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NEW MUSIC DIARY

KEITH POTTER

I must begin by using up some of my valuable space to ask those events organisers who are already in 'contact' to continue to send us details of forthcoming events *as far in advance as possible*, and to urge others to do the same. With a journal that has such futuristic schedules as we do, it's impossible to keep up-to-date unless we hear well in advance, and six or nine months ahead is not too far in terms of planning anything substantial. I'd like to give at least a mention in future to experimental and other activities that don't normally get enough publicity because their organisers can't afford much advertising (even in *Contact*), but I'm well aware that these are the very kinds of events that tend to be arranged at short notice. Still, please tell us as far ahead about as much as you can. Needless to say, I'm afraid I don't have the time to reply to everyone's information and letters: please take it for granted that your communications are most gratefully received, even if we can't act on all of them.

The work of British arts centres outside London deserves particular attention and documentation at this time, I think, and I'm grateful for publications like the regular *Review* from the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol, an organisation which is continuing to do many interesting projects. Their publication has now been expanded and is both more informative and more meaty than it used to be.¹ Other centres of interest are the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow, which does a less detailed publication,² and the Birmingham Arts Laboratory,³ featured in this diary and the subject of a piece in the next issue. I'd like more information on other organisations, for instance the Musicians' or Arts Collectives in Lincoln, Manchester and Newcastle, which are, I hope, proving that the collective/co-operative idea is not dead, though it's in the nature of these things to come and go. Back in Bristol again, the Musicians' Co-operative there is still going as far as I know and their newsletter can be obtained regularly.⁴

Meanwhile we've not, I'm afraid, yet been able to bring you the promised article on the London Musicians' Collective, though from their most recent newsletter⁵ it would seem that things are moving and a really good prospect of an interesting season lies ahead with the occupation of premises shared with the London Film-makers' Co-operative. I hear about events in London at, for example, The City University and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, the latter of which has recently moved into new premises in the long-awaited Barbican development, but not, for instance, from the Cockpit Theatre in NW8⁶ or the Battersea Arts Centre in SW11,⁷ to take one progressive institution from each side of the Thames!

Coming at various points on the line between the information bulletin and the fully-fledged 'journal' are such things as Universal Edition's *Musik Vorschau* from Vienna⁸ which lists performances of UE works all around the world, the Boosey and Hawkes newsletter *Musik '77*,⁹ the latest issue of which announces that they've just taken on the Austrian composer and well-known horn player Kurt Schwertsik as well as British representation for Edizioni Suvini Zerboni (no full details yet, but a catalogue is promised) which should make the music of composers such as Henri Pousseur much more accessible in this country than before. As mentioned above in the 'Foreign Magazines' section, *Tempo* magazine, also run from Boosey and Hawkes, has now started a News Section. Among recent publishers' catalogues received are a new one in Italian for Luigi Dallapiccola (Suvini Zerboni, through Boosey and Hawkes) and two from Schott's,¹⁰ one in German for György Ligeti, but with an essay on the composer in German and English by Imre Fabian, and one in English for Anthony Gilbert which contains a useful survey of his output by Leslie East.

I must attempt to rationalise our coverage of other British magazines devoted at least in part to new music which we'd like to at least mention in each issue. I've already made a reference to the latest issue of *Musics*¹¹ to hand at the time of copy date in the course of writing about foreign magazines; despite a minor side-swipe at this very column, No. 12 (May 1977) is one of their best, with a lot of news and reviews, interviews with Paul Lytton and David Wheeler and an article on 'Fine Art Orchestras' by James Lampard in addition to other material mentioned by me earlier. By contrast, the second issue of its companion, the basically enterprising *Readings* (no date: it appeared in May),¹² has shrunk in size and number of pages and contains no reviews of music. I hope to discuss the first five or six issues of *Impetus*¹³ next time.

We get quite a lot of news about foreign composers, some of whom are their own publishers, and new music groups which I can't possibly detail here. I'd like to present more about such composers as the American Kenneth Gaburo, who has sent us information about the publications of his own Lingua Press,¹⁴ and Allen Strange's Electric Weasel Ensemble¹⁵ who will be in Paris, if not in England, next February; I hope to be able to feature more American composers in our 'Composers Today' format in future issues: Gaburo, for instance, deserves to be known over here and basically isn't at all apart from the odd record. It may be useful to offer my limited information of this nature to anyone in this country who's interested, particularly any prospective promoters. The relevant addresses are in any case available in the footnotes as well.

