

# contact

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

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

## Citation

Bracefield, Hilary. 1988. 'Editorial'. *Contact*, 33. pp. 4-5. ISSN 0308-5066.

## Editorial

It is hard to believe that it is exactly eighteen years ago that the first *Contact* appeared, dated Spring 1971, and edited by Keith Potter and Chris Villars. It is equally hard for me to believe that eighteen years on, the current issue is No. 33, and the last one in which Keith Potter will appear as one of the editors. But eighteen years is a long time to bear the agonies and the frustrations of bringing out a music journal, even though the compensations have been many, and although I cannot imagine *Contact* without Keith, I can understand that the time has come for him to move on to other things.

That first *Contact*, a cyclostyled 30-page journal (cost: 6p) was thought up in the idealistic days of the beginning of the seventies by a student of music and a student of philosophy at Birmingham University. Its editorial explained why the journal took its name: 'to make CONTACT between those involved in the practice, study and enjoyment of the widely differing forms that contemporary music takes.' Other aims included producing 'a journal devoted to the discussion of twentieth century music of all kinds' and bringing 'to everyone's attention the extremely varied nature of the present-day musical scene.'

One turns to the contents of that first issue with some amazement, for amongst its contributors were David H. Cox on Varèse, Richard Middleton on the musical significance of pop, Peter Dickinson on the improvisatory avant-garde, and John Casken writing critically about Michael Tippett's views of modern music. There was an interview with Justin Connolly, reviews of concerts in Birmingham and short articles on jazz and rock. The editors were trying to cover the complete contemporary music scene, and early issues continued to bemoan the paucity of articles on jazz or folk or pop, though the span of articles that *Contact* has published in its eighteen years is, I think, a truly catholic selection, reflecting the music that needed to be written about rather than that which the editors thought should be covered.

In all of this time Keith has remained the catalyst, planning the issues, cajoling articles out of reluctant contributors, ferreting out ideas and keeping abreast of developments worldwide. Chris Villars left Birmingham after two issues came out, and although I'd been trying not to get involved I found myself an editor with No. 3. I'd helped to sell No. 1 and assemble No. 2: the early issues all involved painful typing and correcting sessions and fearful bouts of duplicating in the long-suffering Music Department and Student Union offices, following which piles of pages were placed on a library table for press-ganged volunteers to run round until the issue was complete. There were about 160 copies prepared of No. 1, all long since sold, and perhaps now collectors' items. There were always some volunteers to help, but the editorial team has remained both small and long-serving. David Roberts joined us from No. 6 right until No. 29, John Shepherd from Nos. 10-22, and Rosemary Roberts from Nos. 22-29. With the departure of David and Rosemary Roberts in 1985 the present team was formed, and the remaining four are sorry to lose the expertise of Roger Heaton, who also departs after this issue, and are contemplating the daunting task of producing the journal without its founding editor.

It is amusing, now, to look at the first ten cyclostyled issues, but they chronicle an important part of Great Britain's musical concerns from 1971 to 1975. There is

an emphasis on Schoenberg – articles on whom appear in nearly every issue (including one by Arnold Whittall in No. 6) – but there are also articles on Jani Christou, Xenakis, Takemitsu and music in Scandinavia, Silesia, Japan and Australia. There are articles on Tippett and Ives, but also on Cage, Bruce Cole and Bertram Turetzky. Above all, there is an early recognition of the importance of British experimental music, with extensive reviews of the Experimental Music Catalogue across four issues, and there is a pioneering article on electronic music by Peter Manning in No. 7.

The need for a Schoenberg series was explained by Keith in an editorial in No. 9 – that 'there was very little published material in English that was sufficiently generalised to be intelligible to even the more than averagely interested music student and yet at the same time was sufficiently detailed to be of use.' In the year of Schoenberg's centenary Keith found the situation much improved, and ends the series with views of Schoenberg by six composers: Geoffrey Burgon, Jonathan Harvey, John Joubert, Virgil Thomson, Stuart Ward, and Hugh Wood. This issue helped us get our first advertisements, painstakingly Gestefaxed, a kind of reproduction largely forgotten. Calls for subscribers had begun in No. 6 – 80p for six issues, which, we proudly proclaimed, included postage. It took a long time for some of those early subscribers to reach their renewal time. It caused us no little amusement, incidentally, when the first subscriber – who stayed with us for many years – was found to be appropriately named A. C. Tune.

Keith's own contributions are found largely in reviews. His first in No. 2 (1971) disarmingly begins 'I have unfortunately mislaid my original draft for the review of this concert, and so I shall confine myself to a few remarks of a general nature', but he would be pleased with his acuteness in noting in another in the same issue the 'remarkable talent' of Felicity Lott (soprano) who 'gave what appeared to be an admirable and accurate performance of four songs from Peter Lawson's cycle *Sitting in Farmyard Mud*' and who showed 'a maturity that is rare in such a young singer.' Keith would, however, ruefully recall over many years that his first article, in No. 4, on Peter Maxwell Davies, promised a conclusion which has never appeared. Keith's early interest in experimental music shows in interviews with Michael Parsons (No. 8) and Cornelius Cardew (No. 10) and a perceptive review of Michael Nyman's book *Experimental Music*, also in No. 10.

