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**Goldsmiths**  
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# JEAN-YVES BOSSEUR

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Material received:

Completely Sweet  
Editions françaises de musique

Lire Schubert  
unpublished

Anna-Livia's Awake  
Radio France

*Personal application either to the composer or to the writer of this article seems the best way of obtaining these scores: see the last paragraph for details. No prices are at present available.*

DURING THE 1930s, the previous great period of inflation, transcription was used as a function of clarification. Whether Webern-Bach or Brecht-Shakespeare, the aim was to analyse aurally the structural components and reform in the light of altered class ideology the absorbed social image of the existing material. As Adorno wrote:

The Bach arrangements by Schoenberg and Webern which convert the most minute motivic relationships of the composition into relations of timbre, realising them thus for the first time, would not have been possible without the twelve-tone technique.<sup>1</sup>

The generation of composers born in that period have used the license of transcription to camouflage, complicate and inflate products of the past. Whether Maxwell Davies-Josquin, Kagel-Brahms, Stockhausen-Beethoven, Bedford-Susato or Stoppard-Wilde, the aim is to project the past on to all dimensions (and so incidentally reinforce it as an eternal source of raw material).

The first two of these pieces by Jean-Yves Bosseur offer a refreshing alternative to the elitist crossword-puzzle games and collage/montage of our leaders. Bosseur is a Parisian, now touching 30 who has a keen interest in the ways that verbal and graphic notations can transcend the barriers of technique (professional v. amateur) and clichéd structure. He collaborates with designers, painters, sculptors on such projects as he finds that they tend to have a more open and stimulating approach to space and line.

*Completely Sweet* (the title comes from a song sung by Eddie Cochrane) was composed in 1971 and is scored for an octet of flute, trumpet, harp, harpsichord, violin, viola, cello and bass. Each performer also plays percussion instruments. This combination isn't fixed, and instruments can be substituted as needs govern: when it was performed in Manchester by the Nor.media Band (March 22, 1976), the harp was replaced by a lute, and the trumpet by renaissance wind instruments (one player). The alternative that *Completely Sweet* offers in the zone of transcription is that of using familiar material to make the process of musical exploration clearer (the opposite pole to Webern on the same dimension) and play through the gamut of social groupings (consciousness-raising for musicians!). This point is firmly made in a review of the Manchester concert.

Bosseur's *Completely Sweet* . . . seemed explicitly to parody the 'social content' of [another piece in the programme] by exploring the music group as a social model. The musicians moved from one extreme of 'mutually deciding' to play a folk tune (music of social mutuality) to that of being 'conducted' in a Webern-like passage (music of controlled individualism).<sup>2</sup>

The work comprises three suites (Italian, French, English — actually British and Irish — totalling 50 different dances), realisations of a Monteverdi ritornello and Jannequin's *La bataille*, and pages of ornaments in various styles. As an example of its organisation, I'll refer to the opening of the work, the first half of the Italian suite.

First, scales and ornaments are 'run through' individually. This 'tuning-up' is then interrupted by dances proposed by individual players. The others may play along, oppose or ignore the proposer's dance. Each dance leads to freely-played blocks of extracts from a Monteverdi ritornello (*Orfeo* Act I). Finally, at an arbitrary point, the harpsichordist stops the proceedings to conduct the ensemble in an eccentrically Webernised version of the completed ritornello.

The notation of each piece consists of a mixture of score (generally monophonic) and a choice of verbal proposals (see Ex.1). As there are so many possibilities, not only for the overall sequence (e.g. simultaneous playing of Pavane and Passamezzo), but also within each movement, the musicians face two difficulties. First there's too much to remember, and cues can lead not to a change of action and pace, but to embarrassing stagnation as fuzzy memories grope about for the next move. Secondly, as each of the

Example 1. 'Trenchmore' from the English suite

The violinist begins to play 'Trenchmore' in a tempo of his/her choice; then he/she can choose to be followed by another player, his/her signal being given by looking at him/her; this player should play simultaneously with the violinist, always at the same tempo chosen each time by the violinist.

The first time you play 'Trenchmore' play the last two measures (a)  
 " second " " " " " " " " " (c)  
 " third " " " " " " " " " (a)

etc.

Each instrumentalist may individually adopt (b); afterwards he/she must adopt (a).

The image shows three musical staves. The top staff is a two-measure phrase in G major, 3/8 time, marked with a circled 'a'. The middle staff is a longer phrase in the same key and time, marked with a circled 'b'. The bottom staff is another phrase, marked with a circled 'c', which has a downward-pointing arrow from the circled 'c' to a specific note in the phrase.

If one of the instrumentalists wishes to stop 'Trenchmore', he/she must play one of the two following signs (either successively or simultaneously), repeating them until the harpsichord gives a stop sign:

The image shows two musical staves, each starting with the word 'HALT'. The first staff is in G major, 3/8 time, and shows a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes followed by a half note. The second staff is in G major, 3/8 time, and shows a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes followed by a half note.

If an instrumentalist wishes the violinist to play in a slower tempo, he/she plays:

The image shows a musical staff labeled 'WALK' in G major, 3/8 time. It features a slower tempo pattern with quarter notes and a half note.