Finally a word about improvised music on record. We intend to feature Incus and other labels in future issues as we have already done with the more commercially available Obscure records. One very useful source of all kinds of labels for improvised, free and experimental musics of many kinds is to be found in Brighton at the Public House Bookshop.¹⁶ The range of music available from there on both disc and cassette, either over the counter or by mail order, is impressive, and I commend it to everyone interested.

Now on with the reviews, with my apologies to those involved in events to which I went which happened soon after my space-imposed cut-off date: next time ...

Monday February 7

Another of the BBC's ex-Round House-type concerts, this time at the Royal College of Music. At least there are still some new and lesser-known British works in the series, even if not nowadays a regular commissioned piece for each concert: next year there look like being no commissions in this series at all, or even in some of the others put on by this country's biggest commissioning body ... Played with Webern's Symphony and Ligeti's *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures* on this occasion was John Casken's *Kagura* for 13 wind instruments which includes a prominent part for partly improvising alto saxophone, here played splendidly by Ian Mitchell. This is not a new piece, for it was begun in Warsaw in 1972 when the composer was still studying there and completed the following year for its first performance by the St. Paul's Orchestra in Birmingham. I don't agree with those who think that Casken's more recent works have not fulfilled the promise of this piece, which has, however, been given quite a number of performances. In fact, I think that it compares far less well with such more recent pieces as *Music for the Crabbing Sun*, reviewed in *Contact* 15. But it was

valuable to hear such a professional performance of it from the BBC SO under Elgar Howarth.

Friday February 11

Iain Hamilton got quite a lot of publicity with a number of first performances early in the year of which his new opera *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* at the Coliseum, based on the play by Peter Shaffer, received a good share. I don't want to discuss it in any detail, since it seemed to me a great disappointment after *The Catiline Conspiracy* of three years ago (the relative success of which may well have prompted the staging of *The Royal Hunt*), and I couldn't see (or hear) that there was anything good about the piece which wasn't attributable almost entirely to the original play.

Sunday February 13

An 'opera in camera' called *The Rape of the Teagoose* at Oval House,¹⁷ presented by the I.O.U. Theatre from Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire with curiously but compellingly dramatic and even 'romantic' music from a group of musicians integrated into the drama as actors and singers as well as players and including Phil Minton, Maggie Nichols (solo singer) and Colin Wood as well as the work's composer Lou Glandfield. The work was first performed in Cardiff; the group has since been on a tour of Holland. Oval House is a very good venue for experimental theatre and performance art, in particular, and if I'd stayed until late evening I could have seen Athenea Baker doing, among other things, a 'Total Improvisation keeping contact with the audience' to the music of Philip Glass.

Monday February 21

At the Royal Academy of Music this time, the last BBC 'new' music concert in the series was interesting mainly for the British premiere of the Greek composer Georges Aperghis's *Il Gigante Golia*, an original and quite funny piece with rather 'conventional' overtones which I don't imagine is the reason why the composer is thought of as highly as he is elsewhere. A good batch of singers and the BBC SO under Diego Masson also contributed Alexander Goehr's *Naboth's Vineyard*, boring in the extreme without the staging, and Stravinsky's *Renard*, likewise unstaged, the latter introduced, as was the Webern Symphony two weeks earlier, in his inimitable, if slightly deferential manner by Hugh Wood, who presumably won't need so many BBC introducing jobs now he's becoming a lecturer under Goehr's professorship at Cambridge University. Tapes of both this concert and the one on February 7



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have since been broadcast.