As Keith moved from Birmingham to Cardiff to York, discussion proceeded on enlarging the magazine, announced in No. 10. Despite warnings of the great cost of the new format from No. 11 onwards (a devastating hike from 15p to 25p), Keith wrote that 'he hoped that readers will note that we continue to be not just the only magazine in this country devoted completely to contemporary music of all kinds, but also one of the cheapest music magazines available.' But as No. 11 (1975) explained, the aims of the magazine remain 'to promote informed discussion of all aspects of twentieth century music with special reference to that of our own time.' With No. 11 also began the financial support of the Arts Council for which we have been grateful ever since. Birmingham University Music Society gave support for the first thirteen issues, while Yorkshire Arts Association helped with Nos. 11-14.

And so to the A4 series. Long-term readers will know that No. 12 introduced a new cover design, which lasted until No. 24, with modifications, and with the subtitle 'Today's Music'; it took the price from 25p to £1. A revamp for Nos. 25-30 introduced the current subtitle 'A journal of contemporary music'; our current modified cover design began with No. 31, and the present price of £2.50 does not, I hope, seem excessive for the number of words that *Contact* gives you in each issue.

A glance at the inside front cover of this issue gives an idea of the scope of the articles *Contact* has published from No. 16 (Spring 1977) to today. Its breadth and depth and its ability to keep up with recent trends, even foreshadowing them, is in itself a tribute to Keith's comprehensive knowledge of and lively interest in music of our time. It is a pity that Nos. 11-15 are out of print for they include articles on, for instance, music in Canada, and on George Crumb, Miles Davis, Witold Lutoslawski, Henri Pousseur, Howard Riley, David Bedford, Jean-Yves Bosseur, and Mauricio Kagel, among others. Keith himself contributes searching interviews with Murray Schafer and Philip Glass (with John Shepherd and Dave Smith, respectively). And from No. 16 on as one can see, the range of composers covered is remarkable, as is the range and stature of contributors: it would indeed be invidious to draw attention to any in particular. Keith's attempts to assemble 'theme' issues didn't always succeed, but I would like to draw attention to some of the features of these eighteen years of *Contact* under Keith's guidance.

Firstly, our reviews. Started as parochial reviews of Birmingham events, they have become, I believe, important chronicles of the events of nearly twenty years of contemporary music, through surveys of records, concerts and festivals, as well as of scores, books and little magazines. The *Music in Society* series, championed by John Shepherd, running during issues 14 and 19 was an important contribution to the sociological study of music, which we have intermittently continued. The early article on electronic music by Peter Manning was followed by a series on electronic music studios in Great Britain (Nos 12-19) which only ceased because there are now other ways for such information to be disseminated. Another popular series was the New Music Diary, started by Keith on his move from York to London (No. 15), continued by Malcolm Barry in No. 19 and taken over by the late Brigitte Schiffer until No. 22 – a period of four years of London musicmaking closely chronicled with wit, perception and humour, and great attention to detail. More recently, Keith has cajoled various writers into argumentative pieces for *Controversies Incorporated*, begun with an article by James Ingram on the notation of time in No. 29, and still happily bowling along in this issue. Keith has always also sought introductory articles on music in various countries. Information on musical trends in Western Europe and USA was little enough available in Great Britain in the seventies, but our surveys of music in Eastern Europe, Albania, Australia, Canada and Brazil have also been part of Keith's plan. The present editors hope to keep *Contact's* brief as wide as Keith's always was – a tall order!

The work of editing has always kept Keith from writing as much as he would have liked. Voluminous reviews of festivals in Warsaw, Huddersfield, Glasgow and Zagreb, and titbits from visits to USA and Europe

have appeared; and there have been books and scores reviewed, and two long, thoughtful surveys of improvisatory music on record (Nos. 18 and 21). Scattered through the last nine years' issues, however, have been major articles on composers Keith has studied in depth: Brian Ferneyhough (No. 20), Gavin Bryars (No. 22), Louis Andriessen (No. 23) and Steve Reich (No. 29). These articles show the care and attention he lavishes on every project he undertakes. Now that he is relieved of the drudgery of editorial work, I am hoping that the knowledge gained over the last eighteen years of his experience of contemporary music will emerge in further articles for us.

As Keith leaves the editorial board, and as one who has worked closely with him for the duration of his editorship, I am glad to be able to pay tribute to his comprehensiveness, his thoroughness, his high standards of editing, checking, presentation and writing, and his utter commitment to contemporary music. The present editorial board hope that *Contact* can keep the standards which Keith has held for eighteen years; we hope that Keith will write for us as regularly as possible; and we point again to *Contact: a journal of contemporary music* Nos. 1-33 as a body of material which is a lasting tribute to one man's vision.

**Hilary Bracefield**

All books and music reviewed  
in *Contact* can be obtained from

**Philip Martin**

**MUSIC BOOKS**

**22 HUNTINGTON RD**

**YORK YO3 7RL**

**TEL. (0904) 36111**

**Fast personal service**

**Catalogues of new and out-of-print  
musical literature available  
on request.**

**Wants lists/Items for sale always welcomed.**