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Contact: A Journal for Contemporary Music (1971-1988)

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Citation

Davies, Hugh. 1977-1978. 'Review of *ISCM World Music Days, Bonn, West Germany, May 14-21, 1977*'. *Contact*, 18. pp. 40-45. ISSN 0308-5066.

ISCM WORLD MUSIC DAYS, BONN, WEST GERMANY
MAY 14-21, 1977

HUGH DAVIES

I was one of the members of the British Jury which read about 70 scores that had been submitted for the 1977 ISCM Festival; the others were Peter Evans (chairman), Brian Dennis, Oliver Knussen and Keith Potter. One of the things we found when reading the scores was the problem of dealing with composers — or their publishers — who had submitted more than one score; one composer sent in six. This may even have prejudiced our final selection, which was made in terms of individual works rather than composers, so that, for example, a composer would be selected with four votes for a single work, but not with two for each of two works. I would strongly advise future submissions, especially when made by publishers on behalf of a composer, to consist of no more than one, or at the most two, scores per composer; if they find it hard to select a work, then they should pity the poor jury members who have to sustain an average of about ten minutes per score!

We selected seven works which were then sent on to the International Jury in Bonn. Of these, two were actually

proposed by members of the British Jury as works that we would like to have seen submitted, and were voted upon (by those of us who had heard them) in the same way as with the submitted scores: this was a procedure that we were told had been used before. Both of these additional selections involved tape, and one (Bryars) also specified slide projections; the Bonn organisers were particularly looking for works that featured both elements.

Of the seven works that we selected, only one was finally performed, *The Sinking of the Titanic* by Gavin Bryars. A second work, David Lumsdaine's *Sunflower*, was unfortunately not performed due to problems of programming. In addition to our seven selections, we also sent in two compositions under a new category inaugurated by the presenters in Bonn for music by composers under 25. One of them, *Reflections of Narziss and Goldmund* by Robert Saxton, was chosen by the International Jury.

A further innovation this year was a request for the submission of projects for amateurs or children and for sound environments; these were not sent in to national juries but were submitted directly to Bonn. Two British works were selected, *Triple Music IV* by Tim Souster and an untitled project for children devised by myself.

It is worth mentioning at this point that our system in Britain does seem to be as democratic as is possible. In certain other countries the selection of works is made by a small group of people, without any invitation for scores to be submitted by any composer who chooses to do so; thus, as reported recently in *Melos*,¹ none of the 'East Coast' works sent in by the American ISCM section were programmed, but five 'West Coast' environmental works were presented in Bonn, causing a protest from the American section.² Further, to continue with the USA as an example, their section does not appear to have access to funds even to pay for those composers whose works have been selected to travel to the festival. In Britain it is the British Council which pays the travel costs, not only for Bonn, but also the considerably larger amount for a similar number of composers represented at the 1976 festival in Boston.

The tone of any ISCM festival seems to be largely dictated by those who choose the members of the International Jury, which for this year's festival consisted of Dieter Schnebel (chairman), Luc Ferrari, Italo Gomez, Marek Kopelent, André Laporte, Wolfgang Rihm and Christian Wolff. Such a group would have a slight 'West Coast' orientation and would be sympathetic towards many of the newest tendencies, especially for the projects. This applied to a certain extent to the normal concerts as well, although the selection could, of course, only be made from works actually sent on to the International Jury. In addition, and a feature which is normal practice, a few works already in their repertoire were proposed by the performers when limited rehearsal time prevented a substantial concert of new works from being prepared. During the whole festival four such works were performed, plus two special concerts: a piano recital by Maurizio Pollini of Beethoven, Webern and Stockhausen (the 'hit' of the festival) and a concluding concert of 'Key Compositions of the 1950s' by Boulez, Cage (whose *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* was grossly mistreated), Nono and Stockhausen. As for the projects, two were presumably special invitations from Bonn: a laser environment by David Tudor, Lowell Cross and Carson Jeffries, and *Polyagogie* by Xenakis, a demonstration of a computer-controlled system for direct sound creation intended partly for operation by children.

