

contact

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Brian Ferneyhough

INTRODUCTION

KEITH POTTER

'A SERIES? After all that neglect, a *series*?!' Thus one of my editorial colleagues on slightly misconstruing my plan for a group of short articles on various pieces by Brian Ferneyhough, to be written from different points of view: not only from a wider perspective than just the committedly 'pro' (though there's nothing wrong with that in its place, of course), but from the angle of the performer as well as that of the analyst or critic.

It became clear that some kind of explanation was necessary: some kind of apologia for my idea as well as some kind of apologia for Brian Ferneyhough. Who is he? What has he done that has provoked first neglect and then, more recently in this country, a small wave of almost total admiration that began, I suppose, roughly three years ago and rather than quickly subside, seems to have accelerated its growth rate in the last twelve months or so and shows few signs of diminishing in at least the near future? And why, apart from bandwaggoning, should *Contact* expend so much space on him? Let me try to answer these questions briefly and in turn.

Ferneyhough is a British composer. He was born in Coventry in 1943. He first studied at the Birmingham School of Music and (just a minute while I find my Brian Ferneyhough brochure put out by his publishers, Peters Edition) 'later with Lennox Berkeley at the Royal Academy of Music in London. On completing his studies there he won the Mendelssohn Prize which enabled him to continue his studies in Rome and Amsterdam. While there he won a Gaudeamus Prize in 1968 with his "Sonatas for String Quartet", the same prize the following year with "Epicyle" and the same prize the third year running in 1970 with his "Missa Brevis". In that year he obtained a scholarship to study with Klaus Huber at the Basel Conservatoire, and has lived in Switzerland since then. In 1974 he won first prize in . . .' But hang on a minute. What was that about living in Switzerland? Do you mean to say that this composer, British born and educated (at least in part), the winner of three Gaudeamus prizes in a row and a good few others since then, clearly highly valued (at least by those who award the prizes in Gaudeamus competitions) . . . that this composer isn't living in this country any more? isn't being regularly commissioned by the BBC, by Britain's leading orchestras, ensembles and soloists? hasn't had articles written about him regularly in Britain for at least the last ten years, even in *Contact*? And that we're not even sure of how to pronounce his name?

Yes: I do mean to say all that. Now, *why*? Ferneyhough's music isn't easy to play and it isn't easy to listen to: these facts should become amply evident in the articles below. In fact it's very *difficult* music, from almost all points of view. Ferneyhough's mind works in a very complex way and in a very European way, it would seem. And despite Glock, despite Boulez and despite (because of?) Keller, we in Britain find the complex European musical mind baffling, inscrutable, incomprehensible sometimes. We don't go in droves to listen to complicated, highly intellectual music. In fact most of us don't go at all, ever: so we don't give it the chance. We've

already decided that it's not for us: after all, Schoenberg is quite bad enough. We react to the charge that we're insular and small-minded (in at least two senses) by saying that these Europeans who say they *do* understand this stuff are at best deluding themselves, at worst out-and-out charlatans. And jolly narcissistic to boot: there aren't that many of them, after all. And when we hear the stories — which we always *do* manage to hear somehow, even though we never hear the music — of the players (poor toilers in someone else's fields of sorrow) who failed to pick up the right sort of clarinet or played their part upside down (either accidentally or on purpose; we'll never know) and *no-one* (not even the composer) noticed, then . . . well, I mean: what *are* we supposed to think of the music?

This attitude is all wrong, of course, or at least mostly wrong. Now if we were actually willing to take a composer's work seriously, and to expect to work at it, just as he has had to, in order to start to appreciate its rewards, then we wouldn't be so narrow and blinkered, so shambingly arrogant in the face of such an important cultural advancement, crucial to any understanding of the art of our time. It's only because our cultural mandarins don't understand these matters — or, worse, refuse to understand them — that British public musical taste isn't educated towards an understanding of the complex art of a composer like Ferneyhough; it's only because our music education system and our cultural apparatus in general (and specifically the running of our major orchestras) doesn't encourage, even actively discourages, young musicians with the inclination and abilities to take this music seriously and play it as well as anyone is capable of playing it that those stories take on the importance which they have — *even if they're true*.

Now hang on again a minute. You might perhaps be forgiven for thinking that I've been talking to Ferneyhough: collecting his views for this article. Well, I usually like to meet the composers I write about and I believe it an important part of my business to make their acquaintance. But on this occasion I haven't: I've never met Ferneyhough and never talked to him, not least because he lives abroad (though he's been coming to Britain more frequently for musical reasons in the last three years, I think). No: the above isn't a Ferneyhough paraphrase, and I wouldn't, for his sake if for no-one else's, want anyone to even assume that he'd necessarily agree with all of it.

From what I understand of his attitudes he might at least be critical of that bit about educating public musical taste. Ferneyhough appears to be a very esoteric figure. I'm not saying that he deliberately courts the kind of mystique that inevitably surrounds a composer of complex serial music when at least someone thinks he's good. But I don't *think* he believes that the 'musical masses' are ever going to come to terms with his music, or indeed that he (or, presumably, anyone else, for that matter) should work specifically to bring that impossible end a little nearer. I'm not saying that he's the only composer who doesn't 'write down' to his audience: no

good composer does that and there are quite a few other good composers around even today. But Ferneyhough is as uncompromising in his attitude to the promotion and dissemination of his music as he is in his actual composition processes themselves. And not, like some good composers, because of a lack of ability with words: he has, I understand, a formidable ability to discourse with complex eloquence in several languages. Ferneyhough actually seems to believe that his music can *and therefore should* only be appreciated by a tiny minority and that all else is irrelevant. I do hope he'll find the time to tell me if I'm wrong.

