NEW MUSIC DIARY

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The Diary in Contact 21 *went up to March 31, 1980, but for reasons of space it was decided to hold over Brigitte Schiffer's coverage of the MusICA series with which this instalment begins. (Ed.)*

Sunday November 4, 1979

There is, in London, no lack of opportunity to hear contemporary music of various kinds, but to hear experimental music, to find out what is being done in this field in other countries and to meet artists from abroad one has to turn to the ICA and Adrian Jack's second season of MusICA concerts. Like all people committed to a cause, Jack is always ready to take risks, and 'taking risks' seems the primary condition for progressive and adventurous programme planning. Among the previous year's MusICA concerts, some were exciting, informative and on a high level of skill and technique, others brought frustration and disappointment in their wake, but the large audience that gathered at the ICA for this season's first concert, a recital by the American pianist and composer Frederic Rzewski, seemed ready to take their share in the risk-taking business.

For those who knew him before he settled in Rome and became involved with Musica Elettronica Viva, this was the long awaited return to the concert platform of one of the most brilliant pianists of our time, and in this respect the concert turned into a grand occasion: but in this respect only. The programme also demonstrated his return to a pianistic style rooted in the 19th century. As if this two-fold return was not enough, 'Return' or rather *Wiederkehr*, was also the title of the first piece, written early in 1971 by Luca Lombardi (b.1945). Unfortunately, this futile return to tradition for the sake of a 'new comprehensibility and formal clarity', far from filling old barrels with new wine, resulted in a highly derivative style of sorts, saved only by Rzewski, who succeeded in breathing some life into even this cliché-ridden confection of pianistic nostalgia.

Two other Italian works were played in the first part of the programme: the *Suite No. 10 (KA)* by Giacinto Scelsi (b.1905), a set of seven movements made out of minimal material and played by Rzewski with maximal precision, and *Sofferte onde serene* ('Sorrowful yet serene waves') by Luigi Nono (b.1924), 'a record of the sound of bells echoing through the mist and off the water of the Giudecca', where Nono lives, and performed against a tape from the pre-recorded playing of Pollini, to whom the piece is dedicated. This performance more than anything else brought home the notion of Rzewski as the great pianist, 'in the contemporary and avant-garde repertory perhaps without peer', whose unforgettable performances as a young artist have never been surpassed, hardly ever equalled.

The entire second half of the programme was devoted to the first London performance of Rzewski's own *The People United Will Never Be Defeated*, 36 variations on the Chilean song 'El Pueblo Unido Jamas Sera Vencido': a mixture of all styles, idioms, techniques and origins, long, repetitive and undistinguished, behind which one tried in vain to discover the man whose intelligence, musicianship and integrity had never before been questioned.

Exactly one week earlier, Rzewski had given the British premiere of the piece at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, an occasion which prompted the publication of an interview with Richard Steinitz in *The Guardian*. *The People United* was, so the composer says, commissioned for the American Bicentennial; looking back, he really believes that the piece did help to promote reflection and discussion of the Chilean question in this context. How this should be is difficult to believe, however, as the piece itself is linked by its style with a quintessentially bourgeois tradition (if such a phrase must be used), with the grand Romantic virtuoso tradition; the title of the piece is all that refers to the Chilean situation. The 'synthesis' of diverse musical traditions is Rzewski's way of making the music more accessible, and the haphazard mixture of styles is used by him as a symbol, an instrumental illustration for the mixture of groups and classes in Chile. Such naivety from an artist of this rank is not only disarming but also alarming. There seems only one way to listen to the variations and that is to forget all the literature and to let oneself be carried away by the

performance. As for the music itself, it cannot have any other motivation than the display of purely pianistic artistry, and of a grand manner long dead and now grotesquely resuscitated.

Sunday November 11

The second MusICA event took place one week after the first, when the American S.E.M. Ensemble played works by Jackson MacLow (b.1922) and Phil Niblock (b.1933), the latter's music being accompanied by, but not synchronised with, film. Hardly any communication was established between the performers and the audience and no reaction was recorded.

Sunday November 18

The second S.E.M. event, one week later, unfortunately clashed with a concert at the Round House, so that there was only a very small audience to listen to the first British performance of the setting of Gertrude Stein's *Many Many Women* by the Czech-born, 37-year-old Petr Kotik, the director of the group. Nancy Cole's one-woman show *Gertrude Stein's Gertrude Stein*, played in the early afternoon, was only mildly amusing and had too strong a flavour of déjà vu to captivate the audience.

Sunday January 20, 1980

After the Christmas holidays, the MusICA concerts were resumed with performances by Music Projects/London of two rarely heard but major works of John Cage: the hour-long *Sixteen Dances* (1951) for an ensemble of nine players and *Atlas eclipticalis* (1961-62) in a 24-minute version for an ensemble of twelve instrumentalists, combined with *Winter Music* (1957) for piano.

The concert was one of these happy occasions, when one feels free to relax and even enjoy oneself. The players were ready to let the sounds come as they were, without adding anything of their own, be it expression or so-called interpretation. Richard Bernas, the American born and London based conductor-pianist, led the ensemble of nine (piano, two strings, two winds and four percussion) through the kaleidoscopic changes in rhythm and design of the *Sixteen Dances* in the same unfussy, gentle, yet firm manner, that he used for the twelve players of *Atlas eclipticalis*, whose notes were derived from maps of the stars and redistributed among the parts with the help of the I Ching. *Atlas eclipticalis* is one of Cage's most influential indeterminate scores and one of his earliest attempts to free music from the composer's conscious controls. Far from resulting in a 'free for all', such a score demands the greatest attention to dynamics. Having set the notes free, it is up to the performer not to infringe on this newly gained freedom by pushing or deliberately projecting the sounds. Music Projects did neither. They refrained from any gesture of expression, played softer than ever before, added no glue to the seemingly unconnected notes, took their time and produced some beautiful sounds, something Cage had not asked for but would certainly not have objected to. He would, no doubt, have liked the performance and so did the audience, without exception.

Sunday January 27

Lontano, directed by Odaline de la Martinez, with the soprano Karen Jensen from Electric Phoenix, gave at the ICA a programme of new works by young and not yet established composers from Ireland (Raymond Deane), Wales (Brian Noyes) and London (Sinan Savaskan and Jane Wells). Most of the composers were in their twenties and it is as essential for the composers as for the audience that such works be performed regularly and under conditions as optimal as they were on that evening, with the best artists available and the most careful preparation.

Among the three first performances, that of *Voyages*, a 17-minute piece for six instruments by Brian Noyes (b. 1949), was the least significant, and the little substance there was in *Under the Redwood Tree* by Jane Wells (b. 1952), a kind of dramatic scena for soprano and five instruments, will be remembered mostly for the splendid acting/singing/reciting of Karen Jensen. The work that left the deepest impression was *Many Stares through Semi-Nocturnal Zeiss Blink* for nine instruments by Sinan Savaskan (b. 1954), who is presently engaged in improvisation and experimental workshops. It is difficult to see why this minimalist, soft, dreamy and at times very beautiful music, which drew from Lontano a most lovable performance, should have such a bizarre title but apparently there is more to come, for we were told: '*Many Stares through Semi-Nocturnal Zeiss Blink* consists of 180 sections. The four sections being performed are Numbers 60, 180, 210 and 340'! Whatever the total number may be, I would gladly listen to some more sections, though not all of them at a time. The magic of this kind of music is cumulative and unless one can listen in a leisurely way, quietly and peacefully, one misses the best part of it.

The work of the German-trained Irishman Raymond Deane (b. 1953) also had a bizarre title, *Lichtzwang*, derived, according to the programme note, from the poet Paul Celan, to whom the work is dedicated. In the seven-minute piece, extremes of register, dynamics, density, mood and idiom ranging from Webernian sparseness to Bergian lyricism are explored in a concise and imaginative manner by Deane, a pupil of Gerald Bennett and Earle Brown in Basel, Stockhausen in Cologne and Isang Yun in Berlin. After a brief argument between the two instruments the piece faded away into no-man's-land before one could get tired of it.

Sunday February 24

The second MusICA Lontano concert, given with the American soprano Beth Griffith, was entirely devoted to the music of Gerald Barry (b. 1952), another partly German-trained composer who after having studied with Peter Schat in Holland and Friedrich Cerha in Vienna ended up in Cologne, where he has joined the very active avantgarde and experimental movement centred upon Stockhausen and Kagel. Though this was not really a discovery, Barry having been discovered as long as eight years ago, when he won the first prize in the Dublin Symphony Orchestra competition, and rediscovered at the 1978 Dublin Festival of 20th Century Music and the 1979 Saarbrücken Festival of New Music, his music was a novelty for London, where little is known of young Irish composers.

