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## Christopher Fox

### Darmstadt 1982

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31st Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik,  
Darmstadt, 11-28 July 1982

For the visitor from Britain, used only to the Dartington—Glasgow—Huddersfield—SPNM round of new-music gatherings, Darmstadt is something of a revelation. I found it hard not to be utterly seduced by the seriousness (in the best sense of that word) of the whole event, by the concern that things should be done as well and as thoroughly as possible. For the more regular Darmstadt participants the 1982 course also seems to have had some novelty value. Although the days of the Stockhausen, Boulez & Co. composition faculty are long gone, this was the first year without any representation from the old guard (Caskel, Kontarsky, *et al.*) among the instrumental teachers. In their place was a cosmopolitan collection of personnel, including the American oboist Nora Post, the German pianist Herbert Henck, the stupendous French flautist Pierre-Yves Artaud, and a strong London contingent consisting of Irvine Arditti, Rohan de Saram, Roger Heaton, and James Wood. A new spirit also pervaded the composition course, for alongside the mainstream avant-garde figure of Brian Ferneyhough there were much more idiosyncratic, experimental composers such as Horatiu Radulescu and Walter Zimmermann. On the other hand this new spirit was less discernible in the pieces submitted by participating composers, which, with a few exceptions—most notably James Dillon's *Parjanya-Vata* (1981) for solo cello and Robert HP Platz's *Maro* (1980-81) for solo violin, the two pieces that shared the Kranichsteiner Preis—consisted of longwinded recyclings of all-too-familiar contemporary music clichés.

Much of the credit for the broadening of Darmstadt's perspectives must go to Friedrich Hommel, whose first year as director this was. But the Ferienkurse still have a little further to go perhaps before the adjective 'Internationale' is truly deserved, for although that former Darmstadt iconoclast, John Cage, was duly revered in the year of his 70th birthday—by a spellbinding performance of *Music of Changes* (1951) from Herbert Henck, by an early morning mushroom hunt on the day the weather broke (bearing out Cage's dictum that a meal without mushrooms is like a day without rain), and by marvellously exact and enthusiastic performances of *First Construction in Metal* (1939) and *Double Music* (1941)—there was very little other American music to be heard. At a time when both Phil Glass and Steve Reich, for example, have been significantly extending their compositional vocabularies, this seemed a considerable omission.

The first three days were largely given over to the work of the composers and musicians of the Paris-based Ensemble de l'Itinéraire. The principal composers of the group, Hugues Dufourt, Gerard Grisey, Tristan Murail, and Michaël Levinas, introduced the main ideas behind the group's work and played examples of their music, stressing that although their creative personalities are quite distinct they nevertheless share a common theoretical perspective. In particular they proposed a musical empiricism based on a close study of the properties of

sounds themselves, so that, in Gerard Grisey's words, 'La musique est alors le devenir des sons.' (Music, then, is what sounds grow into.)

L'Itinéraire's work began almost ten years ago, spurred on by the new resources offered by computer analysis of sound and the 'scientific' (as opposed to 'subjective') virtuosity of an emerging generation of instrumentalists, combined with the already available means of generating and transforming sound electronically. There was a tendency for l'Itinéraire and their supporters to make large claims for the innovatory nature of the group's work, but essentially their central philosophy seems a logical extension, into the domain of instrumental music, of the ideas of the Groupe de Recherches Musicales. Certainly l'Itinéraire's compositional interest in the exploration and gradual transformation of individual elements of a sound-object is directly congruent with that of GRM composers such as Jean-Claude Risset and Bernard Parmegiani, the only difference being l'Itinéraire's preference for a predominantly live medium.

In their concerts the divergent creative personalities of the composers became clear. The expanded time-scale that had been argued as necessary for the microscopic examination of the music's sound-world was most evident in Grisey's and Dufourt's work, whereas Levinas emerged as a much more extrovert composer. Thus the first concert by l'Itinéraire's two instrumental groups, the Groupe de Musique de Chambre Expérimentale and the Ensemble d'Instruments Électroniques, contrasted Levinas' short, overture-like *Appels* (1974) with Dufourt's protracted *La tempesta, d'après Giorgione* (1976-7). *La tempesta* is scored (like Dufourt's *Saturne* (1979))<sup>1</sup> for an ensemble rich in low instruments (bass flute, contrabass clarinet, etc.) whose readily produced overtone characteristics are meticulously but slowly exploited. *Appels* is an altogether more strident piece for a wind-dominated ensemble, with each of the wind instruments exciting a side drum so that every note is surrounded by an aura of white noise.