I was able to attend nearly all of the concerts. The two orchestral concerts included works by two German composers under 25 — *Morphogenesis* by Hans-Jürgen von Bose and *Variationen über ein Thema von Mozart* by Wolfgang von Schweinitz, both lavish, youthful and neotonal (Reger?) — and Robert Saxton's composition for two chamber orchestras; I was surprised, having read the score of the latter, how liquid and relaxed the very complex rhythmic notation sounded in performance. There were also two new orchestral works by better-known composers, *Gespenster* ('Ghosts') by Nicolaus A. Huber and a late romantic *Houdini Symphony* by Peter Schat. Huber's piece, typically for him, distorts the time span in a disconcerting but effective manner, mixing various disparate elements such as the final two-minute setting of a Brecht text in a style close to that of Kurt Weill, which breaks off just when one is beginning to enjoy it.

The second orchestral concert contained the third performance at an ISCM festival (!) of *Accanto* for solo

clarinettist and orchestra by Helmut Lachenmann, a work already in the orchestra's repertoire. I don't think any piece of music has ever made me so angry! It took to absolute extremes the avoidance of players using their instruments in the conventional way. Much of the time the solo clarinettist blew through his instrument without the mouthpiece, carefully fingering to impose different pitch inflections on the wind noises, and the orchestra was treated in a similar way. Musically the work is partly based on a similar destruction of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto. *Accanto* was well received by most of the audience, and perhaps my own reaction to it is due to the fact that it was totally unnecessary to have a whole orchestra on stage to obtain the sounds that were produced. (And it's a strange mentality that only arrives at such sounds destructively rather than creatively: the music could have been just as well produced by a small group of musicians playing specially invented instruments.)

Most of the chamber music concerts were rather low-key affairs, taking place in a small hall which necessitated considerable shifting of instruments and props between works; the problem with any such festival of submitted works is to put together a programme where most of the performers play in at least two items. The music ranged from *Chanson pour instruments à vent*, for specially constructed amplified aeolian instruments, by Mario Bertoncini to a refreshingly brief work by the Mexican Mario Lavista called *Cluster*, which consisted of just that (once only) performed on several keyboard instruments. Bertoncini performed his own composition: the instruments consisted of large suspended frames across which were strung dozens of thin strings, and several other metal objects. These were set vibrating by compressed air jets and small ventilator propellers, producing very beautiful, rich resonances; but the best moment was a throw-away gesture (possibly to cover essential technical operations which needed both hands) when he blew on several parts of the frames: how much more expressive are the inequalities and irregularities in human breath!

Two more established composers were represented by interesting and unusual works: Klaus Huber by *Transpositio ad infinitum* for solo cello, a very delicate and sensitive work

dedicated to Rostropovich, and Karel Goeyvaerts' *Ach Golgotha!* for harp, organ and percussion. This was conducted by the composer standing almost motionless in front of the performers and was a quiet, minimalist, almost systemic examination of the accompaniment to the recitative of that name from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*.

In spite of the special emphasis on mixed media made by the Bonn organisers, there was comparatively little use made of electronics during the festival. One example was *Solo* for piano and live electronics by the young Finish composer Jukka Tiensuu, for which the equipment was provided by the experimental studio in Freiburg; unfortunately the composer, playing the piano, was forced to start the piece again due to the fact that the considerable technical installation with two engineers in charge (who did not seem to take their job very seriously) was not functioning properly. The work explored the electronic transformations of the piano sound with considerable success and ranged from extremely wild passages for the piano to long drawn-out lyrical canonic structures using some form of sound delay system.

The most interesting work in a choral concert turned out to be one proposed by the performers, the Collegium Vocale from Cologne (sharing a programme with the choir of NDR Hamburg). This was *the gentleness of rain was in the wind* by Gerhard Rühm, who is a sound poet with considerable involvement in music. The piece is based on the phrase from Shelley used as the title, and expands both the sound qualities of the words and the implications of their meaning in various ways: an attempt to find the most suitable German translation of the word 'gentleness', lexical descriptions and catalogues of words meaning rain and wind in a variety of languages, permutations of vowels and consonants in the German words 'Wind' and 'Regen', and so on.

