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its broadcasting organisations, a tape of one or several contemporary pieces up to a maximum of 35 minutes in length. The works may be of any aesthetic trend but should be 'of marked distinction'; living composers, especially those under 30, should be represented, but 'works by composers who have already achieved great international fame' should be avoided. Each country also sends a delegate who must provide at least three copies of the score or scores submitted, and sufficient copies of analytical and biographical notes for all the delegates. Most important of all, the works presented must have been contractually cleared for one free broadcast in each of the participating countries, to be given within twelve months; in fact the countries undertake to broadcast a minimum of six works from the Rostrum. The resulting transmissions are mainly of the borrowed tapes, but a few (very few!) are of new performances, resulting from the Rostrum's encouragement of live presentation of the selected works, if possible at public concerts.

The Rostrum is held over five days at UNESCO House, under the auspices of the International Music Council. The Monday morning is taken up with official speeches of welcome and homilies on the supposed powers of music to heal all international ills. The Rostrum's president, Dr Gerard Victory, formerly Director of Music for Radio Telefis Eireann, then takes the chair and business proper commences. Lots are drawn to decide the order in which the countries will be listened to, and delegates are reminded of the rules; it is all a slow business since each instruction has to be stated in the two working languages, English and French. Then the music begins, courtesy of a sound technician and two tape recorders. For three and a half days delegates are subjected to a barrage of taped music, which they must assess. On the Friday morning, when each delegate has cast his 20 votes, there emerge one 'selected' work and nine 'recommended' works; a second vote on the works of composers under 30 years of age leads to another 'selection' and two more 'recommendations'. Friday afternoon is devoted to an examination of the rules and any problems experienced during the session, and the Rostrum is duly wound up for another year.

The delegates are an assorted bunch. Most work for radio stations: some have specific charge of programmes of contemporary music, others are heads or directors of music. A few are musicians resident in Paris who are nominated by the radio stations of their home countries because a shortage of travel funds prevents the sending of a proper delegate from among the broadcasting staff. This year the USA's National Public Radio was in a state of such financial embarrassment that it sent tapes but no delegate at all. After due deliberation the Rostrum decided not to allow this lest the entire exercise become a sort of anonymous chain letter—send one tape and receive 32! Some countries have been sending the same delegates for many years; others, like the UK, have a policy of changing personnel every two or three years. Many delegates are earnestly attentive, scribbling all the while, staring vacantly into space, or crowding around one of the available scores. A few are always to be seen reading newspapers or maps—presumably catching up on the whereabouts of the available night life! The contact established between delegates, when the language barrier proves surmountable, is always professionally stimulating, but interestingly (and understandably) conversations tend to be steered politely away from any honest appraisal of the presented works.

At the first session in 1954 only four European radio stations participated and this generated 16 broadcasts. In 1981 there were 33 radio stations (including five from Asia and the Pacific and five from the Americas) and a resulting 662 broadcasts. This year 32 radio stations were represented; notable absentees, apart from the USA, were Poland and Czechoslovakia.

When I first attended the Rostrum in 1981 I knew little about how it was organised, but I had been impressed by the list of composers whose works had been recommended in the past. In the 1950s Berio, Dutilleux, Frank Martin, Henze, Castiglioni, Lutosławski, and Baird were represented, and in the sixties Carter, Penderecki, Nono, Takemitsu, Tavener, and Ligeti. The 1970s saw recommendations for Crumb, Balassa, Górecki, Durkó, and Louis Andriessen, but generally there were fewer of the big names—presumably the suggestion that those who had yet to acquire an international reputation should be favoured was beginning to take full effect. My first year was marked by intense disappointment. Coming from insular Belfast, I had expected to find myself in a forum for the very best in contemporary music; I had hoped for music that was exciting and original, and the truth is that there's not very much of that around. Often the works played at the Rostrum suffer simply from being heard in such close proximity to one another: several times I have found that a work which seemed to be only a borderline possibility for transmission when it was played in Paris was a better piece when I listened to it a month later in my office.