It may by now have become apparent that though they are not necessarily an accurate representation of Ferneyhough's views on these matters, my earlier comments on the nature of conservative, uncomprehending musical Britain were not made without my tongue being at least occasionally in my cheek. I don't believe that they represent the whole story, even if they represent an important aspect of that story. There are cultural forces at work on the opposite side of the channel which are just as resistant to the supposedly 'complex European' type of musical thinking I have attempted to categorise. The facts of Ferneyhough's 'rise to fame' confirm that his music needed the special pleading of the Royan and Venice Biennale festivals in the mid 70s, despite the equally indisputable fact that he was better appreciated (appreciated at all, that is) in Europe generally before that than he was here. And that his thinking is very much in line with certain post-Webernian and post-Adornian ways of thinking which have their origins in, particularly, the German-speaking countries and which thus form a natural part of the cultural matrix in a way which they do not (cannot?) here. But let's be clear about one thing. The numbers of people to whom this cultural matrix is a living thing are small indeed. The specialist new music festivals in Europe, by their very existence as well as frequently by their actual nature, help to prove this.

So why have I chosen to expend so much space on Brian Ferneyhough? Well, the phenomenon of 'the prophet without honour in his own country' is an interesting one from several points of view, for a start, especially when coupled with the problems I have tried to sketch above. I also find Ferneyhough interesting as a representative, not only of certain European trends, but of one which I believe is taking a firm root in this country and may well prove a significant development in the 80s: British composers like, in their very different ways, Michael Finnissy, Oliver Knussen, Stephen Reeve and Nicholas Sackman might be taken as illustrations of this.

But most important of all is that, despite the fact that my personal predilections in new music lie very far from Ferneyhough's, I find his music fascinating to listen to and to attempt to understand. Part of this is no doubt due to an intellectual need to investigate something which in many respects baffles me and for which I may frequently question the need. But at least an equally important reason is that I find Ferneyhough's sounds and processes extremely musical, so that I usually enjoy the actual experience of listening to his music, even for the first time. There can, for me, be no better reason to discuss a composer's music than this.

SONATAS FOR STRING QUARTET

KEITH POTTER

SOME WRITERS — notably Harry Halbreich, one of the European new music cognoscenti who has been most partisan in his support of the composer (he was responsible for the performances at Royan in 1974 and 75) — have divided Ferneyhough's output so far into two

A Checklist of the material under discussion

- Sonatas for String Quartet
Peters Edition, P-7118 (£9.50)
- Cassandra's Dream Song
Peters Edition, P-7197 (£2.30)
- Unity Capsule
Peters Edition, P-7144 (£5.25)
- Time and Motion Study I
Peters Edition, P-7216 (£5.50)
- Transit
Peters Edition, P-7219 (£28.00)
- Sonatas for String Quartet. Berne String Quartet;
RCA Red Seal, RL 25141 (£3.99)
- Transit. London Sinfonietta/Elgar Howarth and soloists.
Decca Headline, HEAD 18 (£4.50)

A Selective Bibliography of articles on or by Ferneyhough in English

Andrew Clements, 'Brian Ferneyhough', *Music and Musicians*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (November 1977), pp. 36-39. The best general introduction to the composer I have read.

Brian Ferneyhough, 'Aspects of Notational and Compositional Practice', Catalogue for the exhibition 'Scrittura musicali', Academie de France, Rome (June-July 1978), pp. 36-41. A valuable adjunct to the composer's score forewords concerning his attitude towards notation.

Jonathan Harvey, 'Brian Ferneyhough', *The Musical Times*, Vol. CXX, No. 1639 (September 1979), pp. 723-728. A more technical article than Clements', concentrating on the *Sonatas for String Quartet*, *Cassandra's Dream Song*, *Unity Capsule*, *Time and Motion Study III* and, in particular, *Transit*.

Peter Heyworth, 'A Venice Discovery', *The Observer Review* (Sunday November 14, 1976), p. 27, and 'Vivid Voice', *The Observer Review* (Sunday November 20, 1977), p.30. These two reviews, of the 1976 Venice Biennale performances and the 1977 QEH performance of *Transit* respectively, are by one of Britain's leading critics.

The two records listed above also have important sleeve note articles by Harry Halbreich and James Erber respectively.

Ferneyhough's most recently completed work, *La terre est un homme*, a BBC commission, received its premiere at a Musica Nova concert in Glasgow by the SNO under Elgar Howarth on September 20 and a further performance in London on September 30 by the LSO under Claudio Abbado. It will also be heard in Donaueschingen in October and in performances by the Chicago SO under Abbado in the USA next February.

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parts, 'separated', as Halbreich puts it in so quintessentially 'European' a way in his fascinating sleeve note to the recording of the *Sonatas*, 'by two years of quasi-silence' (roughly 1972-73). Following this suggestion, we may confidently put the *Sonatas for String*

where Ferneyhough himself comes to our aid:

The point is that the form is not unitary, "monolithic", but essentially *discursive*. The total is generated by the gradual accretion of forms (extensions, variations, metamorphoses) of the initial relatively anonymous basic elements (or rather, "articulation classes"): "pizzicato", "glissando", "chord", "repeated note", etc., all present in the first section of the work in various combinations. Like paths through a forest, the development of these elements is *linear*; they run parallel sometimes, at other points disappear into the undergrowth, re-emerge later, wider or narrower, flow into one another and move apart again. Each of them has a part of the work in which "its" main climax occurs, after which it withdraws once again into the background. There is, therefore, no *single* climactic section, and anyone looking for it will be grievously disappointed! Once one has grasped this essential point, the seemingly meandering course of the piece, as well as its length, will be more readily appreciable, I think.

