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Darmstadt 1988

34th Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, Darmstadt, 1-17 August 1988

Contact has regularly charted the progress of the Darmstädter Ferienkurse für Neue Musik during the 1980s.[1] Roger Heaton's review of Darmstadt 1980 makes it clear that things were already changing at this famous summer school for new music before the arrival of its present director Friedrich Hommel (who, it is rumoured, may preside over his last Darmstadt in 1990); indeed, reports of the 1978 Ferienkurse suggest that some of the essentials of that change were already in place even four years before his arrival in 1982. This is not, however, to belittle Hommel's achievement, for it is clear to the visitor returning, as I did, after an absence of fourteen years that the Ferienkurse have been very much affected by the presence of this benign but powerful director. It was he who saw not only that Darmstadt needed new compositional driving forces to replace those of the 1950s and 60s who had – give or take the odd arrival or departure – remained dominant but increasingly ineffectual down to at least 1974, but that there was also a need for a different sort of Darmstadt in the eighties to reflect the current state of compositional confusion that goes under such names as pluralism or postmodernism. It takes both courage and vision to move an institution forwards in the way that Hommel has done; the fact that he is of the German generation that brought about the post-war, post-Nazi modernist revolution makes his more 'postmodern' position all the more admirable as well as, perhaps, curious. Whatever criticisms follow, the real progress of the Hommel Years should not be forgotten.

Progress, moving forwards . . . are these, though, the ways in which we should be speaking of an institution which – quite logically, in the context of the pluralism mentioned above – no longer seeks to confirm its position, even its authority, via the maxims of an avant garde? Change, yes: no postmodernism worth the investigation would suggest either that we should remain where we are or that we should go back to some previously held position. (However perplexing this latter proposition may seem, it is, nonetheless, widely regarded as a reasonable answer to the Post-Avant-Garde Dilemma. How *far* back, though, are we supposed to go?) But progress? In what sense might this be meant, other than merely chronologically? And to what extent is it either desirable or possible for Darmstadt 1988 to be experienced and reported as a barometer of The State of Composition in the Late Eighties?

There are quite a number of people who expect Darmstadt to reflect current moves across compositional space, even if they acknowledge that the 'space' occupied is more accurately likened to that of a chessboard (warring factions going in opposite directions) or a race track (everyone going in one direction but round and round in circles and with everyone in a different position on the circuit) than to a straight line disappearing over the horizon to a glorious future. Darmstadt does reflect current moves, of course, and it can to some degree be reported in that fashion, but only to an extent which takes account of a mixture of historical, personal and other factors which are probably impossible to unravel, especially so close in time.

One reason why this expectation of Darmstadt as an accurate reflector continues can be found in the firmly-established view that lies behind it: namely, that 'Darmstadt' has been a reliable barometer of avant-garde concerns in the past and now functions, historically, as their record; in a sense, indeed, as their embodiment. To my students, for instance, 'Darmstadt' means *only* the Mecca of the avant garde, chiefly in the 1950s. One might argue that if they had read the relevant issues of *Contact* they would know better. But the view is widely available in the textbooks, and it has a certain validity. Paul Mounsey's story, related in *Contact 31*, of the group of four Brazilian composers who went to Darmstadt in 1962 'to find out at first hand what was happening in total serialism, and were shocked to discover that Europe had moved on' – a shock which caused two of the four to abandon 'serious' music entirely – is but one rather touching illustration of the talismanic power of 'Darmstadt'.[2] And presumably the reputation of 'Darmstadt' – as the Damascus road for serialists and, later on (for those with stronger constitutions than the Brazilians possessed), for composers prepared to follow the path towards indeterminacy under the guidance of teachers stimulating enough to bring about such radical changes of heart – has something to do with the prevalence, even today, of starry-eyed assumptions about what the real Darmstadt can achieve. These days (just as in 1974 when I first went), most people, especially younger composition students, seem to leave Darmstadt dismayed by its failure to stimulate

them. There are good reasons for this, and some of these can be put right, as I will suggest below. But expectations of Darmstadt will no doubt always run unreasonably high among first-time visitors as long as 'Darmstadt' continues to mean anything much historically. Indeed there are few reasons to suppose that the slate will be somehow wiped clean.