If an instrumentalist wishes the violinist to play faster, he/she plays:

The image shows a musical staff labeled 'CHARGE' in G major, 3/8 time. It features a faster tempo pattern with quarter notes and a half note, including triplet markings.

above pieces fills up a page of score, the musicians must either lay out all the pages on a big board like a huge and unwieldy *Constellation-Miroir* or else frantically turn pages (in both directions) to locate the imminent passage. (An alternative is to stick resolutely to the ornaments page until 'Monteverdi' comes.) One solution may be to constantly project slides of the ornaments and Monteverdi pages.

However, when this section works, it's extremely enjoyable, the dances rising and falling through a sea of scales and ornaments. And if you can find dancers who don't expect the same sounds at each play-through, *Completely Sweet* would make a good score to choreograph. The entire work is, incidentally, very funny — you need a prima donna harpsichordist to get the best effect — and sensitively structured for contrast of pace and pitch.

*Lire Schubert* for piano solo or duet (one or two pianos) has Bosseur playing with Franz (I choose my words carefully as this is a family magazine), to be exact, the C minor impromptu from the set of four,

D899, Op. 90. There are twelve pages of score analysing, opening-out and making a surreal mess of the original. Here, the pianist creatively extends what he does anyway with a public performance of Schubert: Bosseur magnifies the processes of transformation and re-formation of a literally dead score that occurs during any interpretation by a living performer. Such an act hopefully causes the pianist to reappraise his attitude to revivals of past work, though I doubt it — what will, apart from the proverbial gun?

Example 2 shows one method of transformation, in this case melodic and harmonic: the register is widened, pitches are reallocated and harmonic weight reinforced. On each page there are generally four systems of material that can be combined by superimposing, surrounding, disseminating into, diverting into, overlaying (camouflaging), extending, interrupting, following, developing out of, or adapting into. The pianist may also 'constantly look to-and-fro from the left hand to right hand pages, and vice versa, gradually more and more hurried (agitated) until you can't see the music properly, and then the opposite, playing the whole time'.

#### Example 2

*Lire Schubert* can sound quite wild if played with full attention in the way that Gérard Frémy played it a while ago in Edinburgh. It can also sound dull and insipid, as it did in a performance by a different pianist in Sheffield. I personally find the piece rather showy — 'look what I can do to Schubert' — and that it works less well in its way of 'opening out' familiar material because there's enough scope in the work to do nothing.

*Anna-Livia's Awake* was written for a group of 'amateur readers' at the 1975 James Joyce Symposium held in Paris. Radio France (ORTF as was) made a recording and entered it for the 1975 Prix Italia where it was a success. (This recording was recently relayed by Radio 3.) Excepting his score for Arrabal's film *Viva la Muerte* (1971), it is Bosseur's best-known piece. It's enjoyable and stimulating for 'non-musicians' to work on — I took part in a performance with journalists from a Manchester newspaper — though there's a part for musicians too; in the recording there are eight of each. Bosseur takes words and phrases from the last section of *Finnegan's Wake* and plays on their syntactical and aural associations. This isn't a case of out-Joycing Joyce (which is Berio's business), but is another part of the attitude to past works outlined above. The taped version lasts 40 minutes and is all a bit too episodic, though the invention and variety is well sustained through the careful handling of groupings of phonemes, textual identity and pace of action.

The score, a text with no music notation, is in French and a kind of English. There are some wonderful Joycean phrases in the awful translation: 'time — thirty for minutes', 'when he deems that the musicians cannot further complexify their percussive attacks', 'the generator usually radiates frequencies at a higher and lower range than that afforded (sic) by instrumental possibilities'. I can work out that "'all" and its variants are taken up again periodically by one or several vocalists; the words around them are inscribed in time with respect to this period' means "'all" is spoken at regular intervals by one or more reciters; the texts surrounding "all" are spoken around this regular pulse'. But I can't work out:

Secure an absolutely autonomous sonorous activity by palliating the physical limitations of the instrument through supplementary activities whilst avoiding all shocks and interruptions; possibly engage in mutual aid, relaying one another under analogous conditions.

The work may be performed with or without the original tape. It's a pity that the score, published by Radio France, which is well printed and presented (though the musicians' and readers' parts could be better differentiated) means so little in translation. But a conversation with Jean-Yves Bosseur, who speaks excellent English, simplifies everything.

Some further information on these pieces: Bosseur has a very 'arty' handwriting and it's sometimes extremely difficult to decipher. Nor.media Band in Manchester have translated copies of *Completely Sweet* which are available (as long as you pay for the postage) from: Top Flat, 6 Kingston Road, East Didsbury, Manchester 20. *Lire Schubert* (not translated) can also be borrowed from the same address, or from Jean-Yves Bosseur, 149 Rue de Rome, 75017 Paris, France. The tape of *Anna-Livia's Awake* is also obtainable from the composer.

NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (Tubingen, 1948) as translated and quoted in Walter Kolneder, trans. Humphrey Searle, *Anton Webern* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p.57.

<sup>2</sup> John Shepherd, review of Manchester musical events in *Music and Musicians*, Vol. 24, No. 11 (July 1976), pp. 56-57. At the risk of making this look like a mutual admiration society, but in the interests of completeness, I should say that the only substantial and easily accessible introduction to Bosseur's music in English is the article I wrote about the Groupe d'etude et de recherche musicales, of which Bosseur is a member, in *Music and Musicians*, Vol. 24, No. 8 (April 1976), pp. 9-10 on the occasion of the group's British tour. Since then he has been to this country for performances quite a lot and will be doing so again in 1977. (Ed.)

CRITICAL COMMENT

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