The two instrumental pieces performed on that evening are based on minimal material and of entirely linear character but the processes devised by Barry are of a fascinating inventiveness, concerned with coordination, decoration and line rather than with texture, timbre or dynamics. His titles, a horizontal line for the ensemble piece and an oblique line through a small circle for the two-piano piece, are typical for his approach to pattern and design. ———— *for Ensemble* (1979), played on this occasion by three clarinets, two violas, two cellos and piano doubling harpsichord, but which may be performed by any group of instruments with the appropriate register, is based on a melody played four times and gradually emerging from rising scales to provide strategic points of rest against the thickening lines of parallel rising thirds and sixths reminiscent of medieval fauxbourdon and even older and more alien traditions.

The piece for two pianos is described by Barry as an étude in coordination (the problem of playing exactly together) and, at the same time, as an exploration of ornamentation. Though I do not quite see how, 'in this piece, the ornamentation becomes the melody', I do see the amount of concentration and of coordination needed to play simultaneously on two pianos the single line first alone, then in simple and later in double octaves and make it sound as if they were played on a single instrument. The synchronisation reached by Odaline de la Martinez and Sheilagh Sutherland was an astonishing tour de force, notwithstanding the hazards of tuning, which may well add some spice to the otherwise rather uniform piece but seem to have been disregarded by the composer.

The two other pieces, *Décolletage* for soprano and *Things that gain by being painted* for singer, speaker, cello and piano gave Beth Griffith, a consummate singer-cum-actress-cum-diseuse, ample opportunity to display her amazing talent. A few days earlier, at a lecture-recital organised by the British Music Information Centre as part of the 'Sense of Ireland' Festival, Barry had tentatively given himself a demonstration of *Décolletage*. But stripped of all the trimmings, the piece, starting with an almost clinical analysis of the actress's body, was rather embarassingly narcissistic; the little music there was justified neither the title of music theatre nor of instrumental theatre. By comparison, *Things that gain by being painted* displayed a typically Kagelian sense of humour; Beth Griffith gave a very exhilarating performance.

More Irish composers were presented by the BMIC, namely Brian Boydell (b. 1917), Professor at Trinity College, Dublin, a prolific writer of songs, chamber, orchestral and film music, James Wilson (b. 1922), who represented Ireland in 1979 at the Warsaw Festival and Frank Corcoran (b. 1944), for eight years Inspector of Music in Dublin and at present guest of the

Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst in Berlin. Of Corcoran's compositions I particularly liked a piece for solo flute played on a eight-note whistle that combined birdcalls with quotations of Debussy, Messiaen and Varèse. A piece for percussion and voice was also very appealing and his Piano Trio, written for the 1978 Dublin Festival, creates a challenging performance situation, each voice going its own way and in its own time, with three different time signatures. He also deserves to be better known in this country and now that a first contact has been established, it is to be hoped that closer links with Irish composers will follow.

Sunday March 16

At the ICA Dennis Smalley presented pieces for tape alone and for tape with instruments, all dating from 1973-76. *Gradual* for tape and clarinettist doubling bass clarinet and trombone and *Cornucopia* for tape and horn, both magnificently played by Roger Heaton (clarinet) and James MacDonald (horn), provided further extensions of already considerably extended techniques, adding many new layers but little new substance or progress to the uneasy relationship between tape and performer. For the three tape pieces, Smalley, responsible for sound diffusion, was also his own performer; to watch him at the console, trying to control all the variables between tape and ear in order to achieve a smooth passage through all the stages along the electro-acoustic chain, was most instructive. Whether this ideal passage was achieved, is difficult to tell; the lack of adequate criteria and familiar vocabulary makes it as difficult for us to talk about such works in any other than entirely personal and subjective terms as the composer finds it difficult to say anything that might enlighten the listener.

Thursday April 3

In their recital at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Singcircle, a vocal group with 16 members, was joined for the first time by Circle, its instrumental counterpart with nine. Singcircle performed music by Bartók, Berio, Gerhard, Ligeti, and Arne Mellnäs, a Finnish composer strongly influenced by Ligeti; Circle played Stravinsky's Septet. Though the performances were impeccable the evening was something of a disappointment. The theatrical dimension inherent in most of the works was missing, the direction was conscientious without being inspired, and there was no fun, no spark and not the slightest sense of humour. Gregory Rose, the conductor of both groups, is a very serious young man, and as long as he fails to come to terms with all the intricacies, tricks and secrets of the theatrical, his ensembles will find it difficult to compete with others, equally good and much more lively.

Saturday April 5

The first performance of Erica Fox's *Paths where the Mourners Tread* was given by the Lontano Ensemble directed by Odaline de la Martinez. How strange that the composer should have chosen an instrumental ensemble (two woodwind, four strings, harp and percussion) to evoke an ancient Eastern, entirely vocal tradition – Jewish liturgical chant – and yet this choice allows her to gain a certain distance from her model and to integrate into her structure skilfully devised patterns of ornamentation and melisma. The little singing there is – some soft humming and vocalising by the instrumentalists – adds atmosphere to this attractive piece, in which all the pitfalls of exoticism and local colour are carefully avoided by the composer. The duration (23 minutes) is slightly out of proportion to the substance, but this may be a deliberate attempt to recreate some sort of Eastern time-scale, so totally alien to Western audiences.

Sunday April 6

For the last concert of the MusICA series Adrian Jack invited Karel Goeyvaerts from Brussels to introduce a concert of works from the early fifties given by the Koenig Ensemble with Gustave Fenyö (piano). From the day of his first arrival at Darmstadt in 1951 Goeyvaerts (b. 1923) formed a close relationship with Stockhausen, another newcomer to the Kranichsteiner summer course, for whom he analysed his latest work, the Sonata for two pianos. Stockhausen, who had been so deeply impressed by Messiaen's *Quatre Etudes Rythmiques* when he heard a recording of the work brought to Darmstadt by Antoine Goléa, was immediately aware of the far-reaching implications of the Sonata, which he analysed at an Adorno class, and to illustrate the analysis, the two of them gave a performance of the second movement. At that time, Goeyvaerts, Stockhausen's senior by five years, had already spent three years (1947-50) at Messiaen's analysis class in Paris, crucial years, no doubt, as they included the time (1949-50), when Messiaen wrote the *Quatre Etudes Rythmiques*, the first attempt at total serialisation. From there Goeyvaerts went further, elaborating the X form, 'the only possible solution, whenever total serialisation was carried out as a single structure'. His Sonata for two pianos, written 1950-51 and built on these principles, triggered off the composition of Stockhausen's *Kreuzspiel* and Boulez's *Polyphonie X*, both from 1951, one year before Stockhausen himself joined the Messiaen class at the Conservatoire.

Looking back over all these years, one feels dismayed at the lack of impact caused by Goeyvaerts's music, in spite of its seminal influence, when one compares it with the uproar caused in 1952 by Stockhausen's *Kreuzspiel* and the scandal that surrounded the first performance of Boulez's *Polyphonie X* the following year. But even now, almost 30 years later, Goeyvaerts's Sonata, which was given a magnificent account by Gustave Fenyö and Jan Latham Koenig as well as *Opus 3 aux sons frappés et frottés* (1952), sounded rather dry and uninspired, whilst Stockhausen's *Kreuzspiel* and his *Schlagtrio*, a later rescoring of the *Schlagquartett* of 1952, played by the Koenig Ensemble with great skill, held the audience riveted to their seats and drew spontaneous reactions from the listeners.

In pointillism, the style evolved by total serialisation, the connecting links between the notes were as hidden to the ear as they were to the eye in surrealism, but to most composers it became a phase to be gone through and abandoned, once every aspect had been investigated and explored. Not so to Goeyvaerts. For him, total serialisation was a creed and in 1957, when he realised that it had been motivated by nothing else but fear of chaos after the War, he denounced 'this rationalistic system as an expression of existential anguish (angoisse existentialiste) and withdrew from all professional musical activities'. Henceforward he was to write music only for pleasure and to give pleasure to those who would play it. The *Pièce pour trois* for flute, violin and piano, which was included in the programme, was the immediate outcome of this new attitude, which has been the major motive of his compositions ever since. Little did one expect another specimen of his usual bloodless and rather unlovable musical discourse and however much pleasure it may have given him to write it, one had strong doubts concerning the pleasure derived from playing it.