Among the sound environments submitted as projects were works by Janos Darvas and the singer Joan La Barbara. The latter's *Wind/Tornado Piece/Cyclone*, included in a normal concert, is a tape composition distributed around loudspeakers in the hall. I was unable to attend the concert in which it featured, but heard the piece a few days later in Paris. In each case, apparently, the hall

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was too small for the long growth of the *Cyclone* to have its full effect in space. Darvas' *Hörfilm* was an audiovisual environment set up for several presentations in a special room; it used multivision (a large screen on which up to twelve slide projections were shown simultaneously, with a second set of projectors for cross-fading to new images) and tape (heard over individual headphones). This was a documentation about Bonn past and present interspersed with short 'commercials', collages of visual and sound advertising from various sources. The recording techniques that were used for the sound explored a scale from 'telephone quality' to 'studio quality' in order to add a chronological element similar to that of the visual images, as well as 'Kunstkopf' stereo, conventional stereo and mono.

The laser environment, entitled *Free Spectral Range IV*, was shown three times; I attended the first and last of these. The first presentation was more or less an improvisation to 'warm up the system'; the third consisted of three recognisably different compositions, whose titles were given in the programme (one by each of the three creators of the system), played without a break. In Jeffries' *Pacifica Electra*, for example, the electronic sounds that mostly paralleled the visual laser element were interspersed with recordings of breakers, which visibly distorted what were otherwise mainly pure geometric shapes on the screen. This was the first occasion on which I had seen a visual element produced entirely by lasers, and I have not seen the several more primitive laser events that have recently been shown in London. Many of the visual effects were extremely beautiful, but very rarely were the images completely new. Some resembled typical oscilloscope patterns multiplied out by deriving four separate beams from the laser, in red, blue, green and yellow. Sometimes all four colours featured the same image rotated each time through 90 degrees; at other times one or more of the colours would be totally independent. Altogether I felt that there was too much of the sort of effect which more than anything resembled random scribbling across the screen. Some delicate textures were produced by frosted glass filters introduced into the path of the laser beams. The whole system, sound and visual, was clearly interlinked; I should imagine that it is operated by sets of control voltages which are applied both to electronic oscillators and to the laser beams.

Tim Souster's sound environment *Triple Music IV* took place in the foyer of the Beethovenhalle before, during the interval and after an orchestral concert. This consisted of taped sounds, including many radio call signals from different countries, which were played over quite a considerable number of loudspeakers, but mostly at rather a low level, so that it was quite easy to hold a conversation and forget the sounds.

A similar environment, similar perhaps only in the way the organisers of the festival decided to present it, was *Orange Air* by two young Americans, Richard Feit and Richard Shaer. This took place in a smaller foyer at the Bonn Center, with the sounds emanating from a considerable number of loudspeakers spread around an exhibition of paintings by Vasarely. The sound sources used were derived from the air: radio and TV broadcasts and sounds from outer space (such as have already been used in Alvin Lucier's *Whistlers*), plus prerecorded sounds that the composers had taped in and around the city of Bonn. A further American sound environment by Max Neuhaus, *Drive-in Music(s)*, designed to employ local radio broadcasting over car radios, was unable to be put on due to the last-minute refusal of the German Post Office to give permission. I was lucky to experience another new work of his a few weeks later at *documenta 6* in Kassel: quiet irregular electronic clicks distributed over a series of loudspeaker horns mounted around the main branches of a large tree in a wood, sounding rather like rain drops or acorns falling. (I wonder how many people completely missed this delightful contrast to the gigantic sculptural gestures that seemed to fill the rest of the park.)

A programme of theatrical pieces presented as a concert began with Gavin Bryars' *The Sinking of the Titanic*: a very relaxed and typical Bryars presentation which I greatly enjoyed, having missed previous live performances of it in Britain and knowing the work only from the Obscure record. Bryars chose to present a fairly simple version of his piece due to the predictable problems of rehearsal time and the amount of equipment that was simultaneously in use in

different parts of Bonn. There was in fact no theatrical element in this realisation; it consisted of a small string ensemble conducted by the composer, with tapes and slide projections. In the same programme there was *Peripathetisches zur Lage*, an extremely virtuosic and humorous verbal work by the Austrian composer Otto Zykan, based on a letter written by Schoenberg, which approached the area of sound poetry (indeed, many sound poets could learn from this piece). The composer, aided and abetted by fellow-composer Heinz Karl Gruber, performed complex, tongue-twisting verbal acrobatics and made a considerable impression, even on non-German-speaking members of the audience.