Paradoxically, given the group's penchant for exploring the untempered world of the overtone series, I found the most satisfactory piece to be Tristan Murail's *Territoires de l'oubli* (1977), written for that most even-tempered of instruments, the piano. Here, at last, was a piece that employed the by now familiar painstaking exposition of individual sound-objects within a larger structure of some complexity. Roger Heaton remarked on the 'colour and brilliance of orchestration' of these composers in his review of Darmstadt 1980,<sup>2</sup> but by the end of two-and-a-half days of lectures and three evenings of concerts featuring the work of the Itinéraire four (as well as some fairly forgettable satellites), I was yearning for more than just brilliant orchestration.

To some extent this yearning was satisfied by the music of Clarence Barlowe, whose *çoğluto-büsüşletmesi* (1975-9) Roger Heaton also discussed. Barleugh, whose Joycian delight in repelling provides light relief in the book of the piece,<sup>3</sup> lectured on the research work that had led to its composition. He was also represented by his *Im Januar am Nil* (1982); this is much more accessible than *çoğluto-büsüşletmesi* and is scored for flute, piano, seven strings, and two clarinets tuned respectively a quarter-tone and a sixth-tone flat. The work opens with string harmonics which articulate the overtone spectra of the pitches of a barely discernible bass clarinet melody. Then the piano and double bass enter in their lowest registers, accompanied by flute

and clarinets, with the same melody which, over about 25 minutes, is subjected to several processes simultaneously: it accumulates pitches, which gradually fill out the metre; there is a series of *accelerandi*; the winds emphasise particular beats with increasingly frequent multiphonics; and the strings progressively replace quiet harmonics with loud down-bow attacks. The overall effect is of an inexorable progress towards faster, denser, and noisier music. In the concert I sat next to a player-member of l'Itinéraire whom the piece obviously annoyed, but on a second hearing, without distractions, I found the piece enormously compelling.

There is a superficial resemblance between moments in Klarhenz Balo's music and American systemic music of the late sixties and early seventies, but a much more profound absorption of American experimental music in general was evident in the music of Walter Zimmermann. We heard a concert of all the chamber music from his *Lokale Musik* (1977-81),<sup>4</sup> a collection of pieces derived from the folk melodies of his native Franconia (an area of southern Germany), which also includes a 50-minute orchestral work, *Ländler Topographien*. The chamber pieces range from an extraordinarily fragile string quartet, *Fränkische Tänze*, in which melodies are picked out on upper harmonics and hocketed between players, to a very vigorous and comic duet, *Erd-, Luft- und Wassertöne*, for trombone and prepared piano, to which an ethereal third part for rubbed wine-glasses is added. I hope to write at greater length on Zimmermann's music in a future issue of *Contact*, but suffice it to say here that *Lokale Musik* is a considerable achievement. Particularly remarkable is the way in which Zimmermann's 'arrangements' (and he suggests 'sublimation', 'transformation' and 'substitution' as more suitable terms than 'arrangement'), preserve some vestiges of the former identify of his local tunes but also invest them with the attributes of a bewildering range of other musics, from gamelan to Christian Wolff and Kagel, from medieval music to early Cage.

Curiously, a large section of the Darmstadt audience found this music sufficiently disturbing to want to disrupt it, and the atmosphere at the end of the Zimmermann concert was electric, with cheers countering boos and crumpled programmes being thrown at composer and performers. Similar scenes were caused by my *Dance* (1980) and Erhard Grosskopf's *Lied* (1977) for bass clarinet and string quartet.<sup>5</sup> Grosskopf is perhaps best known outside Germany for his musical and political kinship with Cardew and Wolff in the early seventies. The bass clarinet quintet marks the start of a new development for him, away from the process-ish music of that period, towards a 'new complexity' (his description), of which *Lied* was the least successful example I heard. More impressive was *Quintett über den Herbsstanfang* (1981-2) for large orchestra, written in the autumn of 1981 during the squatter riots in West Berlin; here sustained chords are overlaid with disruptive, generally aperiodic and fragmented figures.

