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

<http://contactjournal.gold.ac.uk>

Citation

Heaton, Roger. 1981. 'Review of 30th Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik'. *Contact*, 22. pp. 33-36. ISSN 0308-5066.

**30th Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik
Darmstadt, July 20 to August 5, 1980**

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Darmstadt, the mouthpiece of all that was urgently important in post-war music, shows only a pale image of its former glory. My expectations were, of course, based on its past reputation, yet, even in the absence of those 'angry young men' of the fifties and sixties, I looked forward to a refreshing experience.¹ I was disappointed; I was also shocked at the strength and influence of the new neo-romantic movement.

The course itself was divided into two: the Composition Studio (Ferneyhough, Gerard Grisey, Wolfgang Rihm) and the Interpretation Studio (Caskel, Deinzer, Gawriloff, Henck, Kontarsky, Armin Rosin, Werner Taube), with morning and afternoon sessions on every day of the two week course. The first week of the Interpretation Studio was spent in some excellent master-classes on solo works, and as more of the participants' scores were handed in, selected (by a panel of all the tutors), and distributed, group rehearsals were prepared for the ten Studio concerts given in the last four days of the course. The Composition Studio divided into morning lectures and afternoon workshops where participants could briefly present their own work. Until Ferneyhough arrived in the second week, the Composition Studios seemed to lack enthusiasm (Ferneyhough, incidentally, was the only

composer to give individual consultations), and a general criticism, particularly from the Americans, was that there was no leading personality. By the end of the first week we badly needed the rejuvenating presence of a Kagel or a Ligeti.

Grisey, who opened the course, talked about his own music, whereas Rihm concentrated on participants' presentations. A great deal of the music presented was of an undergraduate standard, and the discussions of works therefore centred cautiously on aesthetic issues where in some cases a practical approach as to why the piece was unsuccessful would have been more useful. I assume that more detailed course structures, such as those that governed Stockhausen's composition courses at Darmstadt,² could not be worked out because of the numbers involved (some 100 composers and 100 performers).

The analysis sessions were also unsatisfactory. Włodzimierz Kotonski presented a general introduction to the younger generation of Poles (those born since 1950), and Wolfgang von Schweinitz, Salvatore Sciarrino and Tristan Murail each presented his own music. One hoped for explanation of process and structure rather than vague description.

Of the composers who participated, those of Eastern Europe and Japan seem to fall clearly into national groups. Apart from West Germany, the best-represented country was Roumania with 25 composers and a string quartet which won the performers' part of the Kranichsteiner Musikpreis. Two types of music came from this group: one tonal, non-contrapuntal and folk influenced, and the other strongly coloured by the Polish school of the sixties, including Penderecki's string techniques. The younger Poles have tried to move as far away as possible from their more famous elders. Some of the new pieces described by Kotonski were given in a concert by the Warsaw Music Workshop; two others were played in the Studio concerts: *Tricorne* (1978) by Pawel Buczynski (b. 1953) for two flutes, cello and harpsichord, and *Study III* (1975) by Andrzej Krzanowski (born 1951) for solo accordion, performed by the composer. Both these pieces (and many others heard during the lecture) juxtaposed sections of strangely unpassionate free atonality with extended phrases of diatonic harmonic progressions in a neo-Baroque style, with apparently no attempt at fusion. The call of the past here seems overwhelming (whole sections of the accordion piece sounded like transcriptions of Baroque organ music); but unlike Rihm, who has created a complete vocabulary based on an earlier sound world, or Stravinsky, who reinterpreted older techniques within his individual language, the Poles rely heavily on pastiche. Briefly, the Japanese as a group provided the most convincing and consistent atonal language, particularly in a series of passionate solo violin pieces, which were brilliantly played by Akiko Tatsumi.

The two most interesting concerts by participants came from composers of the Cologne Feedback group, and from an East German composer-improviser Hans-Karsten Raecke, who won part of the composition prize. Raecke (b. 1941) presented a complete late-night concert (45 minutes) of five solo pieces written between 1977 and 1980. He makes his own single-reed wind instruments, one of the most amusing being the Gummiphon, a rubber serpent-like instrument closed at the bell and partly filled with water; while Raecke played, the water gradually emptied out through the finger-holes (the piece was entitled *Wassermusik*). The final piece, *So...? ...oder so?* for bamboo pipe, tape and slide projection, was the strongest of the five works. (All the pieces were structured, so that Raecke always improvised within a framework). In this piece a photograph of the world was gradually distorted into pure white light and then refocused again; the improvisation followed the same arch form to a frenetic climax, at which point the tape, playing synthesized sounds throughout, gave way to the sound of soldiers marching. All the pieces were powerful and committed, as one might expect from an Eastern European improvising musician, yet Raecke's musical vocabulary was not as imaginative as, say, that of Evan Parker; nevertheless the concert was one of the most stimulating of the course.