Let's see how far this quotation from a letter to Halbreich gets us in conjunction with my 'method' of listening.

The important point seems to me to be the notion of 'initial relatively anonymous basic elements' or, as the composer also calls them, 'articulation classes'. Basic material, and some of it pitch based, certainly; but all of it *so* basic that it's really reducible to types of texture, methods of playing, an overall harmonic quality, or whatever. This apparent 'looseness' is clearly of value to the first time listener since this kind of 'Ur' material is more easily 'understood', less easily missed if also less easily 'grasped' in the conventional sense; it's simpler to spot a general type than a particular brand even if you're not completely sure of what you're looking/listening for. My examples of these 'basic elements' or 'articulation classes' and their role in the structure of Ferneyhough's

Sonatas are just that: some first and second thoughts which will doubtless be much modified by the subsequent hearings for which I hope I will find the time.

The three music examples, taken from the beginning of the work, the end of Section 12 (Ferneyhough actually uses letters of the Greek alphabet to mark sections, but I find it much easier to use numbers) and the end of the whole piece, illustrate several 'basic elements' and their transformation. Timbrally, the use of string harmonics is an important feature: an 'articulation class' of which the composer makes considerable use in the *Sonatas*, which indeed range over virtually the entire gamut of string techniques. The slightly suspended quality of the regular rhythms (at first in the cello; almost the first thing you hear) appears during the piece at intervals; both the later examples have it in some measure, but the final transmutation coupled with the glissandi which are likewise a strong 'basic element' in the work, should also give some idea of the dramatic and beautiful, even 'romantic' quality of the piece.

The pitch content of the opening bars presents just one of the basic pitch elements that emerge and help to structure the work. The more easily identifiable ones tend to be chordal and sometimes introduce a new section (the openings of Sections 7 and, to a less clear extent, 22, for example, use the first pitches of Example 1; a different but equally important chord opens the sequence of slow chords at the start of Section 4 and then provides the link between that section and the next); the melodic contours of Examples 2 and 3 are, however, also relatable to the work's first section.

The 'linear' development of the basic elements from which the work is, literally, composed often make their role in the structure at any one point hard to describe. The 'role' of what I have come to call the 'tranquil "double chord"' and the material which surrounds it at its first

Example 2

The image shows a musical score for Example 2, divided into two parts: "Enorme" and "Chiaro".

Enorme: This section is marked with a tempo of 48 and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It features complex rhythmic patterns with many triplets and sixteenth notes. Performance instructions include "sempre", "pizz.", "arco", "sub. sord.", "con sord.", and "quasi niente". There are also dynamic markings like *sfz* and *mf*.

Chiaro: This section is marked "(sempre rall.)" and "molto détaché". It features a more melodic and sustained texture. Performance instructions include "pizz. (sempre tasto)", "non vib.", "con sord.", "senza sord.", and "senza sord.". Dynamic markings include *mf*, *pp*, and *pppp*. There are also markings for "poco ritard.", "poco cresc.", and "sempre dim."

presentation (Section 2, bars 57-59) is difficult to unravel, but the dramatic and emotional importance which this ethereal (and non vibrato) moment has here is somehow confirmed when it returns, though using different pitches, at the start of Section 15, shortly after a big climax (violins very high) at the end of Section 14, but followed by a 'repeat' of some of the material which had followed it in Section 2.

It's typical of Ferneyhough that what he calls the 'climax' of each 'articulation class' should not in fact be always easy to identify. There's no point in the *Sonatas* in

Example 3

Tranquillamente e molto sostenuto

* *detaché e distinto*

Vnls e cello
sempre in tempo
gusbo al fine

* - The two violins are to proceed to the end in complete rhythmic independence from the viola and cello, and verticalization of the two groups is therefore only very approximately notated in the score.

'thematic' or 'articulation' strand with one instrument consistently rather than with another. But these cadenzas fulfil an important character role as well as being dramatic and simple structural points of reference that, for example, make early complete hearings a good deal easier.

The pitch aspect of the *Sonatas* will continue to occupy me for some while. Ferneyhough does seem to have acquired a very distinctive harmonic vocabulary and it would be fascinating to discover more about how he has achieved this. I have already mentioned the importance of certain chords at structurally important places in the *Sonatas*, but I have not discussed the very important role of something which is much easier to hear: the tritone, the clear statement of which at, for instance, the opening of Example 2, is by no means untypical of how he uses it elsewhere (and often C to F sharp).

I had already written the bulk of this article and started to draw the perhaps at first somewhat simplistic-sounding conclusion that parts of the *Sonatas* were serial and parts were not, when I obtained Jonathan Harvey's *Musical Times* article which has recently appeared. This reveals that originally Ferneyhough wrote two movements, 'one in the strict total serial style, the other in an intuitive,

expressionist style reminiscent of pre-serial Webern. Sensing, perhaps, that the drama of the historical moment lay in their interaction, rather than in their successiveness, he chopped the movements up and dispersed the fragments throughout the 24 sections, allowing them to affect each other, allowing the more fertile "intuitive" music eventually to form its own laws of renewal and burgeon in a manner denied to the hermetically-sealed totally serial music.' The importance of this for aspects other than pitch is clearly also important.