Grosskopf's ability to synthesise elements of folk-like material, late Romanticism, and free atonality into an effective musical language contrasts sharply with Wolfgang Rihm's struggle to progress beyond Berg. Rihm—the only survivor of the neoromantic boom of Darmstadt 1980—played a recording of the third movement of his Third Symphony, and James Wood's percussion class performed his *Tutuguri VI*

(Kreuze) (1980-81). Both revealed the same weakness: as Roger Heaton noted, 'his pieces tend to be hyperemotional and overlong'; although individual moments were often exciting, the hyperbolic excess of the whole quickly blunted my interest.

Rihm lectured in tandem with the more senior Helmut Lachenmann. I found this pairing curious, not only because Rihm had little to say, but also because he would seem to be a prime example of the 'avant-garde hedonists' against whom Lachenmann rails in his splendid polemic 'The "Beautiful" in Music Today'.<sup>6</sup> Of Lachenmann's music, we heard *Wiegenmusik* (1963), *Ein Kinderspiel* (1970), and *Guero* (1970), all for piano, and the more substantial *Salut für Caudwell* (1977), given a marvellously dead-pan performance by the guitar duo, Wilhelm Bruck and Theodor Ross. The later music is spare and economical, employing new playing techniques with great aesthetic refinement, so that the studiously contrived absence of conventional playing adds cultural resonance to the precisely articulated new sounds (guitar strings 'bowed' with the edge of the hand, for example).

Whereas Lachenmann appeared towards the end of the course, performances of Brian Ferneyhough's music were a recurrent element throughout, with the Second String Quartet (1980) in the Arditti Quartet's opening concert, followed later by *Time and Motion Study I* (1971-7), *Cassandra's Dream Song* (1971), *Unity Capsule* (1975-6), the *Sonatas* for string quartet (1967), and a new piano piece, *Lemma-Icon-Epigram* (1981). Of these, the piano piece and the Second Quartet were completely new to me, while *Unity Capsule I* knew only through a fascination with the dense calligraphy of the score.

I set out on this extended course in Ferneyhough familiarisation with a fair degree of scepticism, as someone who admired *Transit* (1972-5) and *Time and Motion Study III* (1974) but detested *La terre est un homme* (1976-9) and was bored by the *Sonatas*. The Second Quartet jolted me straight out of this frame of mind and totally convinced me, even at a first hearing. The accumulated tension as the instruments enter one by one with explosive but short-lived phrases, and its eventual tumultuous release, generates the impetus for a 'psycho-dramatic action' (as Ferneyhough terms it) of overwhelming intensity. What is especially impressive is the sense of an organic unity at every level of the work, fully realising the composer's declared intention that 'in any given figure the same sort of intensity as that of the entirety of the work must be present'.

In retrospect, this same intention seems to hold for all the works from *Transit* (1972-5) to the recently completed *Superscriptio* (1981) for piccolo, and it was interesting to be able to compare the flute pieces and quartets from before and after this watershed. As Ferneyhough admits, the *Sonatas*—insect-like—wear their formal skeleton on the outside, whereas the structure of the Second Quartet is absorbed within the music itself; the result is music of a far greater coherence and expressive power in the later work. Similarly the musical discourse of *Unity Capsule* is much more direct than that of *Cassandra's Dream Song*, where Ferneyhough's decision to leave the performer some choice in the ordering of sections means that the piece as a whole has a rather lifeless quality, at odds with the frenetic impetus of the individual sections. Unfortunately the new piano piece was then rather disappointing, particularly since it succeeds the Second Quartet in the

Ferneyhough canon. Before hearing *Lemma-Icon-Epigram I* I was able to have some time with the score and the composer, and so I feel certain that in this case James Avery's performance did the work an injustice; it lacked in particular, the dynamic range the piece demands. It is to be hoped that a pianist of real power (Michael Finnissy would seem ideal) will take up the piece soon.

For Harry Halbreich, the most vocal of the musicologists on the staff, Ferneyhough's music is an example of 'radicalised tradition', the logical extension (and perhaps conclusion) of the western European school of structural dynamism, which Halbreich sees as running from the post-Renaissance polyphonists to Schoenberg. As an opposite tendency, devoted to a dissolution of the time sense of this school and a return to the timeless world of Eastern musics, he traced a line of development through Schubert, Liszt, Bruckner, Debussy, Messiaen, Xenakis, Ligeti, and Scelsi to l'itinéraire and, especially, to the Paris-based Romanian, Horatiu Radulescu.