In spite of these reservations the concert was intensely stimulating and one should not forget that it is only thanks to Adrian Jack's initiative that the early Stockhausen works were brought together for the first time in a single concert with Goeyvaerts compositions from the same period. From Cage to Goeyvaerts and Stockhausen, new light was shed on that crucial period of the early fifties, a wide spectrum was covered in the course of the ten concerts, including chance music, microtonal music and films, music theatre, improvisation, coloured video and avantgarde. It is to be hoped that the MusICA events will get all the financial assistance needed for realising their presumably very promising projects for the future.

Wednesday April 9

At the Queen Elizabeth Hall Rose Andresier, an enterprising young guitarist, gave for the first time a recital devoted entirely to music of living British composers. Two years before, in March 1978, her performance of Nigel Osborne's *After Night* created such a powerful impression that the sameness of the other pieces at that concert, or rather of the other performances, was hardly noticed. In this recital, however, the monotony made itself felt much more strongly, and Andresier's limitations – lack of expressive, rhythmic, and dynamic variety – were all the more conspicuous as the technical and stylistic demands of the new works resulted in obvious stress and struggle. Only one piece, Haydn Reeder's *Object Action 1.1 and 1.2*, had anything fresh to offer, and the total control of sound balance, indispensable if the preparation of the instrument prescribed by the composer was to achieve the desired transformation of the guitar sounds into gamelan-like sonorities, was sadly missing. The performance remained rather tentative and it is to be hoped that the work will soon be heard again.

Sunday April 13

The Nash Ensemble, well known for the exquisite refinement of their playing and the sophistication of their approach, missed a point or two when they applied this manner to a predominantly American programme. Eager to present 20th-century music in the most acceptable way, they

went just one step too far and deprived most of the pieces of their specific character and their well-defined identity. Samuel Barber's *Dover Beach* sounded much too rarefied; Charles Ives's *The Unanswered Question* lost all its engaging ruggedness; the account of Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, in its original chamber version for 13 instruments, was immaculate rather than full-blooded; and the first London performance of Elliott Carter's Orpheus cantata, *Syringa*, for mezzo-soprano (Sarah Walker) singing in English, bass (David Wilson-Johnson) singing in Greek, and chamber ensemble, was so well weeded and smoothed out that little was left of the boldness, the passion and the flamboyance of the music, which were captured in the world premiere in New York in December 1978.

Placed in the context of music by the four American veterans, Paul Patterson's *At the Still Point of the Turning World* (1980) for instrumental octet, a British premiere, was made to sound more traditional and less adventurous than any of them. Even had it been played more blurtly, this pastoral idyll would probably not have given offence to the most tender ears.

Thursday April 17

The recital given by the Dutch bass clarinettist Harry Sparnaay at the Goethe Institute confirmed the famous dictum of Schoenberg that there is no such thing as bad music, only music badly performed. Sparnaay gave a breathtaking account of Brian Ferneyhough's *Time and Motion Study I* (1971–77), and what in the past had always sounded like eight minutes of complexity for its own sake suddenly fell into place, made sense and came over as an exciting piece of highly virtuoso music making. In this demanding programme Frank Denyer's *Book of Songs* for bass clarinet and drone provided the one and only episode of unmitigated lyricism. Lucien Goethals's *Difonium* involved tape signals, Hans Otte teased the audience with a one-minute piece (*Text* for bass clarinettist), and Rolf Gehlhaar's *Polymorph* for bass clarinet and tape-delay system had a strongly alienating effect. Then at the very moment when the audience showed the first signs of fatigue, Sparnaay ended the evening – and the Goethe Institute concert series – with a riveting performance of Mauricio Kagel's *Atem* (1970) for a solo wind player.

Sunday April 20

Three more works by Ferneyhough were presented at the Purcell Room only a few days later by Suoraan: *Invention* for solo piano, *Cassandra's Dream Song* for solo flute, and *Coloratura* for oboe and piano. The extravagant demands made by his music on the performers were met bravely and expertly by Nancy Ruffer (flute), Christopher Redgate (oboe) and Michael Finnissy (piano); this remarkable team of soloists, while overcoming all the technical obstacles, carefully avoided any kind of 'polished' presentation and exposed the grittiness of Ferneyhough's music as well as the struggle involved in its performance.

The idea of devoting the second part of the evening to music by John Cage was a surprising, even an amusing one. The best performance was that of mezzo-soprano Josephine Nendick, who mustered just the right mixture of blandness and delicacy to give an enchanting account of *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs*. It would have been helpful to be able to follow the elaborate and meticulous programme notes but the auditorium was plunged into total darkness.

Wednesday April 23

In 1978 the BBC commissioned Alfred Shnitke (b. 1934), one of the best-known and most Westernised post-war Soviet composers, to write a work for a Festival Hall concert to be conducted by Gennadi Rozhdestvensky in April 1980; it was suggested that the piece be dedicated to Bruckner, since his Mass no. 2 was to be performed on the same occasion. The BBC perhaps got more than they bargained for: Shnitke came up with a Mass of his own, calling it Symphony no. 2 *St Florian*, which, since it lasts 55 minutes, was longer than Bruckner's work by almost 20 minutes. Though heavily disguised by its title and hidden behind the orchestra, Shnitke's Mass follows the six liturgical divisions most faithfully. The vocal writing is based on plainchant, though the four solo voices were often inaudible, being entirely masked by the orchestra for most of the time, especially in the Credo; the instrumental writing, on the other hand, is couched in the accepted 20th-century tradition of symphonic music, with reminiscences from every imaginable source, and a strong element of blurring which, unlike that of Ligeti or Lutosławski, is achieved by thickness and density. There is certainly some justification for seeing in Shnitke the rightful successor of Shostakovich; they are alike in their boundless eclecticism, moderated modernity, daring in disguise (the false-note dissonances), their typically Russian freshness of invention and the vastness of their designs. Everything is larger than life, nothing is entirely new, but most of Shnitke's music has a strong appeal for audiences.

Friday April 25 and Saturday April 26

'Towards a Theatre of Sound', a two-day programme of public rehearsals, lectures, demonstrations and discussions on the preparation and performance of electro-acoustic music, was presented by the SPNM and EMAS at St John's, Smith Square. Beyond arousing the curiosity and stimulating the interest of the uninitiated listener, and giving the composer an opportunity to familiarise himself with the latest tools and techniques of electro-acoustic music, the sessions raised a question, fundamental to all composition but of particular importance for electro-acoustic music: namely 'what to do', as Schoenberg put it, 'when more happens than one can imagine'. According to Denis Smalley, the arrival of computer-generated sound has provided man with the means to create any sound of his imagination. This is a daunting prospect, and the indispensable 'harnessing of resources', which Smalley calls 'the composer's worry', must indeed bring about ever more rigorous methods of choice and control if confusion is to be avoided. On the other hand the composer has, at any time, made use of only a small portion of all available sounds and it is not the increase in the number of available sounds but their integration into the musical process that leads to difficulties.

Edgard Varèse played an important part in the intoduction of noise into musical composition. He was one of the first composers to attempt in musical terms to imagine the unimaginable, and to ask persistently for the tools that would allow him to realise his imaginings. In 1950, when he heard for the first time electronic sounds – those produced by Meyer-Eppler at Darmstadt – he knew that this was the way in which he could achieve his aim. Although from an early date he introduced all sorts of unconventional devices into his orchestra, Varèse never attempted the extension of existing performance techniques by creating new sounds from old instruments; his sound vision was clear and it transcended both memory and past experience. Other composers, gifted with that kind of creative imagination, such as Boulez, Nono, Stockhausen and Xenakis, have each found the means to bring their sound images to life; 'in a world so entirely transformed and dominated by man that we come up against manmade structures the whole time', the artist is simply compelled 'to say what has never been said before', as the German physicist Werner Heisenberg puts it. What is expected from the artist of today is an act of 'creatio ex nihilo'.

When looking for new criteria it is important to make sure that the ends always justify the means, and that new techniques are not used merely for their own sake or for decorative purpose but to bring to life a preconceived idea. In the field of electro-acoustic composition it is important, for example, to establish to what extent the end result corresponds to the initial sound image, and whether the electro-acoustic means were a necessity or a gratuitous choice.

