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**Goldsmiths**  
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DICTIONARY OF 20TH CENTURY MUSIC, edited by John Vinton

THAMES AND HUDSON, 1974 (£9.50)

A dictionary of 20th century music published in 1974 seems a trifle premature, but the editor was obviously surprised at how vast a work can be compiled at this point in the century - 830 pages of double-columned information. While it is necessarily incomplete, there is no doubt that this dictionary will remain as a piece of spade-work on which later compilations can feed and grow.

Originally published in the USA (by Dutton as A Dictionary of Contemporary Music) by a largely American team, despite the impressive list of European names amongst the 'board of advisors', the dictionary has an obvious American flavour in spellings and definitions of technical terms as well as in entries. The main task of such a work is to provide accurate, up-to-date, compact, impartial and useful information on its subject. How far does this book go towards fulfilling this duty?

The dictionary quite rightly, I think, restricts its entries to composers, general articles on countries and important 20th century subjects, and necessary definitions. (Such possible items as artists or performing groups are omitted, except where discussed in general articles.)

One wonders, however, just what criteria were used in choosing composers for inclusion. The editor says that "born after 1880 are alive after 1930" was a rule-of-thumb, but this is obviously waived if someone is considered influential or important enough: Debussy and Mahler, for instance, are both in, so is Scriabin.

He also mentions that "at least a hundred more composers" are not included because "insufficient information could be obtained on them". This seems rather hard on the unlucky ones. Were they mainly from Eastern Europe? Most of the non-British composers that I couldn't find are from such parts - Jiri Jaroch, Tomislav Zogrinski and Nikos Namangakis are examples. Possibly there are actually some who declined to be included. (I wonder if this explains Sorabji's absence?)

But although the editor says that performances, published works and recordings helped decide entries, he probably relied a great deal on the chief contributors from each country, which may explain some naughty omissions in the British entries.

Be warned - there seems hardly an American composer who has ever put pen to paper and called the result music who has not got his few lines and list of works, but while the usefulness of much of this information to the British reader is slight, the work's comprehensiveness brings to our awareness many who do deserve a greater hearing in this country. It also provides valuable information on composers from, for example, Canada, Latin America and Japan whom we could explore more fully.

For the British user, great fun can be had in treasure-hunting through the

pages for the 50 or so British composers included. Most entries are, however, considerably less than half a column and only a goodly list of works boosts a composer's mention to noticeable size. Amongst those whose entries reach a column or more are Richard Rodney Bennett, Peter Maxwell Davies and Cornelius Cardew, the last of whom is seen as the guiding light of the British avantgarde. Everyone will have his own list of who is missed out, but must agree that the British advisers have certainly been hard on the Welsh, Scottish and Irish composers, and on the less revolutionary of the younger generation. Some of those for whom a case could be made are Constant Lambert, Lord Berners, Elizabeth Maconchy, Priaulx Rainier, William Matthias, Havergal Brian, John Joubert, Alun Hoddinott, Jonathan Harvey, Richard Orton and John White - and others will readily spring to mind.

The general note on Great Britain is enlivened by some caustic comment on music before 1945 by Geoffrey Sharp and the choice of Tim Souster to write the post-war section (although this, written in 1970, is already behind the times: perhaps CONTACT will join TEMPO as a periodical on new music in the next edition!).

The commissioning of the articles on many major countries from a young practising composer makes these articles more stimulating than usual, if rather less impartial.

The articles on composers seem as accurate as possible - as they should be with their subjects still mainly living - with useful lists of works and bibliographies up to around 1969-70. The shorter entries are bare, of a who's-who type, with a tiny list of 'influences' as the only guide to the composer's style. Some major composers get short shrift: a criterion seems to be whether one is considered influential on modern music or not. Schoenberg (6½ columns) obviously is, Sibelius (32 lines) obviously is not. Of course, information on the older composers is readily available elsewhere and the value of this book is to have some detail on the younger composers, especially the avantgarde. But the need for encapsulating a composer's style into a paragraph or two makes for a lot of unsatisfactory general statements. One hopes that although the book should be in school and college libraries, its articles will provide the beginning of a study of a composer and not its end.

The most interesting entries are the 40 or so general articles on 20th century movements and ideas. Not perhaps for those who have detailed knowledge of the subjects, but then they will not need to look. For those who need a general introduction to or survey of such subjects as electronic music, twelve note techniques, text-setting and usage or indeterminacy, the dictionary provides clearly written, meticulous and interesting accounts. Worthwhile articles are also included on such related subjects as non-Western music, dance, folk music, jazz, pop and even musicals, though orientated towards their use in mainstream music or by 'serious' composers and necessarily rather breathless in style.

Cross-references are useful, and the proof-reading and general layout good.

Music examples are confined to the more important general articles and are to the point.

HILARY BRACEFIELD

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