It should also be pointed out that the image of 1950s 'Darmstadt' as simply the dispenser of the pure mountain air of the new serialism, invigorating all who went to have their constitutions improved, becomes not a little tarnished directly one looks at the details. A spot of delving, in rare idle moments during Darmstadt 1988, into the Darmstadt Institute's extensive archives (which should be used by researchers more than at present seems to be the case) makes a little clearer, for instance, the position there of Bruno Maderna who, though seen by some as one of the embodiments of 'Darmstadt' – perhaps partly because he made the city his home for many years – was at least a neo-Romantic, if not a postmodernist, before either term was invented, and who must have irritated hard-line serialists even as he helped champion them as a conductor. It is also too easy to suppose that everything about 'Darmstadt' was so much better in the early years: some accounts I've received of 1950s Ferienkursen do not entirely substantiate the glowing impression that history has so widely conveyed.

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How, then, has the real Darmstadt changed since its Mecca days? Perhaps the chief innovation in the 1980s has been an almost total avoidance of the 'old guard' who previously ruled: Berio, Boulez, Ligeti and Stockhausen; even Kagel and Xenakis, whose relationship with the old Darmstadt was more problematic despite their status as Major European Avant Gardists. These composers might anyway no longer respond positively to invitations to appear in person; what is more interesting is that their music is, with the exception in 1988 of one or two short pieces by Berio and Xenakis, seemingly now banned from performance as well. The system of one-hour presentations which now replaces the courses of lectures given by the old figure-heads produces, however, something less than the total democracy that might conceivably have been brought about. One reason for this is that some composers, young or old, are inevitably going to be seen by the majority of participants as more important than others (though that in turn raises the question of who those participants are nowadays and what their value judgements are likely to be). Another reason has more to do with the nature of the choices made by Hommel and his team which, while quite possibly stemming from concerns for equality and 'righting the balance', result in practice in what looks like an attempt to establish an 'alternative history of contemporary music' which threatens to become every bit as enshrined in stone as the 'official avant-garde' one. It could be argued that 'alternative history' is a very necessary counter to received views that make what should be a constant process of change and flux into something ossified: we can all benefit from a view that is sufficiently open-minded to encompass a wide range of aesthetic opinions and stylistic results, however contradictory, but which also provides some even vaguely coherent way of looking at things. More practically, it may be argued that emphases of some kind are inevitable, at least during any individual summer school. What seems especially interesting about the Hommel Years, though, is that they seem to have gone out of their way to elevate older figures who were previously regarded by the Official Avant Garde as also-rans or at least as outsiders.