The concert on the evening of April 26 started with Stockhausen's *Solo* (1965-66) for melody instrument with feedback, in a double bass version brilliantly played by Barry Guy. Jonty Harrison's *A vent*, a passionate little piece for tape and oboe, was given an exhilarating virtuoso performance by Melinda Maxwell, who entirely monopolised attention to the extent of making the electro-acoustic score sound like a mere accompaniment – something the composer can hardly have anticipated. John Chowning, from Stanford University, succeeded in an almost uncanny way in projecting his sound through space to keep the audience baffled and excited. There was more excitement with *Anticredos* for six amplified voices and sound-routing system by Trevor Wishart; whether the audience liked the strange sounds produced by Wishart's extended vocal techniques is difficult to say, but the idea of using the six voices as so many classical synthesizers, with their oscillators, noise-generators and filters, was highly original, and it was magnificently carried through.

There were no masterpieces among the works: most of the compositions, including Alejandro Vinao's *Una orquesta*

imaginaria, exploited one specific aspect of music, whether it was space, timbre, or the voice, and they sounded like preliminary studies for larger works. But the performances themselves, provided by Barry Anderson's West Square Electronic Music Ensemble and Gregory Rose's Singcircle, were on the highest level, and thanks to the presence of the live element and the theatrical props many barriers between audience and composer were broken down. Further events, hopefully as well planned as this one, will keep us informed of new developments in the field of electro-acoustic music and its repercussions on the composing of new vocal and instrumental music.

Wednesday April 30

On the last day of the month Michael Finnissy and the American dancer Kris Donovan gave a recital in the Logan Hall. Finnissy's Piano Concerto no. 4, given its first performance on this occasion, is hellishly difficult and requires as formidable a pianist as the composer himself to do it justice; it 'explores the more purely formal ideas inherent in combining one dancer and one musician'. I found the two artists to be totally incompatible, and to be operating on such different wavelengths and levels of expression and technique that I feel unable to write about something that must simply have escaped me. The same applies to *English Country Tunes*; Finnissy states that its choreography is monolithic, a description I do not understand.

Friday May 2

The programme presented by the Redcliffe Concerts of British Music at the Queen Elizabeth Hall was exceptionally well balanced and well conceived. The first part began with Dallapiccola's *Piccola musica notturna*, a work inspired by a poem of Antonio Machado, which conveyed very vividly the atmosphere of nocturnal suspense and ghostly fantasy that the poem evokes. The Redcliffe Ensemble, under the direction of Lionel Friend, played the second version, for eight instruments, of 1961, which gives a yet more sharply defined expression of the poets thoughts than the 1954 original for orchestra. Dallapiccola's *Tre laudi* for soprano and 13 instruments (1936-37) opened the second part of the concert; these are settings of three sacred texts of the 13th century, and they mark Dallapiccola's first step on the road of twelve-note composition. Highly expressive, sometimes even ecstatic, occasionally reminiscent of Messiaen, but also at times monumental and hieratic, the *Tre laudi* present great difficulties which Jane Gregson, the soprano soloist on this occasion tried hard to overcome. Anthony Payne's *The World's Winter* (1978), a setting for soprano and chamber orchestra of two poems by Tennyson, was more in her line, and she succeeded very well in conveying the lyrical atmosphere of the piece, without, however, being able entirely to dispel the boredom that set in after a while. John Lambert's *Waves*, 'the largest part of a five-movement work to be called *Sea-changes*', is obviously a study in transformation, but after 25 minutes one came to the conclusion that there is very little change indeed, whether in the movement of the waves or of the music. The programme ended with some folk-tune settings by Percy Grainger.

Thursday May 8 and Friday May 9

The following week was Stockhausen week. On May 8 Stockhausen gave one of his highly rewarding lectures at the Goethe Institute; he analysed his *In Freundschaft* for clarinet, step by step, with illustrations by Susan Stephens, the dedicatee of the piece, which she plays very well indeed.

On the next afternoon Lysis gave a rather less rewarding performance of some pretty tricky samples of Stockhausen's music from all periods of his output: 'Set Sail for the Sun' from *Aus den sieben Tagen* (1968), *In Freundschaft* (1977), *Zyklus* (1959), Sonatina for violin and piano (1951), melodies from *Tierkreis* (1975), and 'Japan' (1970) from *Für kommende Zeiten* (1968-70). In the evening, at the Festival Hall, the Philharmonia Orchestra gave the first performance of *Jubilee* (1977), commissioned by the Hanover Opera House for the celebration of its 125th anniversary; Andrew Davis conducted the work with great assurance. Stockhausen says that the whole work is derived from a single musical formula in the style of a hymn and that the formula fluctuates in harmonic density. Although we must believe what he tells us about the intricate structure of the 15-minute piece, it seems to be one of his minor works, intended to be 'festive, spectacular, a showpiece', and this is exactly what it was.

Friday May 16

This was one of those difficult days when one is trying to be in two places at once. I solved the problem by attending an afternoon rehearsal of Douglas Young's *Third Night Journey Under the Sea*, a work of 15 minutes' duration, written for and performed by the young players of the Leicester Schools Symphony Orchestra under their permanent conductor Peter Fletcher. In this work Young attempts to combine the techniques of his two earlier pieces written for the same ensemble: the exploration of the movement of sound in space (*Virages*); and the exploration of the effects of moving the sound sources (instrumental and choral groups of contrasting combinations) around in the performance space (*Journey Between Two Worlds*). Both aurally and visually the new work is most intriguing. Far from being regimented, the young players participate in decision-taking and receive an initiation in new performing techniques, which is all the more valuable because Young has an uncanny way of never overstretching their resources, while Fletcher has a most inspiring way of leading them along. The brilliant trumpet player, Daryl Bonser, made a substantial contribution to the performance of the piece, which was exhilarating and full of unusual effects, and displayed an astonishing level of technical skill.

For the London Philharmonic Orchestra the first performance of Michael Finnissy's percussion-dominated *Sea and Sky* for large orchestra, commissioned by them, was a considerable challenge, which they were able to meet only thanks to the intelligence and the authority of their conductor, Elgar Howarth. Like most of Finnissy's recent works, this one looks vastly overscored, and one cannot help wondering whether the effect obtained from the orchestra would not have been nearer to what he imagined had he used some kind of graphic notation instead of filling the paper with an infinity of notes, many of which can neither be played nor heard. Instead of reading his programme notes one would probably have done better to trust one's ears and to keep an open mind so as to become absorbed in the rhythmic and metric lay-out of the work and to let oneself be carried away by its sheer energy and sustaining power. The time-scales on which the transformations of the sky and sea operate are very different, and it seems to me that the secret of this rather hermetic but powerfully evocative work resides in this dichotomy of phasing and transformation.

Wednesday May 28

During the 1979-80 season, Michael Finnissy and Nigel Osborne, both published by Universal Edition, seem to have monopolised the field of first performances to a large extent. On May 28 it was Osborne's turn. The City of London Sinfonia gave the premiere of his Concerto for flute and chamber orchestra; they commissioned this work with Aurèle Nicolet in mind as the soloist, so that Osborne had the privilege of knowing in advance for whom he was going to write. He also knew that his piece would be placed within a strictly classical programme – Stravinsky's *Apollon Musagète*, a Mozart flute concerto and a Haydn symphony – and though he introduced into his work scales of metres, pitch and time, both the form he chose and the scoring are strictly classical (the latter being indentical with that of the Mozart concerto).

The three movements of the work are strongly contrasted. The first is dominated by a rigid motoric line; the superimposition of seven metric scales and the use of seven pitch sets results in a texture of great density, and as the movement gathers momentum there are the first signs of a steadily rising passion. There is a sharp change of density and temperature in the very slow second movement, a litany of great lyricism, reminiscent of Nono; the intervals are partly very wide and typically expressionistic and partly microtonal (though no less expressive), and they lead the music through all the seven 'sharp' keys of the scale in a loose counterpoint. The third movement is marked by the incorporation of material from *I am Goya* (1977), an instrumental setting of a poem by Andrey Voznesensky for flute, oboe, violin and cello; this ensemble functions here as a sort of concertino group in the manner of a concerto grosso, either set against the tutti or merging with it. Violent and explosive, the movement is articulated by trills, and as it makes for a return of the initial motoric line passion reaches its climax; torn between the two opposite poles of Apollonian form and Dionysian content, the music is suddenly projected into a void, and, as the flute executes a leisurely flourish, is brutally cut off. Aurèle Nicolet gave a committed and assured performance, which was not unfortunately the case with Mr Hicocks's band.