In the historical context in which Harvey acutely places this fact, this is indeed fascinating. It is also significant for the way one actually listens to the piece, for once this information has been vouchsafed, it is easy to start to relate it to the 'dialectic' that seems to emerge when trying to follow what at first does seem an extraordinarily sectionalised piece. The 'putting back together again' in some sense of the 'original' two methods of composition (which, incidentally, casts more light on both the Webern connection and Ferneyhough's unwillingness to be thought of as a serialist which I mentioned earlier) will be a beautiful exercise in 'accretive' listening which I look forward to doing with the aid of the excellent recording by the Berne Quartet.

CASSANDRA'S DREAM SONG & UNITY CAPSULE

KATHRYN LUKAS

THE AGE OF the musical tightrope walker is still with us. The circus of the concert hall is yet filled with hordes witnessing daring feats, cheering in ecstasies at the successes but secretly waiting, almost hoping, for the performer to fall. It is an atmosphere in which speed, brilliance and technique are everything; after all, a sense of perspective, contemplation and growth does not dazzle the crowds.

In current traditional musical circles these values continue to make good box office sense. Similar attitudes exist in the contemporary music world where the resurgence of the virtuoso performer/composer has perpetuated old concert habits. There is something irresistibly hypnotic about watching physical feats of balance and agility, even more than grappling with complex ideas or surrendering to lush sounds. All listeners, including critics, other performers and the general musical public, are subject to it. We have become familiar with the work of Holliger, Globokar and a whole host of double bassists. As for the flute, the United States seems to have been particularly prolific regarding flautists who are extending the frontiers of technique. Robert Dick, Thomas Howell, Patrick Purswell and Harvey Sollberger are the most prominent. Robert Dick is even now developing a flute at IRCAM which will, he hopes, allow for an even greater range of chords and microtones than is possible with the present standard flute. The compositions of these performers reflect their respective accomplishments and interests. However, none of them, to my knowledge, have presented pieces which are beyond the limits of execution. Their pieces are not for all players, but they are playable.

In recent years, though, there have been some composers who have used a singular idea to challenge the new virtuosos: to write a piece which is ultimately impossible to play but which nevertheless must be attempted. For example, Stockhausen's *Spiral* is a philosophical exercise in surpassing one's musical limits (both technical and conceptual) each time one attempts its performance, and Xenakis's *Evryali* for piano or his recent solo cello piece *Kottos* are impossible to play

exactly as written.

Brian Ferneyhough has composed two solo flute pieces, the express purpose of which is to pose such a challenge. It would perhaps be helpful to quote the whole of the 'Remarks' section of the instruction sheet for *Cassandra's Dream Song* (1970), in which Ferneyhough states his attitude towards notation and the way in which the piece must be approached:

This work owes its conception to certain considerations arising out of the problems and possibilities inherent in the notation-realisation relationship. The choice of notation in this instance was principally dictated by a desire to define the quality of the final sound by relating it consciously to the degree of complexity present in the score. The piece as it stands is, therefore, not intended to be the plan of an "ideal" performance. The notation does not represent the result required: it is the attempt to realise the written specifications in practice which is designed to produce the desired (but unnotatable) sound quality.

A "beautiful", cultivated performance is not to be aimed at: some of the combinations of actions specified are in any case either not literally realisable (certain dynamic groupings) or else lead to complex, partly unpredictable results. Nevertheless, a valid realisation will only result from a rigorous attempt to reproduce as many of the textural details as possible: such divergencies and "impurities" as then follow from the natural limitations of the instrument itself may be taken to be the intentions of the composer. No attempt should be made to conceal the difficulty of the music by resorting to compromises and inexactitudes (i.e. of rhythm) designed to achieve a superficially more "polished" result. On the contrary, the audible (and visual) degree of difficulty is to be drawn as an integral structural element into the fabric of the composition itself.

By making such demands, one assumes that Ferneyhough is ensuring against 'easy' virtuosity. Certainly in *Cassandra* he is well aware of what he is asking the played to do. He has brought into play virtually every aspect of flute technique, especially the many varieties of attacking a note (from no attack to violent lip pizzicato) and producing vibrato and flutter-tongue. This is not remarkable in itself; it is the way in

Example 1

Example 1 shows two staves of music. The upper staff has a treble clef and contains notes with various accidentals (sharps, naturals, flats). It is marked with 'ppp sempre'. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains notes with various accidentals. It is marked with 'fff sempre'. The two staves are connected by a brace on the right side.

which he combines them which constitutes the problem.

Example 1 illustrates the kind of dynamic grouping problem to which he refers. Normally it is easy to play loud in the high register and soft in the low register. The difficulty in this case lies in the choice of the range of notes in either dynamic and their rapid alternation. Simultaneous vibrati occur in Example 2: one must play lip vibrato from fast to slow and diaphragm vibrato from nothing to very fast, while at the same time bending a note with the lip and making a crescendo with the diaphragm. In fact, neither of these fragments is impossible played slowly or in isolation. What makes them difficult is their speed and context. Having learned all the fragments thoroughly, one can 'realise' them, but only at half the speed that the composer suggests. It is the compression of time that makes an 'ideal performance' impossible and produces the 'desired (but unnotatable) sound quality'. The rigorous attempt to conform to Ferneyhough's demands is, in fact, what gives the performance of the piece a special taut quality. It will be interesting to chart the progress of successive performances of the work by the same flautist: will the performer become so adept at surmounting the difficulties that he/she will render the composition ineffectual?