Two composers given this treatment in the recent past are no longer living, but the shades of both were strongly felt this year. Giacinto Scelsi actually died while the 1988 Ferienkurse were in progress; news of his death quickly filtered through to participants and resulted in some memorial tributes and performances. The music of this redoubtable Roman count, who received belated and rather cultish attention in his last decade or so, had been a feature of Darmstadt 1986. Morton Feldman, who died in 1987, had been a special feature of Darmstadt 1984 and was, I understand, still a strong presence two years later. (The treatment given to this composer in his last years was seemingly quite different from that offered his erstwhile 'New York School' colleague Christian Wolff at Darmstadt 1974; though their markedly different personalities undoubtedly played some part in this, it is encouraging to think that former experimentalists besides Cage are now perhaps seen as more than 'interesting minor figures'.) A tape of Feldman's last orchestral work, *Coptic Light* (1986), was played as a tribute to him late on the last evening of the 1988 Ferienkurse, by which time most participants had either left town or got drunk and gone elsewhere. Feldman's presence had, however, been strong throughout the preceding weeks not only through other, live, performances of his music, but because a number of composers presenting their own work in the course of lectures had been pupils of his and referred frequently to his ideas and sayings. These included Feldman's widow, Barbara Monk-Feldman, who is, though, far from being the clone of her late husband that cynics would have you believe. It may not be too far-fetched to suggest that the kinds of energy generated by the music of Scelsi and Feldman – different from one another in important respects but also sharing qualities defined only very inadequately by such words as 'contemplative', 'spiritual' and 'undramatic' – are now seen as complements, even antidotes, to past concerns. Serialism and indeterminacy – also, of course, very different from one another – often generated raging but at the same time rather rebarbative sorts of energy. The output of the 'quietist' Feldman was always an exception to this – as was the music of all the American 'chance' composers with the exception of Earle Brown, whose more emotional indeterminacy was, significantly, an important influence on European brands of 'aleatoric music' in the fifties and sixties: it's more the European 'misunderstanding' of indeterminacy (fruitful or otherwise) of which I'm thinking here. An 'angry-young-man' aspect can still be perceived in the work of the modernist 'successors' to the 1950s avant garde, perhaps partly for the simple reason that these composers dispute the 'succession'. If Brian Ferneyhough (who may stand as an example of such present-day modernism) and Feldman are both acceptable at Darmstadt these days as somehow fulfilling complementary needs, perhaps an 'alternative' (because less straightforwardly combative) view of the present is being offered, as well as the more obviously 'either/or' of an 'alternative musical history'.

There were living older presences at Darmstadt 1988 as well. The 65-year-old Karel Goeyvaerts will be known to students of the Official Avant Garde as one of the chief contenders to be written up in the history books as the writer of the First Totally-Serial Piece. It was his just-completed Sonata for two pianos that so fired Stockhausen at Darmstadt in 1951, and Goeyvaerts talked about that early period in the course of his lecture. Following a gap of some years after he gave up serialism around the end of the fifties, he began writing a totally different, much simpler music which he himself is quite happy to describe as minimalist; these works have received a certain amount of attention in Continental Europe but, as so often, almost none in Britain. We were able to hear a number of recent compositions by Goeyvaerts in the course of the concerts, as well as a seemingly quite splendid performance of the early sonata which, not for the first time in my experience, made it seem much more than the Historical Curiosity it is written off as (I'd like to know how many people *have* heard the piece). Goeyvaerts' recent 'minimalism' often seems gauche to me, but fascinatingly gauche; I've just about convinced myself that I mean more by saying this than that I'm simply intrigued by the aesthetic reversal and the clear and compelling honesty that lies behind it.

Other neglected older figures at this year's Ferienkurse included the 71-year-old Frenchman Jean-Etienne Marie, who writes microtonal music which sometimes, bizarrely, combines different tuning systems. Hommel's choice of Goeyvaerts suggests that he feels rejection of serialism should continue to be encouraged on moral as well as musical grounds, while his equally obvious enthusiasm for Marie suggests that the lonely explorer of music's innards must be encouraged as another kind of musical outsider (few even today, with the aid of all the New Technology, seem willing to devote themselves to serious and systematic investigation of microtonal possibilities). Both composers use an interesting mixture of simple materials, maintaining a certain 'distance' from them while also accepting their emotional connotations. Both minimalism and microtonality can, it appears, continue to offer both contemplation and exultation at the same time.