Monday June 2

Elliott Carter's *Night Fantasies* for piano solo (1979-80) was commissioned by four pianists from New York: Paul Jacobs, Gilbert Kalish, Ursula Oppens and Charles Rosen; its world premiere, given by Ursula Oppens before a sparse but fervent audience on June 2 in the Assembly Hall, Bath, was the major event of the 1980 Bath Festival, cementing, as it were, a life-long friendship between Sir William Glock, director of the Bath Festival, and the composer. When Carter received the commission from the four pianists, all of them his friends, it must have been quite a challenge forhim to find a suitable form for this fourfold request. To the initial idea for *Night Fantasies*, described by the composer as 'a piece in one continuous movement, but with many changes of character, suggesting the fleeting thoughts and feelings that pass through the mind during a period of wakefulness', he added the idea of reflecting in music the quite contrasting personalities of the four pianists. Only he who can identify the four characters and trace their individual signatures holds the key to this 'parade sauvage', a piece of bewildering complexity, breathtaking impetus and hair-raising difficulty, which Miss Oppens performed with admirable assurance. It is a piece I am planning to take to my own desert island, where I shall have all the time in the world to unravel its numerous strands and uncode its secrets.

Wednesday June 18

Daniel Barenboim was the conductor when the Orchestre de Paris gave the first performance of *Notations* by Pierre Boulez at the Palais des Congrès, Paris. As are so many of Boulez's compositions, *Notations* is a work in progress; it is the result of a commission by the Orchestre de Paris which was made at a time when the composer-pianist Serge Nigg had just discovered among his papers the manuscript of *Notations* for piano - twelve very short pieces which Boulez wrote in 1945 and dedicated to his friend Serge while they were both studying with Messiaen at the Conservatoire. The pieces were discarded with everything else of that period, but in 1978, over 30 years later, they became a sort of module or matrix for the new work. 'Not so much an orchestration', says Boulez, 'more a way or transcribing', and he adds 'as Berio would call it'. Hardly any information at all is volunteered by Boulez, beyond the declaration that 'the character of each piece is precisely defined, isolated', that there is 'a fixation on one single expression' and that 'the connection between the pieces is first and foremost one of contrast'. When the work is complete this statement may help conductors to choose which pieces to play and in what order. Barenboim's choice - the volatile and playful Pièce I, 'Modéré - Fantasque', the percussive, ostinato-bound, obsessive and perturbing Pièce IV, 'Rythmique', the expressive and expressionistic Pièce III, 'Très modéré', and the exuberant, Stravinskian Pièce II, 'Très vif - Strident' - produced a 20-minute cyclic work strong in contrasts. The element of freedom is the greatest difference between the piano pieces and the 'transcription' for orchestra. The twelve piano miniatures, serially organised and each twelve bars long, seem to follow one another in some kind of permutational order, whereas the order of the orchestral pieces is indeterminate. Nevertheless the original pieces hold the key to an understanding of the new work, which not only preserves the structure and design of the models but elaborates each bar and motif.

There can hardly be any doubt that Boulez's orchestration benefits from his experience as a conductor. The string section alone is occasionally split up into as many as 70 individual parts and the same process is applied to the woodwind and brass; but there are windows and perforations in the densely crowded score which remains transparent through all the gigantic juxtapositions and superimpositions, all the powerful onrushes and explosive climaxes, as layer upon layer converges towards some unspecified goal and breaks off to gather new energy and set off at the assault of new heights. There are silences heavy with foreboding, and there are moments of frantic activity; the sound itself is beguiling, irridescent, perpetually changing and flowing, sometimes reminiscent of Debussy.

Even for an audience unfamiliar with the inner workings of such a piece there is no obstacle to overcome, no barrier to spontaneous, sensual enjoyment of the piece. The audience at the Palais des Congrès was entirely overwhelmed by the impact of *Notations*. Barenboim had prepared a strongly profiled and, as far as one could tell, authentic performance, and the orchestra mastered the difficulties without strain or stress, enjoying a score that takes into account the specific character and scope of each instrument. It is rare to see the new work of a major contemporary composer so warmly applauded. For all concerned, composer, conductor, musicians and audience, it was a great evening.

Friday June 20

The London Sinfonietta programme for their concert at the Queen Elizabeth Hall was a model of planning and imagination. Works by Milhaud, *La création du monde* and *L'homme et son désir*, opened the first and second parts of the concert, and each was followed by a work by the Austrian H. K. Gruber (b. 1943), his Violion Concerto (1977-78) and *Frankenstein!!* (1976-77). In England Gruber first stepped into the limelight in September 1978, when a whole issue of *Tempo* was devoted to him and his former group, the now disbanded MOB art & ton ART. It was for this group that he in 1970 wrote his *Frankenstein* suite, based on a collection of naughty little nursery rhymes by the Austrian poet H. C. Artmann; a version for solo voice and ensemble, for the MOB and Die Reihe groups, was followed in due course by the definitive version, *Frankenstein!!*, 'A Pandemonium for Baritone Voice and Orchestra', which was premiered at Liverpool by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Simon Rattle conducting, on November 25, 1978.

Frankenstein!! certainly owes something to Kurt Weill and Hanns Eisler, but also to Franz Lehár, to Kagel and even to the Second Viennese School; it is this influence that suggested the seven-chord series on which the work is based. The music is strictly diatonic, but it runs through many keys, stringing them together by a process of shifting rather than modulation. Declamation and song adhere to the rhythm of the verses, whereas the orchestra moves freely, including jazz, pop, and salon music in its stylistic kaleidoscope. Singing, acting and reciting himself, Gruber possesses a formidable stage presence, through which he easily overcomes any problems of communication with the audience and inhibitions among the performers. Simon Rattle, who was again the conductor, entered into the game with relish. Popular music made respectable, entertainment accepted and enjoyed without reluctance or embarrassment - that was the outcome of this first London performance.

Both Gruber and Milhaud share a kind of popular appeal and both have a way of teasing the ear with a 'tonality' that is slightly off target; but whereas that of Milhaud is rather spicy and typically Mediterranean, Gruber's is of a sweeter kind and unmistakably Viennese; but it is very sophisticated - neither a return to the past nor nostalgia for it, but the result of a long continuing attempt to overcome serialism. The Viennese influence is clear in his Violin Concerto, which has links both with Alban Berg and Schubert. In one movement, lasting 25 minutes, the work is based on a song; its subtitle '...am Schatten Duft gewebt' ('Perfume woven from shadow') is taken from one of Artmann's *Persian Quatrains*, and the music is highly lyrical and intensely melodious. It was beautifully played by Ernst Kovačić, its dedicatee; Simon Rattle conducted with his usual flair and the London Sinfonietta was at its very best.

Tuesday June 24

There can be little doubt that the Nash Ensemble is, at present, one of the best chamber ensembles of that size (16 performers) in London, and to hear them give the first performance of a work commissioned by them, Nigel Osborne's *Mythologies* for six instruments, under the dependable Lionel Friend, was to know that one was hearing an authentic and reliable performance of the work. In its original form *Mythologies* was a study in structuralism based on a myth from the nort-west Pacific coast of America, which describes the journeys of young Asdiwal; it reflects various aspects of Tsimshian society and establishes a set of oppositions (east-west, high-low, hunger-repletion). Over the years, rather than reworking or altering material, Osborne 'simply composed "on top of" what was there before', superimposing layer upon layer; this description led one to expect a great density, but instead an extreme sparseness informs the work from beginning to end. 'The music', Osborne further explains, 'is an attempt to test creatively Lévi-Strauss's assertion that music and myth are similar "machines" to overcome time'. In fact Lévi-Strauss goes far beyond this assertion when he declares that the structural analysis of myth and music will lead us ultimately to an understanding of the unconscious structure of the mind, and that the interdependence of logical structure and emotional response is much the same everywhere. For him,

what the individual listener understands when he hears a myth or a piece of music is in many ways personal to himself; more likely than not, Osborne's *Mythologies* was subjected to that kind of selective hearing by the listeners in the Queen Elizabeth Hall.