Within the city centre in Bonn during the festival there was also a presentation of a specially-created work by Pauline Oliveros called *Bon-Fire*, which had won the prize in the competition 'City Music'. The title contains a double pun, since the pronunciation of the English word 'fire' is virtually identical to the German word 'Feier' (celebration). It consisted of events, often without music or sound, of a deliberately low-key theatrical nature, which took place in the pedestrian precinct in Bonn. This is a very compact area, the most successful transformation of a town-centre into a pedestrian precinct that I have seen, where many other events have taken place over the last few years, so the citizens are more or less accustomed to unusual things happening there. Children were finger-painting the man-hole covers in the streets; teenagers, two or three at a time, would very occasionally walk through the market-place carrying musical instruments but not playing them; old people were at one point seen painting pictures in a display window of a big department store; Mustapha Tettey Addy, the Ghanaian master drummer who now lives near Bonn, appeared every now and then, performing on his own; a man dressed up in an old-style naval uniform with a parrot on his shoulder was observed from time to time (and occasionally directed to the Rhine by helpful citizens), and various other events were also to be seen. Some of these were not planned by the composer but fitted in with the atmosphere: sitting outside a cafe in the market square one afternoon, I heard every now and then a distant bell-like sound, which turned out to be a four-year-old boy throwing something metallic on the ground, chuckling, picking it up again and repeating the process a few seconds later. In the same area there was at least one organ grinder and a man who sang standing on his head for several minutes at a time (both permanent fixtures); I also caught the end of a round dance performed by schoolgirls and a programme for children given by the Amsterdam Electric Circus featuring Moniek Toebosch and Michel Waisvisz (with his specially built combination violin-machine gun with crackle-box).

Finally, the area in which I myself was involved: music for amateurs and children. There were three programmes: two with actual compositions and the already-mentioned demonstration by Xenakis. This last was very disappointing; I got the impression that Xenakis and his team were not ready to present their work in public, and indeed by the second of the three afternoons on which it was shown, the system had broken down. It consisted of a small computer, a cathode ray screen and a large board on which graphic notations could be drawn. This specially-constructed board contains built-in electrical contacts in grid format and is used to transfer graphic information into the computer which can then be seen on the screen and heard over loudspeakers. A group of children had been brought along to demonstrate that anyone could use the system. It took about five minutes for the very simplest sounds to be seen and heard. It is probably only a matter of more time and money that has prevented them from building the necessary equipment to create an instantaneous visual and aural realisation of the graphic notation; a five-minute delay is quite impossible for anyone to work with on a system that is designed for immediate self-expression. Its potential would seem to be great once this delay is removed; however, it will also be extremely expensive, and I doubt whether many electronic music studios could afford such a system, let alone schools. Another aspect which I found disturbing was that it was presented to us as a solution to all one's problems: with this system 'composers can finally just get on with composing'. (Peter Zinovieff has made a similar claim for the new EMS Vocoder, which friends tell me is also rather limited in practice as well as costly; such claims remind me of categorical statements made by eminent scientists that are totally refuted a few years later: such as

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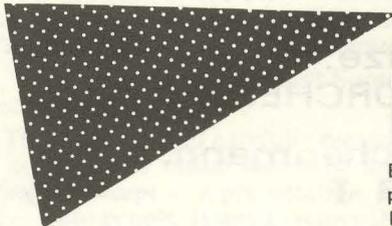
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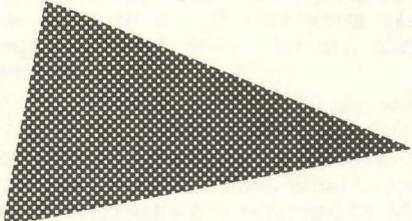
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that around the beginning of this century everything in physics was known and there was nothing of importance left to be discovered; or that man would not reach the moon in the 20th century — made shortly before the first sputnik.)

The two concerts of music for amateurs and for children contained five works which covered a wide range of musical possibilities and age groups. In the first, Jean-Yves Bosseur presented *Jeux avec le Scriptoson*. This consists of a metal sheet on which magnetised shapes of different colours can be arranged, forming the notation of the piece; some of the children (aged between five and eight) manipulated this, while others played simple instruments, mainly percussive, many non-Western in origin. This was the first work in a concert that began at 8pm, which was much too late for children so young; they were nervous and over-excited long before the programme started.