It would also be easy, however, to paint a picture of the present Ferienkurse as continuing to favour, at the expense of others, a tendency frequently given the label 'New Complexity'. The strong British contingent, for instance – invited back and even expanded year after year in what is, I suppose, a welcome contrast to the tiny group of British representatives in 1974 – is dominated by the four composers – Richard Barrett, Chris Dench, James Dillon and Michael Finnissy – who were so extensively discussed in *Contact* 32 by Richard Toop.[3] That article made clear the foolishness of considering these composers (or their colleagues James Clarke, Richard Emsley, James Erber and Roger Redgate, who all swelled the ranks at Darmstadt 1988) as some kind of post-serial, post-Ferneyhough school united against the inanities of all other present-day composition; what unity they ever possessed is rapidly disappearing anyway. But it's interesting – particularly for a London-based observer used to seeing these composers forced out of so many of the institutions which foster new music, on the grounds that their musical philosophies are incomprehensible and their compositions anyway impossible to perform – to find these men, at least some of them, fêted as a British élite. The view now seems quite well developed at Darmstadt that, with or without the assistance of Ferneyhough (who, not entirely surprisingly, seems to view them more as rivals than colleagues these days), Barrett, Dench and Dillon (probably not Finnissy, though maybe some of the others) are the 1980s equivalents of the 1950s serialists in their quest for a synthesis of intellectual rigour and musical forms consistent with acoustic realities. The fact that their New Complexity has challenged the old serialism as both intellectually and musically bogus only adds spice to the crusade currently being waged on their behalf. The fact that their work is not presented on the lavish scale Stockhausen could once expect at Darmstadt (Dillon, for example, was represented in the concerts by a couple of short solo pieces, while his major recent orchestral work *helle Nacht* (1986-7) could only be heard on tape during his talk) is more an indication of Darmstadt's presently rather parlous financial situation than of anything else.

Any suggestion that Hommel is himself openly fostering the advancement of these composers' careers at the expense of his already-mentioned pluralism must, on the other hand, be challenged. The principal protagonist in the British New Complexity business at Darmstadt appears to be Harry Halbreich, an omnipresent but also elusive presence around the Ferienkurse who seems to function in something of the manner of a Court Jester to the summer school's directorate. Halbreich's achievements as a critic and a catalyst for new musical activities are only sporadically known in Britain; regrettably so, since his knowledge of contemporary music is considerable and he has made important contributions as a writer, broadcaster and festival director in his own right. And though his range of knowledge is not, I dare assert, as wide as his reputation as a walking encyclopedia of new music may suggest (he seemed unaware of musical activities in Britain or the USA, for example, outside his particular aesthetic preferences), his interests stretch to a very laudable and necessary attempt to make Tippett better understood in non-English-speaking countries than he is today. Halbreich's position at Darmstadt is one of apparently considerable influence wielded very selectively. There may be nothing wrong with this, and anyway Halbreich does an invaluable service to the Ferienkurse by making his quite astonishing linguistic talents freely available in the absence of proper translation facilities. (It's a disadvantage, incidentally, to attend Darmstadt without at least some knowledge of German, even though English is widely spoken there too. The British and the Americans ought to be better linguists than we are, of course, but it's a pity that some better arrangement can't be made to help the flow of information and ideas.) Halbreich's position should, however, be reported, even if its exact influence cannot be precisely established. As someone sympathetic to the British cause he espouses, and glad that at least some British music is finally being taken seriously at Darmstadt, I can't help wondering to what extent a more comprehensive view of the British new-music scene (be it warts and all) is being blocked here. The more one travels around, the more one realises just how hard it is to get any kind of comprehensive view of compositional activities anywhere other than your own patch. Halbreich's own lecture at Darmstadt 1988 on the pleasures and perils of 'keeping up' with new music was a good illustration of the problems.

Then again, British music other than the New Complexity does get some airing at Darmstadt these