Though based on a colourful story, the music is obviously not descriptive. Only the pattern of oppositions, not their specific meaning, is reproduced in musical terms, but this pattern alone is manifold enough. On the one hand there is the opposition between a fundamental structural layer of micropolyphony, characteristic of Osborne's earlier work, and, on the surface, the more vivid figuration of his later style. On the other hand there are the specific oppositions within each parameter (pitch, dynamics, speed), and the drastic opposition between the very slow and very secretive two outer movements and the central part, where passion flies high and violent emotions are suddenly unleashed. The first movement, a Scherzo, gradually unfolds, with flute and clarinet on the surface confined to very small steps, and violin and cello providing a background of open fifths; the harp suddenly rushes towards a climax, which is broken off immediately as the initial pattern returns. The presence of the trumpet passes almost unnoticed until it expands into a solo cadenza of very wide intervals. This introduces the strongly contrasting second movement, entitled 'Paradigma', whose raison d'être is evidently purely structural. This haunting movement vanishes into a mysterious 'niente' and leads without a break into the third movement, a kind of organum in which the narrow steps of the Scherzo emerge again. There follows a spellbinding coda for harp and cello – perhaps intended as a ceremony of remembrance for Roland Barthes, the French structuralist, from whom Osborne borrowed the title *Mythologies*, and to whose memory he intended the work as 'a small tribute'.

Proms 1980

The programme of the 1980 Proms was disappointing enough as it was, and it happened that contemporary music was particularly badly hit by the musicians' strike, because of which 20 of the planned 57 concerts had to be cancelled. Among the cancellations were the performances of three of the 'Proms Firsts' – works by Paul Patterson, Robin Holloway and Harrison Birtwistle. The remaining works new to the Proms – by 87-year-old Hendrick Andriessen, 79-year-old Edmund Rubbra, (this year's only commission), and 75-year-old Sir Michael Tippett – had little of the shock of the new, more of nostalgia and respect, even if Sir Michael's new Concerto for violin, viola and cello is in every way the work of a master. No doubt the programme had, as Robert Ponsonby pointed out, 'all the usual ingredients: accepted masterpieces of the central repertoire, some of the most interesting of new music and some unfamiliar early music', but the proportion of these ingredients was highly alarming and one would wish that even in a 'period of serious difficulty' the BBC would maintain their readiness to take the risks involved in a forward-looking and responsible programming policy.

Friday September 5

At first it seemed quite a good idea to include Peter Maxwell Davies's *Five Klee Pictures* in the programme of the ILEA London Schools Symphony Orchestra concert. But one very soon became aware of the discrepancy between the technical accomplishments of this remarkable ensemble of young musicians (who played under the inspiring direction of John Carewe) and the very limited demands of these pieces, which were originally written, 20 years ago, for the members of the orchestra of Cirencester Grammar School. The five pieces have, since then, been revised – they may have had more bite and more stringency in their first version. In their present form they are charming enough but rather simplistic, and on this occasion they matched neither the technical nor the intellectual standard of the performers; nor, incidentally, do they match the poetry and sophistication of Klee's delightful pictures.

Tuesday September 9 to Saturday September 13

Trevor Wishart, the new guru of English music theatre, has at last had his say in London, where Adrian Jack, always receptive to new ideas, opened to him for five consecutive evenings the doors of the ICA. The continuous show, which lasted for 90 minutes, consisted of three pieces connected by tapes and slides explaining Wishart's ideas; no detail was left unaccounted for and the audience was led firmly from one stage to the next, lest they stray from the prescribed path. All three works performed at the ICA – *Fidelio* for flautist, six suitcases and six cassette recorders, *Tuba mirum* for tuba player, stage effects, costumed actors, special mutes and lighting unit, and *Pastorale/Walden 2* for flautist, tuba player, magician's cabinet, stuffed birds, tape, slides and visual effects – are dominated by Wishart's current box fixation and contain messages so well hidden behind a mass of allegories, verbal instructions, and props that it is often difficult to relate the message to the action, the music and the story.

Fidelio, so we are told, 'takes an ironical look at the blessings of technological liberation'. A flautist (Kathryn Lukas) 'improvises within five designated regions' and is finally defeated by the taped music, recorded on six cassettes which are hidden inside six suitcases. To make sure that we don't miss the point, an extract from the last scene of Beethoven's opera is played at the beginning. *Tuba mirum* is a solo tuba piece for Melvyn Poore cast as a psychiatric patient. He too is eventually overcome and put under sedation. Berlioz's Requiem provides the frame of reference here. The piece is based on the text of the 'Tuba mirum' from the Requiem Mass, and supplies the soloist with a valid pretext for some extravagant and rather virtuoso tuba playing combined with a good deal of clowning and subsidiary action. *Pastorale/Walden 2* is, Wishart says, 'an indictment of Skinnerism'. It is also a most amusing music theatre piece for two instrumentalists (Adam and Eve). While they are being controlled by clocks and metronomes, the Kyrie of Bach's B Minor Mass is gradually transformed to the point of total mutation. The theatrical devices are hilarious, the music is clever, the setting of Adam and Eve in a mechanically animated box is imaginative and one would have liked to forget all the ideological ballast and enjoy the piece for its sheer fun.

Friday September 26

In his recital at the Purcell Room the Greek pianist Christodoulos Giorgiades played a mixed programme of Frescobaldi, Haydn, Skalkottas, and Pawlu Grech, a young Maltese composer. Listening to the *15 Little Variations* (1927) of Nikos Skalkottas I was again struck by the totally unchromatic, unviennese and unromantic character of this music. Skalkottas may well have been – as the Greek scholar Yannis Papaioannou has been claiming for years – one of Schoenberg's favourite pupils, but one can find no trace of any Schoenberg influence in these pieces, which seem rather rooted in Mediterranean soil. The *Passacaglia*, also entirely unromantic, is a much tougher piece and was played by Giorgiades with great understanding and assurance. As for Pawlu Grech, he is possessed of a genuine sense of musical humour, which he should carefully cultivate, it being such a rare commodity these days. His *Divertissement for Pianist* with the subtitle 'A Pianist's Amusement' was played by Giorgiades inside and outside the piano, on strings and keys, using all kinds of implements and interpreting the text score according to his own views. The piece was great fun and it left the whole audience in a very cheerful mood.

Thursday October 30

In 1963 Lina Lalandi organised her first English Bach Festival. As was to be expected, the bulk of the programme consisted of works by J. S. Bach, his sons and his contemporaries. Although the events included the first performance of a Sonata for unaccompanied violin by Nikos Skalkottas as well as the Mass and three motets by Stravinsky, it could not have been foreseen at that time that Miss Lalandi was soon to become the most ardent champion in Great Britain of contemporary music in general and of Greek composers in particular. 1966 was the year devoted to Xenakis, 1967 to Messiaen, 1969 to Skalkottas, 1970-71 to Stockhausen, and so it went on for well over a decade. All these years are remembered most vividly, but none more than 1964, which was marked by the first performance, at Oxford, on June 27, of Jani Christou's *Tongues of Fire*, a Pentecost oratorio, which had been commissioned by the English Bach Festival and was conducted by Piero Guarino.

Christou (1926–70) was in 1964 almost completely unknown in this country. He grew up in Alexandria in a society steeped in Mediterranean culture and Eastern mysticism. When he left Egypt in 1945 he went to Cambridge to read philosophy and linguistics with Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein at King's College, pursuing his music

studies with Hans Redlich as a sideline. The following years were spent between the Jung Institute in Zürich (1948–50), where his elder brother also studied, and Italy (1949–50), where he studied music with Lavagnino. When he returned to Alexandria he was equipped with a solid philosophical basis on which to build his compositions.

His first work of importance, *Phoenix Music* for orchestra (1948–49), which was performed at Covent Garden under Alex Sherman in 1950, is a sort of matrix for all the works to come. It deals with transformation – that of the legendary bird that, after having lived for five or six centuries in the Arabic desert, burnt itself on a funeral pyre and rose from the ashes with renewed youth to live through another cycle. Everything is there: the transformation motif which, in later years, Christou was to connect with alchemy, the fertility theme, which was to be found in most of his later works, and the cyclic form, by which the beginning returns at the end, allowing the next cycle to start without interruption. The structure describes a single great arc, which Christou called 'moon form' or 'Phoenix form'; his works in this form usually start *pianissimo* and work up to a colossal climax in which action ('metapraxis') is generally involved. This is then followed by a rapid decline, leading to total annihilation. Growth, decline and rebirth is a concept current in most religions and rituals from prehistoric times and primitive societies to the high civilisations of East and West; besides adopting this fundamental cycle Christou became deeply involved with the subconscious, with dreams and visions, and strove to bring to the fore what had for too long been buried under many layers of inhibition and rules, reviving and resuscitating it in his musical and theatrical 're-enactments' of old myths and rituals.