While the driving of such paths through music history is rather silly (like picking World cricket XI's to play Mars) and sometimes, as in Halbreich's case, a blinkering activity, Radulescu's music does represent an extreme example of the interest in musical stasis that characterises areas of the work of Messiaen and of Ligeti, Stockhausen, and Xenakis in the sixties. Unlike l'itinéraire, Radulescu discusses his music not in terms of acoustic research but of magic, describing it as 'coming from and going towards the ETERNAL (the outer time)'.<sup>7</sup> While I distrust any composer who erects mythologies (whether political, theological, or pseudo-scientific) around his compositional practice, I found Radulescu's *Thirteen Dreams Ago* (1977), played by 13 strings of the Ensemble Köln, very beautiful, with each of its sound-constellations full of the 'inner life' that the composer promised. The other pieces played—*Capricorn's Nostalgic Crickets* (1972) for seven flutes, *Écous atins* (1979) for five players and 'sound icon' (a grand piano on its side so that nylon threads attached to the strings can be excited), and three other pieces programmed in a concert that started after my bedtime—were all prepared during the course and suffered accordingly, since the players did not have time to become acclimatised to life within Radulescu's 'sound plasmas'.

As well as providing a forum for the main lectures and concerts, Darmstadt also serves as an invaluable context for the exchange of scores, addresses, and the like.<sup>8</sup> Herbert Henck and Walter Zimmermann also took the opportunity to create an occasional, fringe-like alternative to the main course, playing tapes of, for example, a fascinating String Quartet from 1945 by Conlon Nancarrow, Cage's *Roaratorio* (1979) and *Pulse Music (I)* (1977-8), and a superb process piece for tape by John McGuire. However, these sessions were sparsely attended, with the hard-core avant-gardists rarely turning up for a bit of useful head-cleaning. But perhaps 'official' Darmstadt will have moved its focus a little further west by 1984.

<sup>1</sup> *Saturne* was broadcast on BBC Radio 3's 'Music in our Time' earlier this year and is available on record on Sappho 004.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Heaton, '30th Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik', *Contact 22* (Summer 1981), pp.33-7.

- <sup>3</sup> Clarlow, *Bus Journey to Parametron* (Cologne: Feedback Studios, 1978). Although the book is 'all about *çoğluotobüsişletmesi*', there is much of a more generally useful nature as well. I, for one, will be exploiting the fruits of Barlot's researches into metric and harmonic cohesion. *çoğluotobüsişletmesi* is now available on record on Wergo WER 60 098.
- <sup>4</sup> Parts of *Lokale Musik* and the piano piece *Beginner's Mind* (1974-5) were heard in the 1980-81 MusICA season. *Lokale Musik* is on record on the Edition Theater am Turm label.
- <sup>5</sup> Zimmermann and Grosskopf later suggested that this response was provoked by our music's use of consonance and an imagined concomitant lack of seriousness!
- <sup>6</sup> Helmut Lachenmann, 'The "Beautiful" in Music Today', *Tempo*, no.125 (December 1980), pp.20-24.
- <sup>7</sup> Horatiu Radulescu, *Sound Plasma—Music of the Future Sign* (Munich: Edition Modern, 1975), p.20.
- <sup>8</sup> For example, the Canadian musicologist Donna Zapf gave me a copy of a recent issue of the interesting Canadian journal, *Musicworks* (address: 30 Saint Patrick Street, Toronto, Canada M5T 1V1), on this occasion dealing exclusively with the new-music scene in and around Vancouver (Murray Schafer, Sten Hansen, Kenneth Gaburo, and others), though normally it deals with a much greater geographical area.

### Correction

In Adrian Thomas's article on Lutosławski's *Jeux vénitiens* in *Contact 24* Example 1 on p.5 is wrongly printed: the penultimate chord lacks the notes *g''* and *d'''*. We apologise for this error.

**BRITISH – AMERICAN INTERACTIONS;  
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There will be an American music number of *The Musical Times* to mark the occasion, and some of the papers will later appear in the Sonneck Society's new journal *American Music*. The BBC is expected to participate as in the first conference. The American Embassy will be supporting the conference as previously, and there will be London-based events later in the month.

Further details from: Music Department, University of Keele, Staffordshire ST5 5BG, England.  
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