days. Composers of various kinds of repetitive music (to use another blanket label possibly as unrevealing as 'New Complexity') may have more trouble than most in gaining much attention in this context, since it seems you don't *have* to be a serialist or indeed any other kind of avant-garde dogmatist to consider anything even vaguely 'minimalist' to be fundamentally unserious. Both Christopher Fox (*Heliotrope 6* (1987), premièred by the Arditti String Quartet, was surprisingly minimalist) and Steve Ingham (who mounted his own performance of an engagingly rock-repetitive piece entitled *Shards* (1987) for bass clarinet, marimba, piano and tape in a late-night programme at the summer school's end) managed to present works which went right against the grain of 'Darmstadt' as Halbreich apparently conceives it. Chris Newman, who can seem so fundamentally unserious that even avant-gardists conclude he must have a point somewhere, has become a part of the West-German music scene anyway, but while his 'lecture', consisting of readings of his 'poetry', struck me as an ideal demonstration of his somewhat Satie-esque art, his new piano piece, *My Night in Newark/New Pianos* (1987-8), played by Marianne Schroeder, was boorishly reminiscent of a child at its first piano lesson. Near the end of the Ferienkurse, James Wood's *Stoicheia* (also 1987-8) for percussion, keyboards and electronics showed what can be presented at Darmstadt these days if you provide at least some of your own resources and take full advantage of the situation; unfortunately, while it actually fitted rather better than the above-mentioned works into 'Darmstadt' as purveyor of cosmic experiences, I could find its lengthy ritualistic exposition of percussive theatre only lengthy and pretentious. I couldn't help but recall that the last time I was in the local Sporthalle, of whose impressive space *Stoicheia* made full use, was to hear Stockhausen's *Indianerlieder* and, even more vacuously pseudo-cosmic, his *Herbstmusik*. Wood's official role at Darmstadt was that of percussion teacher; the Instrumental Studio continues to be dominated by British performers, who also include Christopher Redgate (oboe), Roger Heaton (clarinet) and most of the Arditti Quartet.

The view of American music from the angle of the Ferienkurse has always included an element of suspicion; imperialist tendencies, scorn, envy, downright hostility and rank schizophrenia have also featured at various times. (At least the European avant garde could muster up some real venom for its American rivals; the official reaction to British experimentalism at the summer school in the past has simply been to ignore it.) Thirty years on from Cage's infamous 'storming' of Darmstadt 1958, Hommel may have felt he had quite good enough reasons to risk flouting his ethic of 'no domination' by inviting a large group of American composers and performers to dominate the first week of this year's summer school. Unfortunately not only did things seem to have escalated beyond his original intentions, but the lengthy presentation of work of many kinds, too numerous to identify separately, from the Department of Music at the University of California at San Diego had few moments of real musical interest even for this British listener keen to encounter new American music of all – well, nearly all – sorts. In this context – for the right reasons I hope, and not just out of personal sympathy for a composer plagued by illness for many years now and unable to attend Darmstadt 1988 himself – I found the evening of, chiefly, solo works by the veteran American Robert Erickson the most invigorating. Erickson was born in 1917 and his music is not widely known even in the States, though he is often spoken of highly as a teacher and musical catalyst. Not everything in the programme lived up to the high claims being made on the composer's behalf, but several pieces suggested that not only they but other works of his too might deserve more attention than they have so far received. Erickson's position as an innovator in the field of what are usually called extended instrumental techniques may not survive close scrutiny. But pieces such as *The Pleiades* (1981) for violin and *Dunbar's Delight* (1985) for timpani (the title derives from the name of the percussionist for whom it was written) are such *musical* fruits of lengthy and careful collaboration with individual performers that they not only compel admiration as real pieces of music using extended techniques, rather than merely as catalogues of fancy sounds, but they also help to vindicate the much-maligned profession of 'campus composer'. If campus composition can allow the leisurely production of such exquisite music (though not many composers in universities these days have that sort of leisure), then its continued support, public or private, should not be in question.