With *Tongues of Fire*, written in Greece on the island of Chios, he went one step further in that direction, inventing new means and new techniques to convey the initial bewilderment, confusion and panic of the apostles and their ultimate rapture; the post-serial idiom is entirely his own, and he multiplies the devices of voice production until every part of the body is mobilised in the endeavour to intensify expression.

The oratorio *Mysterion*, for three choirs, soloist, and orchestra including piano, harpsichord, celesta and five percussionists, was given its first performance by the choir and the symphony orchestra of the Norddeutsche Rundfunk at the Jacobikirche, Hamburg, on October 30, 1980. It was written in 1965–66 and Christou integrated all the experience he had acquired in the writing of *Tongues of Fire* into a new compositional system for it. He abandoned conventional notation, inventing instead graphic symbols – strokes, dots, circles and arrows – neatly arranged in boxes applying to the various choral and instrumental groups; the 'metapraxis' or action passages are 'scored' in drawings.

The subject of *Mysterion* is taken from the old Egyptian Book of the Dead. It relates the story of the King of the Sun who, in his chariot, descends every evening to the depth of the underworld in order to visit the lost souls, and emerges the next morning into the glory of light. To gain access to the chariot, the souls have to submit to a number of trials: they must know by heart the secret names of the ten gates, the ten gatekeepers and of all the deities, they must recite these in the precise order in which they are inscribed on the walls of the tomb of the pharaoh Seth I, and they must defeat those who compete in the struggle for salvation. (This fight is carried out in the choir with wooden shields and swords; arms flail and fists are shaken, as theatrical action, 'metapraxis', comes into its own.)

After an introduction by a speaker, who tells the story with great gravity, all that is heard are the magic 'words of power', meaningless in themselves but suggestive and potent; they are at first shrouded in mystery, but gradually emerge from a collective whisper to break into frenetic outcries of anguish and despair which increase and multiply as the lost souls recite the names of the gates one after another, reaching climaxes of violence and hysteria before returning to the initial whisper so that the cycle is complete and can eventually start again. Nine is the sacred number of deities, as decreed in the year 2270 BC by the Egyptian priesthood, and *Mysterion* is therefore divided into nine sections. The sound one hears is totally unidentifiable and could be attributed to electronic devices if the orchestra were not there to testify to Christou's most unusual skill in drawing from the instruments the exact sound image of his inner aural vision.

The frenzy, the ecstasy and the mystery were so terrifying that the audience, who had remained silent after the other two works (by Denisov and Webern–Bach), as is the custom in churches, broke into vociferous applause in order to relieve itself of an unbearable tension. This applause, I may add, was thoroughly deserved by all the participants in this remarkable performance. Francis Traves conducted with authority and intelligence, the choir and orchestra surpassed themselves and one felt that Christou would have approved.

Wednesday November 12

The first of the Fresh Ear concerts at the October Gallery clashed most unfortunately with another concert, and I was able to attend only a rehearsal. John Potter, formerly leading tenor of Electric Phoenix, is said to have left that group for lack of opportunity to explore new fields of performance. His present policy is an entirely experimental one, and he seems ready to take all the risks involved in pursuing it. There can be no doubt that the actor–musician, a very rare species indeed, has to undergo an extended and highly specialised training if he is to acquire an equal skill in both disciplines; there is, in that kind of performance, no room for improvisation or last-minute solutions, and an elaborate and lengthy preparation is called for. What I saw and heard on that afternoon (not forgetting that it was a rehearsal) had obviously been prepared by highly qualified artists and technicians, but the result was a string of the most amateurish sketches. Fresh Ear will have to rethink their present policy radically before launching themselves on another new venture of this kind.

Thursday November 20

Alexander Goehr's Sinfonia was commissioned by the English Chamber Orchestra for their 20th anniversary season. The work marks Goehr's homecoming, a return to Schoenberg, his original father-figure; the enfant terrible of the fifties has come back full circle to the classicism of the Second Viennese School, and so Schoenbergian is the sound of this music that one is tempted to suggest, behind the lengthy quasi-quotations from Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony, a kind of homage. Perhaps this was inspired by the location (the Sinfonia was written in Israel) as was certainly the last movement, 'Dankgesang', in which each of the two sections ends with part of a prayer set to a very simple melody: 'Pray that Jerusalem may have/Peace and felicity'. The most striking feature of the work is the double occurrence of variations – in the first and last movements. It ends with an F major chord of which Schoenberg would probably have approved. Daniel Barenboim conducted the work with great conviction and the audience was entirely pleased.

Wednesday November 26

At the Purcell Room Capricorn, conducted by Anthony Pay, presented two new works, by Robert Saxton and Theo Loevendie, and five short pieces by Italian composers (Berio, Donatoni and Petrassi), and composers who studied in Italy (Peter Maxwell Davies – with Petrassi – and Bernard Rands – with Berio).

Franco Donatoni wrote *Lumen*, for two strings, two woodwind and two percussion, in memory of Luigi Dallapiccola. For this short and luminous homage Donatoni makes use of a restricted selection of notes and gestures; the sound picture, entirely dominated by vibraphone and celesta, culminates in a final explosion of light.

Maxwell Davies's *Runes from a Holy Island* (1977), a collection of seascapes, is also, to a certain extent, percussion dominated, but the sound is as sparse and austere as that of some of his early pieces. The structure is closely involved with all kinds of riddles and rules, acrostics, transformations of plainsong and a magic square. Inspired by Davies's 'own island', the pieces are very evocative, and if the listener is so inclined he can 'fill out his own miniature sea and island soundscapes'.

Goffredo Petrassi's piece, written way back in the sixties, is set for three instrumentalists (flautist, oboist and clarinettist) playing seven instruments – hence the title *Tre per sette*. The seven sections of this one-movement piece are strongly contrasted, dramatically tense and full of instrumental challenges, which were met by the three performers on this occasion (Philippa Davies, Christopher O'Neal and Anthony Lamb) with great virtuosity.

Robert Saxton's *Eloge*, on poems by St-John Perse and Jules Supervielle, a work commissioned by Capricorn, is highly atmospheric, with long interludes full of arpeggios and flute arabesques à la Debussy, chords à la Messiaen, and decorations à la Saxton. The undulating vocal line was well sung by Lynn Griebling, soloist of the evening. Saxton is very

fastidious in his choice of French and German poetry. He will no doubt have listened eagerly to Berio's *O King* for voice and five instruments (the next piece on the programme), to this very day a model for vocalising words, feelings and ideas.

From Berio's former pupil, Bernard Rands, we heard *Nemo I* (1971), a double bass 'sequenza' brilliantly played by Barry Guy, its dedicatee. The concert ended with the Nonet by the Dutch composer Theo Loevendie (born 1930), a 17-minute piece with a rhythmically pungent first movement and an episodic second, of many moods and modes of expression; it started well but outstayed its welcome considerably.

Friday November 28

The programme of the Suoraan concert at the October Gallery was divided between British, Japanese and Italian composers (Richard Emsley, James Clarke, Toru Takemitsu and Luigi Nono). It was hard to discover a common denominator between the works presented, but easy to get involved in the one outstanding performance of the evening, that of Nono's by now almost legendary tape work *La fabbrica illuminata* for mezzo-soprano and tape (1964). In this piece natural voice and tape are so totally integrated that the sung words seem to spring right out of the taped clamour of anonymous sounds. It would be hard to think of a greater contrast than that between Josephine Nendick's anguished and powerful rendering of Nono's work and Nancy Ruffer's quiet and genuinely contemplative performance of Takemitsu's *Koe* ('Voice'; 1971) for solo amplified flute at the start of the concert.

Tuesday January 13 to Sunday January 18, 1981

Ekkehard Schall, deputy director of the Berliner Ensemble and son-in-law of Bertolt Brecht, is not a singer but an actor. He is the last survivor of a generation of performers who inherited the Eisler–Brecht tradition, and at a time when so many singers are giving us travesties of those songs, Schall's show at the Riverside Studios, called 'Of the Dying, Of the Dead, Of the Living', was nothing less than a must for everyone interested in that very special song style of the late twenties and early thirties. (I was glad to see a large attendance of musicians and composers, and I hope many producers went along for they would have found Schall's performance both inspiring and instructive.) In the original productions all the principal parts of *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny* were taken by actors, and the way in which Schall half sang and half recited Brecht's poems – 58 items at one go – brought back all the memories of the Berlin of 50 years ago.