Perhaps Ferneyhough wanted to guard against such an eventuality, for he has written another, more complex work, *Unity Capsule* (1976). In comparison to *Unity Capsule*, *Cassandra's Dream Song* should stand next to Varèse's *Density 21.5* and Berio's *Sequenza I* as a part of the 20th century classic flute repertory. Whereas Cassandra's 'song' is almost entirely virtuoso flute writing (the voice appears only three times), *Unity Capsule* has a virtuoso voice part. It is a flute line articulated literally by means of vowels and consonants spoken into the flute. The flute part also has an extended array of microtones,

Example 2

Example 2 shows a single staff of music with a treble clef. It contains notes with various accidentals. Above the staff, there are markings: 'smorz.' with a wavy line, '7-6' in a circle, 'non vibr.', 'molto vibr.', and 'non vibr.'. Below the staff, there are dynamic markings: 'pp', 'f', and 'p' with arrows indicating a crescendo and then a decrescendo.

chords and embouchure tensions and positions. These techniques, together with the voice part, result in a shimmering succession of sounds which bear little resemblance, for two-thirds of the work, to normal flute tone. There is a central section which is played more conventionally, and when this mode returns towards the end of the work, Ferneyhough suggests it be 'played with "normal" technique (almost exaggeratedly so; as if with almost hysterical relief...)' Only lightly parodistic! This section leads to a final frenzied voiced passage, and the piece concludes with the player drawing in the maximum quantity of air and holding it to bursting point: literally a breath-taking finish.

There are other directions in the score specifying the removal and application of the flute to playing position, which gives the piece a dramatic, if not genuinely theatrical quality. The performance notes in this piece do not imply any philosophical position, but merely state that the 'basic tempo is as fast as possible whilst adequately executing all specified figures'. The philosophy is left to the performer, who has to decide whether to accept the task of deciphering the notation in order to execute the piece.

Example 3 shows one of the more complex fragments from the 20 pages of the score. Reading from top to bottom, one line at a time, the notation refers to: position of instrument, embouchure tension, accentual rhythm, tone quality, note rhythm, quarter-tone pitches, vibrato speeds, flute dynamics, vocal utterances, voice dynamics. All of these are possible, alone and in combination; all that is necessary is the time to practice. This is no longer the composer's, but the performer's concern.

In my view there is nothing wrong with Ferneyhough's notation; it is precise and clear. It works as a road map to his music, not as a barrier. It is only a barrier to sight-reading, not to music-making. It points out more dramatically than traditional notation the contract that exists between the performer, the composer and the piece, regardless of historical period. Notation makes it possible

Example 3

Example 3 is a complex musical score with two staves: Flute and Voice. Above the staves are various markings including '(U)', 'sub. (U)', and 'sub.'. The Flute staff has markings like 'molto intimo!', '(#)', 'vibr. ord. (dolce)', 'N.V.', 'V.M. → (N.V.)', 'N.V. (same note)', 'lento → presto', and 'lip-gloss. sen.'. The Voice staff has markings like 'legato molto!', 'sub. f', 'mf', 'pp', 'quasi al niente', and 'poco niente'. There are also dynamic markings 'pp', 'ppp', 'p', and 'ppp' with arrows. A box at the bottom left contains the text '(#) Exaggeratedly sweet and cloying tone.' Below the staves are markings '(usa)', 'ppp', 'p', and 'ppp' with arrows.

For an idea in sound to be transmitted where learning by rote does not or cannot exist. If the composer makes his contribution in intelligently writing down his ideas, then the performer has the responsibility to do what is necessary to bring those ideas to life. Unfortunately, in our present musical society, only 'easy notation' pieces are rewarded by performance, because the others are far too costly. It is an accepted fact that musicians engaged in

processing difficult music, whether realisations of pre-1800 or contemporary scores, do so virtually without remuneration. They must subsidise this work with more conventional means of support, by teaching or playing sight-readable music. It is to be hoped that these musicians will carry on and perhaps eventually reap the benefits of the circus world by becoming our next generation of virtuosi.

TIME AND MOTION STUDY 1

KEVIN CORNER

FERNEYHOUGH'S *Time and Motion Study I* is a virtuoso piece written for the Dutch bass clarinetist Harry Sparnaay, the winner of the 1972 Gaudeamus performers' competition. Like other works composed for Sparnaay, this *Time and Motion Study* exploits many of the newer techniques for his instrument and also his ability to give clear definition to extremely rapid figuration. However, the work poses many unnecessary problems for the interpreter, not the least of which is the near illegibility of what is admittedly a beautiful-looking score. The problems here are a result of frequent 'over-notation' and also, of course, of the extremely florid nature of the music itself.

Time and Motion Study I was originally written for an ordinary B flat clarinet in 1971 and recomposed for the bass clarinet in 1977. In the original only the 'overall form, certain materials, and general expressive ambitus were determined'. In the notes which accompany the score, Ferneyhough says that in the course of re-composition 'no attempt was made to recapture the spirit of the original . . . the opposite was aimed at; a new and independently conceived matrix of proportions was superimposed upon the partially ordered pre-existent material'. In this way the original material was destroyed but remained to form "archaeological substrata" in and through which the *a priori* structuration of the subsequent compositional activity would . . . "hear itself spoken" .

For much of the work's duration the material is still of an extremely basic nature, consisting of tremolandi and ostinati with added notes and accents emerging from the texture. In addition to normal, orthodox articulation (including flutter tonguing and a 'throat flutter'), Ferneyhough requires two further kinds: 'slap tongue' — a hard attack with no sustaining, and 'pesante' — a hard attack but also sustained. These are notated in the manner usual for Sprechstimme: an arrowhead replacing the normal note head and a cross added to the note tail. In themselves these articulation devices present little problem and occur in the works of other composers. In

Example 1

The diagram shows a musical score with three staves. The top staff has a large note labeled '(main nota)' with a horizontal line above it labeled '(main dynamic level)'. Below this, there is a complex rhythmic pattern with various markings including 'smorz' and 'ord.'. The bottom staff is labeled 'Pulse accents' and shows a series of notes with arrows pointing to them. Below the bottom staff, there are two groups of three notes each, with a bracket underneath labeled '5:4 (d)'.