Most of the rest of what San Diego offered is, however, best passed over as offering more evidence for the abandonment of campus composition than for its retention. Roger Reynolds' work is at least a serious attempt to make new musical discoveries with the aid of the computer, though I generally found, as I have done before, that his music leaves me cold and feeling more in the presence of a brilliant intellect than in that of a composer dealing with sounds in a truly musical way; *The Palace* (*Voicespace IV*) (1980) for baritone and tape seemed, though, to have the sweep of real musical drama about it. But so much of what we heard from the other composers and improvisers represented – provided by a team that was reputedly some 70 strong, counting all the attached performers, academics, technicians and so on – seemed to be little more than reworkings of ideas about extended techniques, improvisation of various kinds, mixed media and other theatrical possibilities which were not only discovered in the sixties but which, at that time, produced much more interesting results. Besides, the notion of a whole university music department, however devoted to radical composition and performance, as worthy of attention as a 'school', as opposed to possessing one or two talented composers, is more promotional than truthful.

Ferneyhough, who joined the San Diego faculty a year before the 1988 summer school took place, was of course widely credited with fixing the whole thing through his influence at Darmstadt, which goes back around ten years. His distance from his new colleagues compositionally was, however, matched by his marked absence from the summer school during its first week (he did, though, have a piece to finish), and anyway it seemed fairly clear that the San Diego arrangements had been put in train before his appointment. The main performances of his own music were independent of the UCSD concerts, and though his recent Third String Quartet (1987) is a powerful work containing one or two new things I should like to discuss, this is not the place for it; his music is well known and his aesthetic position does not seem to have changed. As far as his position at Darmstadt is concerned, Ferneyhough has long since made his mark as the rightful successor to the serialists of yester-year who

has shown the post-serial way forward for serious composition in the late 20th century. That this is probably not how he himself views matters is just one indication of the problems to be encountered when trying to report Darmstadt 1988 in the State-of-the-Art terms I mentioned at the beginning. Ferneyhough is possibly as dismayed as much as he is flattered by the number of imitators he has, wittingly or unwittingly, spawned in the last ten or fifteen years. But the problems involved in finding your own voice as a young composer these days (including whatever that may mean exactly) are all the greater for the lack of present certainties. Darmstadt still seems, to the outsider, to be providing some kind of refuge for at least some of the 'aesthetic certainties' encompassed in that so-called New Complexity and its rigorous intellectual and performing demands: West German, Italian and other composers of highly complex and 'difficult' music – as well as those from Britain – continue to congregate at the summer school. But, paradoxically, it achieves this in the context of a highly developed state of schizophrenia, marked – as I suppose Darmstadt rather than 'Darmstadt' always has been – by endless and often boorish frictions between the competing factions.

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Mention of the response received at Darmstadt by both compositions themselves and the ideas they embody leads me, finally, to the conditions under which all this activity went on during the seventeen (or rather in practice more like fifteen) hot August days of the summer school. And since these conditions strike me as open to at least some improvement, I'll end with just a few suggestions made from the point of view of an observer, rather than that of an active participant, which most of *Contact*'s previous reporters have been.

Good summer schools are probably quite naturally and rightly hectic affairs in which, while a lot is attempted for all kinds of good reasons, less is actually achieved than people, particularly some people, may have wished, and in which a lot of the most useful and interesting things take place outside the formal sessions, of whatever kind. But Darmstadt 1988 was, I thought, needlessly – as well as, ultimately, debilitatingly – chaotic. One area in which I felt this strongly was the whole Composition Studio set-up. In the old days, this was essentially a workshop for composers, allowing them to bring along pieces, discuss matters both aesthetic and technical, compose exercises or even real pieces during the course for class experiment or concert performance, and generally behave much as their performing colleagues would be doing elsewhere at the same time, even though the possibilities of one-to-one lessons which at least some performers were getting was effectively reduced to nearly nothing by the sheer preponderance of composers attending. In 1988 composers still outnumbered performers to a considerable extent; indeed, I understood that the numbers of performers attending had gone down, and I'll return to this in a moment. Providing the same conditions for composers as for performers is probably not possible, at least within the financial constraints under which Darmstadt now labours; the economics of the Ferienkurse is another area which ought to be discussed – Darmstadt 1988 seemed almost *not* to have happened – but I'll leave that to one side here. Since a workshop of this kind starts to become unworkable as soon as numbers reach any distance into double figures, and Darmstadt attracts over one hundred composers, it seemed sensible to have abandoned it in favour of an extension of the open lectures given chiefly, but not exclusively, by composers, which composers were presumably expected to attend and to which performers could go as they wished and as their other commitments allowed.

