

contact

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

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An Editorial

It will hardly have escaped the notice of our regular readers that the gap between the publication of this issue of *Contact* and the last one has been much longer than usual. In view of this, but also for other and perhaps better reasons too, it seemed the right moment to offer a statement from the editorial side. *Contact* has not, at least recently, cultivated the sort of image that leads its readers to expect regular reflective comment of this kind from its editors. It is not at present the intention to make a habit of it.

The delay in publishing the present issue has been caused by a combination of problems – mostly practical, also in part financial. In essence, they arise from the basic circumstances in which the journal has always been published in the sixteen years of its existence, a little of which is explained below. We do, of course, regret this long hiatus, for which we would like to apologise to all our subscribers and other regular readers. We would also like to explain that we were unable to inform subscribers of what was happening not only because we were ourselves uncertain for some time as to when the next issue would be ready, but also because the cost of doing so is prohibitive for a low-budget operation such as ours.

As a result of our recent experiences, however, we have now expanded our editorial board to six; their names appear on page 3. This is intended in the first instance to bring about a return to regular publication: two issues a year, one in the spring, the other in the autumn. But it is also envisaged that *Contact* should continue to evolve and to change where necessary, while retaining its original aim: the provision of information and comment on a wide range of contemporary music to whoever is interested, whether professionally involved or not.

No-one, we hope, would expect such changes overnight. It seems, in any case, that it is likely to be more a question of the rejuvenation of original aims than a radical search after new ones. More specifically, it is likely that *Contact* will continue to steer its sometimes faltering course between the Scylla of the 'academic journal', written by academics but read by no-one, and the Charybdis of the 'popular magazine', responding only to current fashion and the 'promotional machines' and producing nothing of any substantial musical worth.

It is no doubt wise for *Contact* to continue, for the most part, to preserve a certain decorum regarding its practical problems: aside from anything else, readers presumably want to read the results of our labours, not a catalogue of those labours themselves. The following may, however, put right at least some of the misunderstandings that others, perhaps quite understandably, have about us.

Contact is published with the aid of an Arts Council 'guarantee against loss' which essentially

pays for our typesetting and printing. Revenue from subscriptions, sales, advertising, etc. has to cover all our other costs. Neither editors nor contributors are paid for their services, apart from a small honorarium to those doing sub-editing and proofreading which is far from the 'going rate' for this extremely time-consuming and thankless task. *Contact* is therefore not run as a commercial operation in any normal sense. All those involved on the editorial side have full-time jobs and/or busy freelance careers in music.

It may dismay those who think the editors of *Contact* make a handsome profit at their subscribers' and the taxpayer's expense to learn that the journal is produced in such a fashion. It is, though, important to stress that many journals and magazines, particularly academic journals, are produced in this way: some very reputable journals have been sub-edited by an unpaid academic and proof-read by his wife. Most academic journals, though, have some assistance – sometimes extensive assistance – from a publisher. We do not. On the other hand, we value the independence that comes from being 'non-aligned'.

Finally, a word about future plans. Editors will from now on be working in pairs, planning an issue and seeing it 'through the press' themselves, rather than with the assistance of a separate sub-editor. Reviews will be dealt with by Hilary Bracefield, though since it has been an important part of our policy in recent years to allow the borderline between 'article' and 'review' to be crossed when appropriate, this will not be an entirely separate matter. We do hope, though, to be able to review more material than we have managed in the recent past. (Material for review should continue to be sent to the Goldsmiths' College address on page 3 for the moment.)

Despite the problems involved, we intend to continue the policy of devoting an issue to a particular subject area or even an individual composer when appropriate. (We have tried very hard in the last few years to publish issues devoted to, among others, Cornelius Cardew after his tragic early death and Christian Wolff on his 50th birthday; some idea of how hard this is to achieve can be gauged by, among other things, the appearance in the present issue of just a single, though we hope useful, article on the latter.) Plans for the future include an issue dealing with aspects of music in West Germany; articles on music in Brazil and China and some attention to Danish and Yugoslav music; several articles on younger British composers; and a detailed examination of aspects of repetitive music, particularly that of Steve Reich.

Keith Potter