Monday February 28

A strange programme broadcast live on Radio Three, and round the world since it was an EBU International Concert, from the City Hall, Glasgow was a typically Hans Kellerian attempt to present 'a sharply contrasting concert showing aspects of the performer's role in creation'. It included Matyas Seiber's arrangement *From the Art of Fugue* which he made with Alexander Goehr's father Walter and the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto, both played by the London Sinfonietta. But I mention the concert here on account of the inclusion of Earle Brown's *Available Forms 2* for two orchestras, in which the Sinfonietta under John Carewe was joined by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra under the composer himself, paying one of his fairly rare visits to Britain. (Why was this the *only* concert scheduled for his visit?) Apart from on record, this 1962 example of 'the performer's role in creation' is rarely heard and the opportunity was a welcome one. It stood up fairly well as a piece of music despite some differences of opinion and, dare I say, commitment as well as differences in experience of bringing off this kind of music among the performers. It does seem a waste of money and opportunity to send most of a band of 49 players actually bearing little resemblance to the real London Sinfonietta from London to Glasgow for one circa-20 minute piece, and then not to build on that beginning in more performances of this work and perhaps others using similar techniques. At least a repeat performance could have been arranged somewhere else, if not even in London.

Wednesday March 2

The first of the more familiar London Sinfonietta's four concerts in the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London combining a wide selection of well-known and unknown works by Kurt Weill with performances of no fewer than six brand-new or almost new pieces from six British composers. A very laudable project, and incidentally not only a possible part of the reason for their not having done the Earle Brown work in London, but also a set of programmes anticipation of which made up for not being able to hear the Sinfonietta in London for half the season due to their extensive commitments elsewhere (abroad and on the Arts Council's Contemporary Music Network tour where two of the six British pieces in their London programmes received their premieres).

The Weill collection arose from two programmes presented at the 1975 Berlin Festival devised by David Drew and the subsequent recordings which were issued by DG last year.¹⁸ The concerts included, however, quite a number of pieces discovered or made available for performance since then, though most of the performers were the same. In the sequence of works too long to name which formed the second half of the first concert, pride of place, despite the conclusion with the famous *Mahagonny Songspiel*, must go to the lugubriously intense *Vom Tod im Wald*, sung admirably by Michael Rippon and perhaps the best representation in these programmes of the lesser known side of Weill's music: bleak, sometimes even cold, but tough and resilient in the best works. The conductor for the evening, once again Diego Masson, seemed only there for the ride as far as the Weill pieces were concerned.

Of the two British works which formed the first half of the evening, both first London performances commissioned by the Sinfonietta, little need be said. Robin Holloway's *Concertino No. 3* ('Homage to Weill') is a rather obviously unobvious tribute to the composer originally intended for the Berlin Festival concerts but expanding into a much bigger piece which wasn't finished in time. It apparently represents an important change in the composer's style and certainly sounds different from the rather seductive romantic excesses of works like *Domination of Black*, Holloway's 1974 Prom commission, but it merely sent me to sleep. As, despite its link with his opera *The Catiline Conspiracy*, did another offering from Iain Hamilton called *The Alexandrian Sequence*.

Saturday March 5

Henri Pousseur's visits to this country are rarer even than opportunities to hear very much of his music, so I thought the trip to the Birmingham Arts Laboratory for a long evening of his work, organised as part of Douglas Young's extremely enterprising Arts Today Festival (which, just as enterprisingly as the programmes themselves, took place entirely outside London: mainly in Leicester and Nottingham), would be well worthwhile. If in the event I was disappointed, the fault must lie partly with Pousseur, but also perhaps with the choice of works on this occasion: adventurous and designed to show different sides of his output, but a lot of it remaining firmly on the ground as music and, more particularly, as music-theatre.

The best piece in the early evening concert was the new solo cello piece, ¹⁹8/4 (it's been called lots of things, but that is, I think, its proper title and it's pronounced like the title of George Orwell's book), admirably, indeed beautifully, played by Rohan de Saram, who was as much a collaborator on the piece as merely its means of execution. The precision of microtonal inflexion arising from the attempt at a 19-note scale resulted, I thought, in some ravishing melodies on this occasion, though I must admit that a second performance of the work by the same player (who else is

going to take it on in a hurry? By the way, it is dedicated to him) and sounding to me pretty much the same structurally as the first, on May 1 in the Purcell Room (and subsequently broadcast), made me suddenly have serious doubts: I'm not sure why yet. *Apostrophe et six reflections* for piano was ably played by Peter Hill, but Douglas Young's bombastic accompaniment to de Saram in *Modèle Réduit* for cello and piano spoil the piece completely.