Time and Motion Study I, however, both 'slap tongue' and 'pesante' are required in passages where, played at the indicated speed, the average note length is in the region of one fortieth of a second!

Further to this, Ferneyhough adds staccatissimo markings to the 'pesante' indications: a strange contradiction, especially considering the demanded speed. He often makes use of superimposed articulations, however, to produce a complex sound structure which can be very effective. Example 1 is taken from the accompanying notes to the score, not from the score itself.

Ferneyhough uses four different types of note head to indicate tone colours. In addition to 'normal' tone, he requires a hard, bright tone, a breathy indistinct timbre (but with the pitch of the note still fully audible) and a tone which contains a high degree of breath sound with pitch as such scarcely identifiable. The notations for the three departures from 'normal' tone are given in Example 2. In themselves they are not really that distinctive anyway, but in conjunction with the normal note heads and the other notations for different types of articulation mentioned earlier, the problem multiplies.

Example 2

- ◆ = hard, bright tone production
- ◇ = rather breathy, indistinct timbre (but still with fully identifiable pitch component).
- ♠ = high degree of breath sound, with pitch as such scarcely identifiable, or audible merely as timbral modification.

In a similar way Ferneyhough makes life unnecessarily difficult by using symbols for $\frac{3}{4}$ tone sharp and flat as well as $\frac{1}{4}$ tone sharp and flat. Surely this could have been avoided, especially as in his introduction the composer says that he realises these notes will probably be out of tune anyway because of the characteristics of individual instruments.

Rhythmic complexity is, of course, a problem both composers and performers will take for granted, and in this respect Ferneyhough's use of superimposed subdivisions within single beats is not exceptional. Where it does become a problem, however, is again in the sphere of clarity and legibility. The work opens with one of the recurring ostinato passages, the basic $\text{♩} = 60$ being divided into between eight and 14 ♩ subdivisions and most of the pitches being at the bottom of the instrument's range. The numerous ledger lines involved tend to run into one another because they are so close together. And as the note tails are extremely thick the staff is completely obliterated, with the result that the actual

Example 3

Musical score for Example 3. The top staff is a piano part with a melodic line of eighth notes. It starts with a dynamic marking of *in marc. mp* and a *mfz* marking. The bottom staff is a bass line with a constant *mf sempre* dynamic. There are two measures of 10 notes each, indicated by a bracket and the number 10 with a *(b)* below it.

pitched are effectively obscured. Example 3 shows this, while Example 4 gives some idea of the rhythmic complexity involved in the score.

Time and Motion Study I also makes demands upon the performer's breath control: not only in terms of phrase lengths (on two occasions Ferneyhough asks for a passage of some 50 seconds' duration to be played without taking a breath — effectively demanding double breathing techniques) but also in terms of dynamics (all possible levels from pppp to ffff coupled with practically every conceivable dynamic combination of accent, e.g. *sffz*, *ffpp*).

The pitch range required by the score is unexceptional: some four and a half octaves from low written C. Ferneyhough in fact offers alternatives for the lowest notes or allows for their octave transposition. Apart from a few orchestral instruments, however, surely no player

Example 4

Musical score for Example 4. The top staff shows a complex rhythmic structure with various time signatures: 3:2, 5, 9, and 3. The bottom staff shows a bass line with various dynamic markings: *fff*, *sfz-f*, *mf*, *f non dim!*, *sub pp*, and *meno f*. There are also some markings like *7* and *7* with asterisks.

now has a bass clarinet without this 'extension': certainly no-one who may have any inclination to attempt Ferneyhough's virtuoso work! (What a pity that the same cannot be said of the lower 'basset' extension to the normal clarinet. Alan Hacker's example and pioneer work have been largely ignored, with the result that many British composers have to suffer the transposition of their basset clarinet parts or modify them.)

Having discussed *Time and Motion Study I* with some dozen composers and half a dozen performers, I have gained the general impression that both composers and practitioners feel that Ferneyhough has over-notated the work. While the actual look of the score leads one to expect total clarity, far too much of the score is confusing or simply redundant. The impression has also been that the score is really far too demanding and should perhaps be realised electronically.

TRANSIT MALCOLM BARRY

THE PERFORMANCE of *Transit* at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in November 1977 brought a rare moment of critical agreement. Here was a composer of obvious gifts who was receiving, perhaps belatedly, some recognition via a whole concert with the London Sinfonietta and, subsequently, a broadcast of that concert and a commercial recording of the work. The critical approbation was general, as was a feeling that Ferneyhough's works were extremely difficult both for performers and listeners.

The impression of complexity is maintained on subsequent acquaintance with both score and record, but this complexity repays a great deal of scrutiny whether at the structural level (briefly but convincingly outlined by James Erber in his notes accompanying the record) or at the foreground: an almost Boulezian concern with the beauty of sound, often busy within a static background. The work does not yield its secrets easily, although a few clues are provided by the composer towards the end: what follows is intended merely as a description of some aspects of the piece.