The work that was selected in 1981, *Réquisitoire* for brass and percussion by the Belgian composer Frédéric Van Rossum, was certainly one of the more characterful and distinctive scores, but I found it cliché-ridden and it failed to live up to the claim in the programme note that it evokes 'human tragedy in the face of divine sentence'. It has left me with few memories—an observation with which I have tended to dismiss the whole of the 1981 Rostrum. And yet when I look back at the list of works, I realise just how many of them I do remember. The selected work by a composer under 30, *Trois morceaux de l'aube* for cello and piano by the Finnish composer Jouni Kaipainen, is refreshing and uncluttered music, which deserves public performances. So do two other, simpler pieces offered that year by Hungary: *Handshake after Shot* by Gyula Csapó was an object lesson in C major simplicity and brevity; *Epitaph from Aquincum* for soprano, electric organ, and strings, by János Decsényi, was full of commonplace overlapping diatonic phrases and often seemed puerile... but it has remained such a strong and vivid memory that I regret the distortion on the recording which prevented me from including it in my selection for broadcasting.

Orchestral works that year all tended to be on a large scale and to build up to a climax, with the inevitable J. Arthur Rank tam-tam. Outstanding for its craftsmanship was a piano concerto by the Bulgarian composer Georgi Mintchev, but in style this was a Romantic work, owing everything to the old Romanticism and very little to the new. Denmark contributed orchestral works in 1981 and 1982 that, like Kaipainen's piece, deserve public performance in this country. Ib Nørholm's *Idylles d'apocalypse*, for organ, 15 wind instruments, and string quartet, explored the paradox of its title with much more drama and even horror than Van Rossum could evoke in *Réquisitoire*. The images that inspired Nørholm were from the work of Hieronymus Bosch and they were reflected in a music whose language was not

always immediately contemporary but whose impact certainly was. By contrast, in 1982 Denmark offered Bo Holten's *Caccia*, an exploration of the F major merits of a mid-14th-century French *caccia*; its effectiveness arose from many overlapping canons, and the enjoyable tapestry managed at times to suggest Peter Maxwell Davies and even Stokowski!

The Rostrum provides insufficient evidence to allow one to make generalisations about national characteristics; but on the strength of my three visits I have decided—I hope wrongly—that all Australian orchestral music reflects a vast and anonymous outback, while the French write only for unwieldy monster orchestras. Alain Bancquart's Symphony, heard in 1981, was a lumbering giant of a piece, which at times came close to anonymity but always managed to startle at the crucial moment. In 1982 France presented the work of Yoshihisa Taira, born in Japan but resident in France since 1966; his *Meditations for Orchestra* was another blockbuster of a score with hammer blows of percussion, washes of sound, and, towards the end, a long, slow *crescendo* which began with interweaving strings.

An infinite number of sounds float around me [says Taira]. Some of them touch me more intensely than others. So to me, beginning to make music is the same thing as listening to the life of each of the sounds that I have remembered . . . To me, music must not be abstract subject with pedantic theories or vain explanations. I think music must be a living verb, concrete.

Hearing his *Meditations* after a Parisian lunch on a hot June day was like being struck by a chunk of concrete. A devastating piece.

And this year France did it again—bigger and bolder though no better. *Ouverture pour une fête étrange* by Michaël Levinas is scored for two orchestras and tape—the tape producing a mutation of the orchestral sound by means of amplification and pitch modification. The work was inspired by a Piranesi drawing and is written on tremendously long pages with a veritable multitude of staves. The vast, murmuring outcome seemed to me to be a waste of such resources—the effect would be better captured by synthesizers and the like . . . But then Rostrum delegates tend to like the blockbusters (as I did last year!), so it was a slight surprise to find M. Levinas just pipped at the post for this year's recommendation. That the recommended work should have been Györky Kurtág's *Messages of the late R. V. Troussova* will come as no surprise, however, to those who have heard this urgent, humorous, fragmented, and lonely piece (it has been broadcast several times and was given at the 1982 Proms). The only surprise is that a composer as well established as Kurtág should have been represented at the Rostrum at all. Perhaps it was felt that a change was needed in the style of the works submitted by Hungary. There is more detailed compositional craft evident in a Kurtág score than in the minimalist offerings of Csapó and Decsényi in 1981, or in *Lesson 24: Christmas Day* by István Mártha, which was entered in 1982; but for all its simplicity, the relentless rhythms and sheer jubilation of Mártha's piece, operating on a different level from the music of Kurtág, provided memorable refreshment and, indeed, a reminder of the sheer diversity of music to be heard at the Rostrum.