Following this came, first of all, a TV film performance of the orchestral work *Colours croisées* and yet another indeterminate mix of *Paraboles* or *Paraboles mixtes*, a set of dull tape pieces which can be combined ad nauseam. The rather dated (cinema) film of a version (just one of many possible ones and not even one of the 'real' ones in the opera house) of the opera *Voyage de votre Faust* was entertaining but gave, I suspect, only an idea of the potential power of this, Pousseur's magnum opus.

Wednesday March 9

The second Sinfonietta concert was conducted by Elgar Howarth and, like the first, included a number of Weill UK premieres such as, in this case, *Bastille Music* and *Oil Music*, both arranged by David Drew from theatre music. The powerful *Berliner Requiem* ended the first half and the second half began with another UK Weill premiere, the First String Quartet in B minor, played by the Gabrieli Quartet, which is pretty tepid stuff, though the composer was only 19 when he wrote it, which makes a revival a bit hard.

The new British work in this programme was the first performance of *Silbury Air* by Harrison Birtwistle. Silbury Hill, the biggest artificial prehistoric mound in Europe, to be found in Wiltshire, gives the piece its title. It is obviously connected in the composer's mind with Paul Klee's idea of 'imaginary landscape' and hence with the 'imaginary landscaping' of Birtwistle's music 'through the juxtaposition and repetition of "static" blocks or, preferable for my terminology, objects', as he says in his programme note. These objects are every bit as striking and individual as with every one of Birtwistle's pieces, yet I wasn't quite satisfied at a first hearing with the ways in which they were put together, or, to quote the composer again, 'subjected to a vigorous inverted logic via modes of juxtaposition, modes of repetition, modes of change'. I'd like to hear the piece again soon to find out if I was wrong. It's good to see several pieces by Birtwistle coming out recently, since with his preoccupation with the opera *Orpheus* and his work at the National Theatre, there's been a lot less music from him in the last few years.

Wednesday March 16

Premieres here from the 25-year-old Dominic Muldowney and the 43-year-old Anthony Gilbert. Muldowney's *3 Part Motet* characteristically makes use of a limited element of music-theatre, sticks thrown impulsively to the ground by the percussionists as they attack four high-hat cymbals, yet despite this rather disconcerting, almost embarrassing, display of 'tantrums', the music coheres in a rather strange way: not entirely unrelated to the work of contemporary composers to whom Muldowney is close (and who are revealed in his choice of source material from Machaut), but still a somewhat individual presentation of, to quote his own words, 'clear, hard-edged musical images that revoive within rigidly patterned forms and an increasing interest in medieval music (and in particular the late medieval motet)'. Gilbert's *Crow Cry* not only has less of that kind of originality (he probably doesn't want that kind!), but is also, again on a first hearing, dull and uneventful to my mind, though actually there must have been a lot of events in such a long piece. The main Weill event in this programme, conducted by Simon Rattle, was the first UK performance of *Happy End*.

Wednesday March 23

The final London Sinfonietta concert of the four, with a premiere from Peter Maxwell Davies, *A Mirror of Whitening Light*. Davies's operations on more than one level take a number of different forms (naturally) and are variously deducible in different works. But either the music works for a listener or it doesn't: that's obvious enough, I suppose, even though the 'implied alchemy' involved in this piece still relies on the presence of a 'sharp listener who knows his "Liber Usualis"' (quotations from the composer's programme note). *A Mirror of Whitening Light* seemed clear in its structural outlines — perhaps even traditionally 'obvious' — and familiar Daviesish textures, yet came across as a piece of considerable power in its own way. The 'whitening' process of the title — the transformation of a base metal into gold, and by extension 'the purification of the human soul' — worked on one level for me, at least, in a piece which has a rich vein of melody running through it, though for the composer, who has seen the 'mirror' of his title in 'the great cliff-bound bay before my window where the Atlantic and the North Sea meet as a huge alchemical crucible, rich in speculative connotations', it must, as seems increasingly the case with his recent music, work on a level so far removed from that attainable by most listeners that it could be said to belong to a different world. Perhaps, indeed, it does.