Ferneyhough seems intent on preserving the dramatic aspects of music as well as the sensual features hinted at above. The work builds to a climax just before its conclusion, and traditional concepts of drama in orchestral music are satisfied, albeit in a language in which pure structure and texture have taken the place of pitch relationships in communicating this. Complementing the drama is the attractive quality of the sound, and the six solo voices contribute much to this in a continuum of vocal resource that ranges from the delicacy of the opening to the violence of the close.

Both these aspects, together with the disposition of the forces and the progress of the music, have an extra-musical significance. The score calls for six 'circles' of performers arranged in an amphitheatre effect, each circle

symbolising one of the spheres of the cosmos. The score is prefaced by a '19th century pastiche' of a Renaissance woodcut depicting the penetration of the various spheres of the cosmos, and each section of the music has a programmatic as well as a structural function.

The six voices and three solo woodwinds (representing 'the human element') are deployed in the first circle and all nine have individual amplification. The composer is quite precise as to the amount of amplification: never intrusive but sufficient to make the quieter passages audible. The singers have auxiliary percussion — claves and maracas — which they are required to play while singing as well as separately. The solo flute, oboe and clarinet are required to play various members of their respective family of instruments and both sets of performers make full use of the possibilities available to them: from the gargle through speech to *bel canto* in the case of the singers, and from vaguely pitched keywork through harmonics to orthodox techniques for the woodwind. The texts (by three Greek writers and including one forgery) are embedded within the texture and emerge clearly only twice towards the end of the piece: 'eternity maketh the cosmos' marks the most operatic entry from a solo voice, while just before the final climax 'O, Death!' is very audible. The latter might stand as another comparison with Boulez' *Pli selon pli*.

The second circle ('the stars') consists of three trumpets, three percussionists (a great array of instruments), two harps, guitars (electric and acoustic), cymbalom and two keyboard players, one on piano doubling amplified harpsichord, the other on piano doubling celeste. The techniques required here are also exhaustive rather than orthodox: particularly impressive in this regard is the sound of the amplified harpsichord and the cymbalom, the latter becoming a percussion instrument with a vengeance.

Ferneyhough's use of very short durations and a plethora of pitches at the foreground level mean that his music seems to aspire towards the condition of percussion. It contains an intricacy and precision that, were they not allied to a fine structural sense, would be in danger of descending into whimsical fussiness, and the composer walks this tightrope with astonishing accomplishment, bearing in mind that *Transit* is (presumably) still an early work (1972-75). The difficulty for performers (in the intricacy of the demands and the notation) and listeners (in the teeming foreground) is doubtless balanced by the difficulty for the composer in actually writing the music down.

These difficulties are as marked in the third circle ('the darkness between the spheres'): a group of 16 strings dominated by six cellos and four basses. The strings form the most purely textural level of the piece (that is still how it sounds after a few hearings), although this group's material seems once or twice to become of more pronounced structural importance.

Of undeniable importance in this respect are the six pedal timpani (three players) which form the fourth circle. Ferneyhough requires plastic skins and is very precise as to the position of attack, harmonics, etc. The timpani are the first pitched instruments to sound and give the first impressive indication that here is music in which aural/dramatic and intellectual/structural aspects are going to be held in a fine balance.

The fifth circle ('the music of the spheres') consists of eight brass players used for overwhelming power at the close, while the sixth circle adds to this impression: the three trumpeters from the second circle are placed surrounding the ensemble for greater effect at this point. Such perambulation is not unique to the trumpeters, for the timpanists of the fourth circle are the percussionists of the second.

The disposition of the circles seems to represent a continuum from intricacy and precision to dynamic power as well as the programmatic element. This is not to say that the brass parts are not precisely notated, merely that their precision *seems* less than that of the instruments of the first circle. This is balanced, however, by dynamics and the care Ferneyhough takes over these in all the circles.

One of the composer's many achievements in the work is that of welding together successfully many different kinds of writing: Boulez' polyphony of ensembles and ensemble of ensembles here come to a fruition, as well as allying a fine structure with a 'programme' which, however impenetrable, was keenly felt by Ferneyhough. Another achievement, as I have indicated, is the balance between form and surface, while a third is that, despite an apparent complexity, listeners will gain from the repetitions *within* sections a sense of the smaller scale form as well as an overall conception of the piece from a couple of hearings of the work. Ferneyhough thus demonstrates his knowledge of and zest for the *craft* of composition and it is thus that his music stands as a magnificent challenge to the infantile posturings of much of what passes for contemporary music.

Transit is sectional but progresses in a cycle of types of section as follows:

- Vocal Model
- Tutti 1
 - Voices 1
 - Verse 1
 - Voices 2
- Tutti 2
 - Voices 3
 - Verse 2
 - Voices 4
 - Verse 3
- Intonatio/Transitio

The Tutti make use of Circles 1 (woodwind), 2 and 3. In the first the music is completely notated and read in the conventional way and it features a contrast between the woodwinds, percussion and strings. The second takes the idea of polyphony of material further by providing a background where the pitch material is free, although serially-organised durations and modes of attack are specified, into which are placed two 'inserts' of totally determined material. Ferneyhough is thus providing compositionally a polyphony of ensembles (in this case, of types of writing) to complement the polyphony of ensemble (of sound) that will be apparent to the listener.

The Voices sections feature different types of vocal usage: unorthodox vocal techniques against a 'textural' background of homophonic strings in the first, tremolando female voices accompanied by 'melodic percussion' (including harp and guitar) in the second, homophony with various ensembles in the third and sustained pitches in the fourth. These sections are clearly sectionally organised with an analagous scheme of organisation.