Wednesday January 14

The first performance of Anthony Gilbert's 80-minute radio opera *The Chakravaka Bird* was given on Radio 3 in a striking production by Veronica Slater. Drawn from an Indian legend, it is the story of two pilgrimages and one transformation: the wanderings of Mahadevi, the Indian poetess and saint of the twelfth century in search of her 'lord, white as jasmine'; Gilbert's own journey into Indian thought and philosophy; and the gradual transformation of Mahadevi from an innocent and healthy girl into an emaciated and transfigured bride of the god Shiva. The libretto is based on Sanskrit texts and poems by Mahadevi.

The opera consists of three 'Meditations', each of them introduced by a narrator and divided into an 'aria' and several 'refrains' (sung by Mahadevi, mezzo-soprano, and her inner voice, the same, electronically distorted), and an 'encounter': the first of these is with Kausika (*Heldentenor*), Mahadevi's blustering and lustful suitor, whose brashness leads her to discard all her clothes in a gesture of social protest, and pursue her search naked; the second is with Allama (countertenor), the relentlessly probing examiner and sage, who in the end declares her a saint; and the third is with Shiva, her lord (high tenor, electronically modified), whose apparition brings about her spontaneous combustion. It is a typical case history of a martyr, stubborn, ambitious and conceited, unbalanced in mind and extreme in her physical demands.

With so highly erotic and exalted a subject Gilbert could easily have indulged in lusciousness and exoticism, but the music adheres narrowly to the rigorous structure of the drama. The orchestra consists of alto flute, accordion, cimbalom and a percussion section of seven players, including three pianists, and is strongly reminiscent of Stravinsky's ensemble for *Les noces*; Gilbert seems to have been further influenced by that work in the static, repetitious and obsessive treatment of his musical ideas. The instrumental score draws its rhythmic material from seven 'cycles', progressing from a mere tinkle of high gong, triangles, small gong and lujan in cycle 1 to the clatter of bongos, handbells, tubular bells and boobans in cycle 7. Four 'mantras' provide the material of the voice parts; the vocal signature tunes and leitmotifs, particularly that of the 'lord, white as jasmine', progress from smaller leaps (in the first meditation a tritone) to wider (in the final section a ninth). At moments of emotional turmoil the voices resort to extended and extravagant melisma, withdrawing into an intimate and mysterious Sprechgesang at moments of introspection.

Ritual and frenzy, derived from Indian drama, and the sounds of Indonesian gamelan have been absorbed into Gilbert's language; there is no trace of Western sensuality, that of Wagner or Messiaen, and the music remains clear and uncluttered from beginning to end. Among the team of excellent performers the American flautist Kathryn Lukas will be especially remembered for her handling of the highly ornate and virtuoso part.

Sunday January 18 to Saturday January 24

The first performances of two works, one by Rolf Gehlhaar, the other by John Cage, took place at the Espace de Projection in IRCAM on January 18 and they were repeated daily for a week. Gehlhaar's *Pas à pas*, 'music for moving ears', is the result of a research project that is still in progress, and the work therefore has the character of a prototype rather than a finished composition. Scored for tridimensional sounds and traditional instruments, it is described by the composer as 'ambulatory music', the ambulating element being, however, not the music but the audience; each listener is intended to walk around in a leisurely fashion gradually changing his position with respect to the loudspeakers and the instrumentalists, and creating his own sound environment – the thesis being that what he hears depends on where he stands. He is left entirely to his own devices; some do experience the sudden shock of recognition, when the changing of the sound appears, others don't. The exact

nature of the transformation seems as yet to be rather unpredictable, but no doubt in time it will become more precisely defined.

Similar phenomena must surely have been perceived quite frequently by anyone finding himself in a loudspeaker-connected situation, but the IRCAM event was presented as a special occasion and the public expected – well, what exactly did they expect? To be speechless with surprise and excitement, to partake in a sensational discovery? If so then they must have been sadly disappointed because Gehlhaar's findings are nothing of the sort. His contribution has been to add a new dimension to the definition of space; this parameter, which has previously been determined mainly by the position of the sound source, the location of the loudspeakers, and by stereophony, may in future also be defined, and with the same precision, by the position of the human receiver. Seen in this perspective the wider implications of Gehlhaar's research begin to become apparent. And I wonder whether the presentation of his investigation to a predominantly uninitiated audience was not slightly premature and whether the concert form was at all suitable for the public performance of a 'composition' that can hardly yet be called a 'work of art'.

On the other hand, John Cage's *Roratorio*, 'An Irish Circus on Finnegans Wake', cries out for performance, whether live or taped. In its 'audio' form, completed on August 15, 1979, it was awarded the C. Sczuka prize for the best radiophonic work of the year. For the IRCAM performance, announced as a 'première mondiale', a live element was added – the Irish ballad singer Joseph Heaney, and two Irish drummers, Peadar and Mel Mercier; Cage is already thinking of a version involving the participation of the Cunningham dance company. Just like James Joyce, Cage is engaged on a 'Work in Progress', of which *Roratorio* is only the first manifestation.

In his programme notes Cage states that he never does anything without being invited to. In this case the invitation came from Klaus Schöning of WDR, who asked him if he would like to write music to accompany his reading of *Writing for the Second Time through Finnegans Wake* (this is the radically pruned, 41-page version of the 120-page *Writing through Finnegans Wake*, which consisted of 862 mesostiches, exactly the number of pages in the book). With the new commission in mind, Cage undertook the listing of all the sounds mentioned in *Finnegans Wake*, which at a later stage he divided into categories; to these he added Louis Mink's listing of all the places, spread over the whole world but half of them in Ireland and most of those in Dublin, where Joyce is remembered as a keen ballad singer himself. In search of Joyce, Cage went to Ireland, accompanied by his sound engineer, John Fullemann; together they visited the places on Mink's list and made recordings of Irish sounds, concrete and musical, assisted by Joe Heany, 'king of the Irish singers', Seamus Ennis, a bagpipe player, and four more musicians, a violinist, a flautist and two drummers.

With his Irish recordings and a collection of sounds selected by Schöning from the archives of the WDR, Cage went on to Paris. The mixing and final realisation of the work was carried out at IRCAM in response to the invitation of Max Matthews and Pierre Boulez to Cage to realise a project in the IRCAM studios; there Cage was able to coordinate his work with the contributions of the WDR from Cologne, the SDR from Stuttgart, and the KRO from Hilversum. The recording of Cage's 'lecture' was done in a day. During the following four weeks three more 16-track tapes were added to and connected with this original recording, and the final result was a huge superimposition of a total of no fewer than 64 tracks, with, obviously, a built-in element of unpredictability. Would it be possible to distinguish anything, would Cage's voice be totally drowned, would there be chaos? Nobody knew, everyone speculated. In the end it all added up to a colossal fête champêtre, brimming over with the most genuine Irish joie de vivre; to the most poetic, outrageous, bedevelling, lovable 'circus'; to one more Finnegan-sonorisation and one more attempt at Finnegan-decrypting. As Cage delivered his 'lecture', in a soft Sprechgesang entirely his own invention, as Heany sang his ballads and the two percussionists let themselves be carried away by their own drumming, magic started to spread and no one escaped the hypnotic fascination of the event.

Saturday January 31

Two new works, commissioned for the occasion from Ross Edwards and Philip Grange, were premiered by the Fires of London in their concert at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. For a work intended to express liveliness and vitality, Edwards's *Laikan* – the title is an Old Gothic word – is strangely quiet and subdued; the liveliness is restricted to the central movement, where a Madagascan folk-tune lends the piece an exotic touch, which on this occasion was enhanced by Gregory Knowles's skilful percussion playing. Philip Grange derived the title of his work, *Cimmerian Nocturne*, from the Greek 'Kimmerios' which refers to the people of Cimmerii, condemned to live in perpetual night. The composer originally planned a nocturne 'rather different from the salon variety', but the piece is highly evocative of the usual nocturnal mood (though the oppressive darkness is occasionally pierced by the lightning flashes of a screaming piccolo). I was reminded from time to time of Pierné's famous *Petits faunes*.

All the other pieces in the programme were effectively eclipsed by Maxwell Davies's *Anakreontika* (1976), a setting of ancient Greek texts for soprano with alto flute, cello, harpsichord and percussion. The very delicate and transparent instrumental commentary was repeatedly submerged by the shrill outbursts of Mary Thomas, who has a tendency to equate passion with hysterics, but who at times found deeply moving accents of great purity and restraint. (It is regrettable that it was impossible to distinguish a single word of the beautiful text and one could not follow the programme because the hall was in complete darkness.) John Carewe conducted the work with a keen understanding of its refinement and delicacy.