The second piece was the result of a fortnight's work that I had done with two groups of children during the second half of April.³ Since my project proposal did not involve any existing composition, the title was actually made up by the organisers (*Stücke mit selbstzubauenden Instrumenten*, which is a very compact and informative title meaning 'Pieces for self-to-be-built instruments'), and none of the children came up with an alternative suggestion. During rehearsals I proposed six sections in the piece, based on different structures that we had tried out collectively; during the performance I functioned as a sort of traffic policeman, holding up a large card to show the beginning of each new section, using my hands to control loudness and density in certain sections, and in two sections using additional cards to select different categories of instruments, such as percussion, xylophones, wind, flutes and so on.

The final work in this concert was *Kommunikationsspiele* by the Swiss composer Hans Wüthrich. This was performed by the composer and his wife with four teenagers on a considerable variety of mostly percussive instruments, some home-made. It consisted of a number of sections, in each of which a relationship of communication between people is enacted; in some cases there are parallel dialogues going on, in others one person is the leader, the father-figure or controller who can stop the other performers by a musical gesture, and so on. This was to have been performed by a group of eight out-of-work young people; however, half of them got cold feet a couple of days before the concert, so that Wüthrich and his wife had to step in at the last minute. Musically the effect was very dynamic and the piece was played with tremendous gusto; in a discussion afterwards the performers stated that they had enjoyed it and had learned certain things about human relationships, but on the whole would prefer to play pop music. All three composers stated even before the concert that the collaboration with the young people had been far more important than the presentation of the results; in my own case I had imagined more of an exhibition-demonstration than a formal concert.

In the second concert of music for children, which took place in a school one morning during a public holiday, the first work was by Chisako Shimizu from Japan, *Yobikake* ('The Call'). This was simple and charming; however, I was slightly disappointed that the performers turned out to be Japanese children from a school in Düsseldorf (who performed excellently). The composer does not speak German or English, and would have therefore had great difficulty in working with German children, but I felt that the challenge that the rest of us had faced in working with local children had been avoided in her case. This was the only fully notated score in these two concerts. The children were scattered in groups around and among the audience and were directed by the composer. The work was made up of Japanese calling words and vocalising against sheets of cellophane paper; considerable use was made of the possibilities of the space by antiphonal effects and movements of groups from one point in the hall to another.

The other work in this concert was *Fountains of My Sky* by Horatiu Radulescu, a Rumanian living in Paris, and seemed very unsuited to children (the work was originally composed for adults). A stage full (and I mean full!) of instruments, slide projectors, microphones, percussion instruments and other objects was revealed from behind drawn curtains, with the composer and two assistants directing the children; no creative contribution seemed to be required of the children, nor were they given much opportunity to enjoy themselves in performing the work.

The concert works performed during the World Music

Days covered the sort of range of styles and preoccupations that I had rather expected, with many recent trends not yet reflected. There were very few real discoveries. Admittedly I was personally involved in one of the projects, but there did seem to be a general feeling that this area was a valuable addition to the normal programmes of ISCM festivals. In my own case I have never received so many congratulations after a performance, although the piece was rather unsophisticated and not sufficiently differentiated; but the involvement of the children in the performance was clearly genuine, and the collaborative nature of the project was obvious.

I feel that if the addition of projects could be expanded in some way to become a more integral part of this annual festival, then the ISCM event could once again achieve the relevance to young composers that the very first festivals had 50 years ago. Many of the more interesting younger British composers would not normally dream of submitting a work for an ISCM festival, and the success of this year's projects will, I think, have shown even to those who are most interested in maintaining the existing form of the ISCM that an expansion of categories and of forms of presentation is essential for the continued life of such an institution.

NOTES:

¹ Erhard Karkoschka, 'Komponistenkrieg in den USA', *Melos/NZ für Musik*, 4/1977.

² See also Stephen Arnold's report in *Contact* 17 (pp.35-37) which describes the somewhat reversed situation that obtained at last year's ISCM World Music Days in Boston, USA.

³ A description of this can be found in David Roberts, 'Hugh Davies: Instrument Maker', *Contact* 17 (Summer 1977), under "Kids", p.10.