The Verses, too, share a common formal pattern:

A B1 B2 C1 C2 C3

Within the 'repetitions' there are many changes in pitches, instruments used, etc: although enough remains in common for them to justify the repeat marks and double bars that Ferneyhough indicates. The basic durational patterns are treated with added and subtracted values, as in the timpani contribution to the Vocal Model, so that Ferneyhough at once has regard for the structure qua structure, its micro-structure and the possibility of communicating both. Each Verse features a woodwind instrument and each contains a certain latitude: the clarinetist, for example, may choose from different paths through the material.

The Vocal Model has two sections. In the first, two ensembles proceed completely independently. The singers start from a model and subsidiary pitches and work through six lines of durational material arranged and performed like a 'simultaneous' round. There is some choice allowed in pitches and manner of performance. The timpani read conventionally a totally determined and strictly serial section within a band of tempo ranging from ♩ = 56 to ♩ = 62. These two ensembles come together for the second section and take the music into the first Tutti.

The 'Intonatio/Transitio' is tri-partite. The first of these parts is itself divided into three sub-sections of which the titles are "Intonatio Aeternitatis", "Intonatio Temporis" and "Intonatio Gencartionis". Such titles and the further sub-division clearly and carefully marked in the score (e.g. 5 'phases' are specified in the last 'Intonation') suggest that, from the durational aspect at least, this is the core of the work. This is further supported by the immediate appearance of the second part of the Coda: "Transitio 1" in which independent ensembles in free tempo are contrasted with totally notated tutti, and "Transitio 2", the through composed climax of the work. Ferneyhough's almost obsessive concern with balance suggests that the intellectual and dramatic peaks of the piece might be juxtaposed. Even within "Transitio 1" the *senza misura* sections are balanced between themselves and characterised by different performing forces, all making a logical complementary relationship.

Such a cursory description cannot do justice to the sound of the work or, indeed, its phenomenal construction. The sub-divisions and symmetries therein at once invite and repel analysis: a fuller account of the forces used and the tempo relationships within and between sections would reveal something of this symmetry, but the durations and pitches chosen are far more complex.

The pitch class sets chosen do not immediately suggest

an easily grasped patterning. The Vocal Model at the start is 6-Z48 (contrasted with 4-2 and 8-21 of the first four timpani bars) and Ferneyhough seems to favour non-equivalent sets¹ where a vocal verticalisation is segmentable.

For example, the vocal insert in Tutti 2 forms 6-Z26, the sustained chord at the opening of Voices 3 forms 6-Z37 and at III of the same section 6-Z15. Voices 4 is formed as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} 6-Z47 + 5-24 &= 8-11 \\ 4-Z15 + 4-16 &= 5-28 \\ &6-15 \\ &4-Z15 \end{aligned}$$

The recurrence of 4-Z15 can scarcely be fortuitous, although the presence of non Z-related sets together with the high likelihood of Z related sets of cardinal 6 militates against a glib assumption of the symmetries that doubtless lie within the pitch organisation of the work.

The tempting idea that Ferneyhough chose Z related sets for the vocal writing and not for the instrumental, or the related possibility that he uses a contrast in types of set to differentiate ensembles in instrumental sections, disappears when the opening of Verse 1 is considered. Here the pitches are arranged as follows:

Trumpets: 7-11 7-20 = 11-1 [♭] 5-4; 6-Z13 etc.
Vibraphones: 6-Z13; 10-1; 5-1[♭]

Additionally 6-Z48 recurs at the climax of the piece on the brass instruments while the vocal parts there are based on 4-2 and 8-21: a reversal of the situation at the opening. Nor do his 'melodies' for solo wind instruments in the Verse sections assist in this respect. The difficulties of segmentation are pronounced, the more so given the extensive use of grace notes to elaborate an already florid style.

Towards the end of the work the parlous concentration on verticalised sets present at certain points disappears entirely in favour of a linear writing that, in itself and in its

¹ Z-related sets have the same *total* interval class content.

complexity within the polyphony of ensembles, defies an easy segmentation other than the most arbitrary. The relative clarity of the durations and the complexity of the pitch material being juxtaposed in this way are perhaps another example of Ferneyhough's concern for a symmetry (or several simultaneously). The clearer durational patterns occur in the 'Intonatio' sections, where serial patterns within multiples of three beats are presented in quick succession: earlier rhythmic complexities derive from *superimpositions* of durational cycles.

The extra-musical aspects of the work are no less impenetrable: why, for example, derive the text from a forgery (albeit an Ancient Greek deception)? Why, further, use a *pastiche* of a Renaissance woodcut? Ferneyhough does not provide many clues, although one is quoted in the notes accompanying the record.

The record itself, by the London Sinfonietta under Elgar Howarth, is a fine piece of production. *Transit* is unquestionably a work made for quadrophony, and even on the humbler stereophonic level recording enables many of the details to be heard which are lost in a live performance. The balance, so crucial in this work, is exemplary, enabling the woodwind instruments in the Verse sections to sound 'non solo' as directed, while the impression (voices close, percussion far back) of the recording mirrors the directions of the score.

The two are not wholly consistent, however. While the studio enables a greater accuracy, Ferneyhough seems to have changed his mind in at least two particulars: the notated relationship between clarinet and guitar in Verse 2 and the length of one section within 'Transitio'.

As well as accuracy and balance, recording enables, by repetition, a greater variety of colours to impress themselves on the listener, and as this is the most immediate aspect of this piece this is all to the good. *Transit* stands as a positive achievement (the beliefs in structure and communication), and as with the best of these its properties of negation are as necessary: negation of the flight from thought and the negation of regression with which contemporary music is confronted. It is simply one of the most impressive works of the 1970s.

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