The Cologne concert contained three pieces: Mesias Maignushca's *Agualarga* (1978) for two pianos, one percussionist and amplification, John McGuire's *Pulse Music III* (1978-79) for tape, and Clarence Barlowe's *çoğluotobüsleşmesi* (translated as 'Bus Journey to Parametron (all about "çoğlu...")') (1975-79) for solo piano (Herbert Henck), which won the composition prize. Maignushca's piece was a colourful work in arch shape, containing three constants: a rhythmic constant (semiquaver

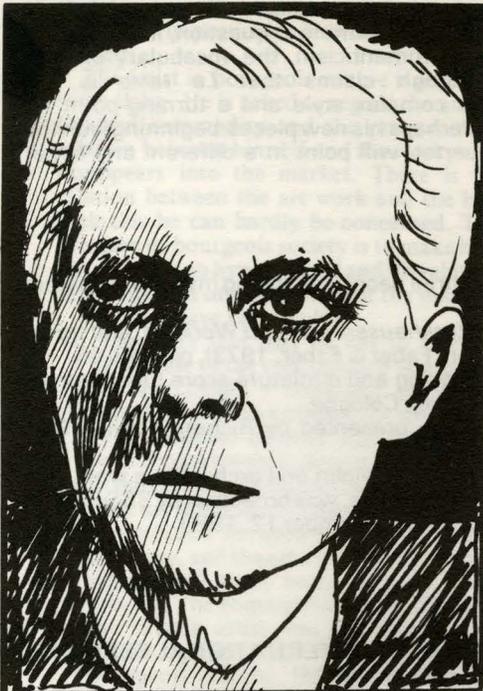
= 232), four pitches, and a fifth pitch repeated on marimba to enable the pianists to synchronise events. The work started and finished with tiny cells of material around the given pitches, in which stopped harmonics from inside the piano were frequently used. McGuire gave us a process tape piece of the utmost clarity and beauty; hugely dense diatonic chords covering a vast range exploded at three- or four-minute intervals (the chords themselves moved in simple harmonic progressions), leaving complex, high bell sounds repeating in subtly changing patterns.

Barlowe's piano piece with the unpronounceable name is an almost incomprehensibly complex 30-minute work of highly differentiated polyphony, in which several layers of pointillistic, melodic, chordal, rhythmically articulated material run simultaneously at different speeds. Barlowe states that 'the music can vary from tonal to quasi atonal, metric to quasi ametric, eventful to sparse', these different areas phasing into and out of each other smoothly and continuously. The work uses quarter-tones, obtained by the retuning of several notes in each octave, apparently to give the impression of Middle Eastern intonation; on this first hearing it sounded rather as if it were being played on an out-of-tune piano. The composition of the work was a large-scale project preceded by months of preparation and composed with the help of a computer. Barlowe explains that by using an algebraically defined system of tonality he has found a compositional method of creating tonal fields of differing strengths. *Çoğluotobüsleşmesi* is so difficult to perform that it forces even the best of players (and Henck is certainly that) into an approximation of the score; for this reason it also exists in a computer realised tape version. Though the concept of the work is fascinating, I found it aurally almost unbearable.³

Grisey (b. 1946) and Murail (b. 1947) presented their work in some detail. Both are exclusively interested in building pieces out of an orchestration of the harmonic series. Simply, they electronically analyse single sounds and try to reproduce these spectra in an ensemble of traditional instruments. For example, at the opening of Grisey's *Partiels* (1975), for a chamber orchestra of eighteen, the double basses and trombone continually play E in a small, ever-changing rhythmic pattern; then there is a gradual flowering of the harmonic spectrum on this fundamental in the rest of the ensemble, with piccolos and E-flat clarinet at the top of the pyramid of sound, which then quickly disintegrates. These two events form a unit which is repeated some 50 times, with the rhythmic cell and the order of entry and prominence of voices in the pyramid changing each time. These changes follow a carefully structured plan of contrast between rhythmic periodicity and aperiodicity, the basses exploiting the former and the pyramid the latter. *Partiels* is the third in a series of five pieces, under the general title *Les espaces acoustiques*, in which each piece enlarges the acoustic field of the preceding one; they can be performed separately or continuously. In the opening concert of the course, given by the Radio Symphony Orchestra of Cracow, we heard the fourth piece in the cycle - *Modulations* (1976-77) for 33 players. The form and material here are built from the processes of sound modulations taken from the harmonic spectra, the spectra of partials, white noise, filtering and so on. Further material is taken from the 'synthetic' reproduction or reconstruction of the sound of muted brass, which is central to the sound world of this piece. Again the fundamental is E and again there is much use of periodic duration, with an emphasis on what Grisey calls psychological time - the relative value and passage of events - rather than chronometric time.

In his lecture Murail called this kind of composition 'synthetic composition', and he seems to take sound simulation still further. In his piece *Memoires/Erosion* for horn and nine instruments, he cleverly copies simple electronic techniques, particularly the tape loop and feedback. Besides his orchestral piece *Gondwana* (1980), given in the first concert, we also heard Murail's *Treize couleurs du soleil couchant* (1978) for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano in a stunning performance by Levine, Riessler, Gawriloff, Taube and Kontarsky. This piece gave perhaps the clearest demonstration of the incredible ear for colour and brilliance of orchestration which both these Frenchmen have; it contains such subtleties as individual pitches from a clarinet multiphonic being highlighted and then 'orchestrated' by the rest of the group.