To return to earth with Kurt Weill's *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*, which concluded this final concert, the only non-vocal one of the four, was to come to a brief reconsideration of the success of this

series in presenting Weill's music. For the often less familiar, 'serious', sometimes dark works, less 'characteristic' from our, possibly very unbalanced, view of the more popular of the Brecht-Weill collaborations, the Sinfonietta players and singers engaged for these performances were ideal: the Violin Concerto, for instance (a work which I unfortunately cannot take to easily), was splendidly played by Nona Liddell as the first item in this last concert. But the presentation of the 'popular' works should surely reflect all their overtones, both subtle and unsubtle, of politics and cabaret, of musical and social distinctions of all sorts (multi-levelled, as such music must be). Here these performers, and in particular some of the singers and conductors, seemed out of their depth. And though some seemed to try hard to instil an appropriate sense of style into the music (I specially noted Benjamin Luxon in this respect, and to some extent Meriel Dickinson, both very experienced singers), the whole mode of presentation in the cool and conservative concrete confines of the QEH was against them.

But to end on a happy note: Walter Susskind, who in the last concert came nearer than any of the other conductors to the spirit of Weill, sometimes simply by not making his actual 'conducting' presence felt at all, let the Sinfonietta end the series with as precise but flexible and 'right' a performance of the *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik* as you could wish to hear, and banished all reconsiderations of this kind for at least the duration of the encore.

NOTES:

¹Available from Arnolfini Gallery, 16 Narrow Quay, Bristol BS1 4QA. An annual subscription for six issues costs £1.50, payable to 'Arnolfini Mailing'.

²Available from Third Eye Centre, 350 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow G2 3JD. No price or other details given.

³Details of forthcoming events and A.L.M. (Arts Lab Music) Publications available from Melvyn Poore, Music Director, Birmingham Arts Laboratory, Holt Street, Birmingham (note new address).

⁴From Ian Menter, 36 York Road, Montpelier, Bristol 6 or Steve Mulligan, 18 Church Lane, Clifton Wood, Bristol 8. No price or other details given.

⁵Dated June 12, 1977 but including a summary of a General Meeting held on July 3. Annual subscription to the London Musicians' Collective costs £1 which should be sent to the secretary, Paul Burwell, 86 Auden Place, Manley Street, London NW1.

⁶Cockpit Theatre, Gateforth Street, off Church Street Market, Marylebone, London NW8.

⁷Battersea Arts Centre, Lavender Hill, London SW11.

⁸Available from Universal Edition, A-1010 Wien, Bösendorferstrasse 12, Austria. No price or other details given, but possible to arrange to receive this through UE's London office at 2-3 Fareham Street, Dean Street, London W1V 4DU.

⁹Available from Boosey and Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd., 295 Regent Street, London W1R 8JH. No price or other details given.

¹⁰Available from Schott, 48 Great Marlborough Street, London W1V 2BN.

¹¹Available from *Musics*, 48 Hillsborough Court, Mortimer Crescent, London NW6. UK and overseas surface mail subscription for one year (six issues) is £2.40; airmail to USA, Canada, etc. is £4, airmail to Australia, Japan, etc. is £4.50. Single copies, including some back issues, available at £0.40.

¹²Available from the same address as the London Musicians' Collective above, footnote 5. Subscription for three issues is £1 (UK and overseas surface mail) or £2 (airmail USA, Canada, etc.).

¹³Available from 7 Philpot Lane, London EC3. Subscription for twelve issues is £4.50 (UK and overseas surface mail); for airmail rates you have to write to *Impetus* enclosing an International Reply Coupon.

¹⁴For information write to Lingua Press, 6417 La Jolla Scenic Drive South, La Jolla, California 92037, USA.

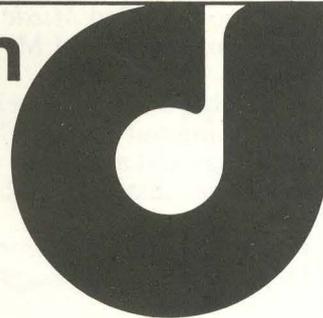
¹⁵For information write to Allen Strange, Electric Weasel Ensemble, 4 Euclid Avenue, Los Gatos, California 95130, USA.

¹⁶For a catalogue write to John Kieffer, Public House Bookshop, 21 Little Preston Street, Brighton BN1 2HQ.

¹⁷Oval House, 52-54 Kennington Oval, London SE11 5SW.

¹⁸DG 2740 153 (3-record set, £8).

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