Despite that diversity, my lasting impression of this year's Rostrum is one of emptiness. The tone was set by the opening piece which came from West Germany: Passacaglia by the young composer Detlev Müller-Siemens was a well-constructed, well-orchestrated, slow-moving, sombre work, but once the available and rather anonymous possibilities of 3

against 4 against 5 had been explored there was the real problem of what else to do. Müller-Siemens had the measure of his material and knew when to stop: many other entries did not have this merit. For Australia, Martin Wesley-Smith's *For Marimba and Tape* was a fun piece of which a little went a long way; Peter Sculthorpe's Piano Concerto—perhaps because of its association with the deaths of three close friends and his own near-fatal car accident—lacked the vital spark needed to enliven what sounded like a slowed-down version of all that lovely French film music where the piano has an ostinato figure dominated by endless semiquavers.

By contrast, Denmark offered two characterful works. Hans Abrahamsen's *Nacht und Trompeten* (1981) is another of those orchestral pieces that mix various permutations of rhythmic groupings using similar notes, but it revealed a composer with a strong personality and a clear and often dramatic sense of direction. Niels Rosing-Schow's *E rigidis* for violin and piano was born from the 'new simplicity'; the title means 'out of rigidity' and suggests a development from 'the frozen to the freely fabulating'. Without intending any sort of condescension, I can say that this was a charming piece, which was well but unobtrusively crafted; its concentration on the central note E was no hindrance to the gradual unfolding of the music.

Another country that presented a group of interesting pieces was Yugoslavia. The orchestral Sarabande by Frano Parać began as good film music in the big Romantic tradition; every now and then the curtain opened just a little to reveal a private world which gradually grew but then came to naught—in fact it lost direction in a sub-Tchaikovsky fairyland before disappearing. It was a strangely haunting work: old-fashioned, depressing, and powerful. The juxtaposition with Milan Stibilj's *La Rosette* for orchestra was fascinating. This was a relentless piece with colourful, if diffuse, textures in which the strings were often scored for in ten parts; but what a wonderful sensation when the strings thinned out to leave simple thirds in the horns! The third Yugoslavian piece, *Raskovnik* by Vuk Kulenović, was a hypnotic minimalist work based on folk-dance material. It may well prove boring on a second hearing but it was fun to follow with the score.

I have still to look back over my scribbled notes (no, I was not one of the newspaper and map readers!) and decide on my personal recommendations from the 1983 Rostrum. But it seemed to me that while 1982 was a marked improvement on 1981, this year the number of interesting works declined again; still, not every small country can provide masterpieces each year (nor for that matter can every large country—thank goodness!). Perhaps anyway I shall revise my opinion when I listen to the tapes again, and decided that 1983 had its share of masterpieces.

I have been disappointed by much that I have heard at the Rostrum, but that does not detract from its usefulness in providing the opportunity to hear and assess contemporary music from many corners of the globe. The competitive element inherent in the voting procedure should not be highlighted; placings of second, third, and so on after the main recommendation do not give a true reflection of the artistic merits of a particular work. However, it is pleasing to note that British composers have consistently maintained a position in the ratings! For the record the works that have been presented in the last three years are Edward Maguire's *Euphoria—a Sense of Well-being* and George Benjamin's *Ringed by the Flat Horizon* in 1981, John Buller's *The Theatre of Memory* in 1982, and Roger Smalley's Symphony in 1983.