This emphasis on colour and harmonically static yet ravishing sonorities is far removed from the preoccupations



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of Ferneyhough. His lectures were, in fact, the most interesting. In four morning sessions he analysed *La terre est un homme* (1976-79). We were – and Ferneyhough was aware of this – ‘blinded by science’. The compositional systems, the number games, became so engrossing in themselves that at the end of each session one was suddenly startled back into the reality that the man was supposed to be writing music! With reference only to this piece doubts were voiced by many concerning its ‘musicality’, not because of the compositional pyrotechnics but rather because of the actual sound, which is impossibly dense and which therefore renders the plethora of detail redundant. Ferneyhough himself admitted that he could not hear the detail, but that this was less important than the basic concepts and the overall effect. Every possible facet of the work is strictly controlled by different numerical systems all emanating from a basic seven-note row and the rhythmic possibilities of the number seven. Rhythm, pitch and register are ruled by the Fibonacci series up to 21 (seven integers), and many permutations and expansions are formed and then treated further by other systems to allow the adding together of groups, vertically and horizontally, in a meaningful way. However, Ferneyhough still allows for a certain instinctual compositional procedure to correct any clumsy simultaneities which the systems might have produced, to round off the rough edges as it were.

Ferneyhough, with his reinterpretation of integral serialism, suggested that neo-romanticism is not the right way forward, yet Wolfgang Rihm (b. 1952) is a very important figure in Germany today as the leader of a movement that represents music’s contribution to what is a general trend in the arts. This trend seems to be a reaction to the ‘economic miracle’ of post-war Germany – that stable and wealthy society, which built anew, experimented, and forged ahead in the arts through the fifties, sixties and early seventies. It is a reaction to the technical complexity of modern life as expressed in ‘difficult’ modern music. The manifestation of this trend in literature has been called ‘Innerlichkeit’ (inwardness) – a looking back to the sources of modern art before the turmoil of the political sixties. In music the source is turn-of-the-century Viennese romanticism. This movement is not of course exclusive to Germany, but it is, I feel, at its strongest and most explicit there. Aribert Reimann has summed it up in this way: ‘Everybody is tired of making music which is cool and so cold, of intellectualism and experiments: it’s boring. People are longing to hear music again. I think to have the trust in melody and the trust to write melody without shame, I think this is a very big step forward.’⁴

To judge aurally, the two most important influences on Rihm must be Mahler and Berg. I gathered from the little Rihm said about his music that the compositional process for him is structureless and instinctual; the music seems simply to flow from him and, as a consequence, his pieces tend to be hyperemotional and rather long. His catalogue bears out this characteristic: at 28 years old he already has an opera, three symphonies, three string quartets, seven piano pieces, and numerous other works to his name. We heard three pieces: *Cuts and Dissolves* (1977) for 29 players, the Third String Quartet ‘Im Innersten’ (1976) (its subtitle very much in keeping with the idea of inwardness), and Klavierstück Nr. 7 (1980). The quartet is the best example of Rihm’s style. It is in six movements, of which two are in two sections, making eight in all; four are designated *con moto* and four *adagio*. The *con moto* movements are contrapuntally atonal, motivic, fierce, thickly textured with much octave doubling, and the whole moves in waves of romantic gestures. The first *adagio* of the piece, the third movement, is an exact stylistic replica of Mahler in both tonality and atmosphere. One expected from the final *adagio* an overwhelming self-indulgence, but this extensive movement seemed to take the final page of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony as its starting-point, fragmenting and stretching the long tonal phrases towards an expressive understatement which is rare in Rihm’s music.⁵ The new Klavierstück was disappointing by comparison; it comes straight from the Liszt tradition of virtuoso solo piano writing, and its incessant crashing octaves and random moves in and out of consonance are, to say the least, inane.

Neo-romanticism in Germany is being taken very seriously, particularly by the younger composers who seem to feel that the free atonal language of the last 30 years has run its course, and that, in the absence of anything else, one must now look to the past, to rediscover tonality. What Darmstadt showed was a tremendous stylistic instability and a general regression (an avoidance of theatre music and electronic and computer techniques); it is clear that those

who are still trying to master and utilise the language of music evolved since 1955 are beginning to question, in the light of this strong wave of romanticism, the vocabulary of their teachers. Ferneyhough claims that *La terre* is the culmination of his complex style and a turning-point for music in general. Perhaps his new pieces, beginning with the Second String Quartet, will point in a different and better direction.

NOTES:

¹Incidentally, only three people, including myself, came from Britain.

²Karl H. Wörner, *Stockhausen: Life and Work*, ed. and trans. Bill Hopkins (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), pp. 243-46.

³It is available in playing and miniature score formats from Feedback Studio Verlag, Cologne.

⁴‘Fire in the Phoenix’, presented by Richard Mayne, BBC Radio 3, October 29, 1979.

⁵*Lichtzwang* (1975-76) for violin and orchestra, a work very representative of Rihm’s style, was broadcast by BBC Radio 3 in ‘Music in our Time’ on December 12, 1980.