In practice, though, so great was the expansion and so strongly was the 'no domination' ethic observed, that the results resembled more an endless parade of turns on a TV chat show than a serious attempt to address aesthetic issues and to introduce what was in fact often complex and challenging music. In 1974, even with the dominant focus of a whole series of lectures and presentations from each of the four Leading Composers selected for this treatment (Stockhausen and Xenakis had a complete week each, while Kagel and Wolff, deemed Lesser Leading Figures, shared one week between them), it was still possible for one-off talks to make an impact: there weren't so many of them, and the conveyor-belt effect was correspondingly reduced; there was less pressure on speakers to complete their presentations within the hour; one or two were even allowed mini-series; and people were more likely to attend a large number of them.

In 1988, around 70 egos jostled for position to make their aesthetic pitches and sell their compositional wares to anyone who would listen. At least this was how it often seemed, particularly when speakers had to be cut short when a morning or afternoon session had already been allowed to overrun quite considerably and as the cumulative effect of information overkill overtook proceedings in the later stages of the summer school. Some speakers already experienced in the ways of the recent Darmstadt wisely offered, say, a brief introduction to a recent piece rather than launch a major defence of their aesthetic position; and of course some presentations still managed to say important and interesting things. But it did seem that the atmosphere was not ideally suited to much serious discussion of the matters we presumably all thought we were there to address.

There appears to me to be at least one thing that could be done to reduce the negative effects of what is, in theory, a very laudable effort to democratise Darmstadt; and I feel the more confident about suggesting it, since not only does it appear to tie in with Hommel's encouragement of independent presentations of various kinds mounted on an ad hoc basis, but it might also work better in bringing together those interested in a particular subject to meet in smaller groups for more extended discussion and listening. Some speakers stimulated such interest, even as they battled with the disadvantages of the ego parade, that they were able to attract some kind of audience for a few hastily arranged extra sessions. Hommel, as I said, seems to encourage this. But at present there is simply too much going on and channels of communication are too erratic to allow such independent projects to take flight. If, on the other hand, such project leaders were selected in advance, I feel the consequent lack of democracy would be a small price to pay for what could be the most stimulating sorts of experience I at least can imagine taking away from Darmstadt, should I go again.

I even have two suggestions for such people. Lev Koblyakov, a Russian-born musicologist now living in Israel and just about the only person ever to have

produced a convincing serial analysis of Boulez' *Le marteau sans maître,*[4] was persuaded to offer some seminars on this work at Darmstadt 1988 which proved fascinating (though I was not able to attend them all); his defence of serialism as a still viable basis for present-day composition seems unusually well-argued, and a series of presentations from him in a future year would surely be an eye- and ear-opener. Revealing too, I suspect, would be the chance to hear the German-born composer and theorist Konrad Boehmer, whose early book on open form[5] reveals only one side of what seems a fascinating critical mind, as those who have read his work in the Dutch journal *Keynotes* (he has lived in Holland for many years) will be aware. His seminars at Darmstadt 1988 on the social as well as aesthetic and technical issues currently confronting young composers – or rather the issues which he thinks they *should* be confronting and so often are not – could easily be extended into a whole series in a future year; if they were given in English as well as German (which Boehmer is, like Koblyakov, perfectly able to do), they would be especially valuable in opening up some of the difficulties of what so many English-speaking people simply write off as 'incomprehensible Adornian dialectics' and in encouraging a wide-ranging debate steered by an unusually perceptive but highly comprehensible thinker. These are the kinds of things Darmstadt needs, not the chat-show approach, however well intentioned.

The other area I found unacceptably chaotic at Darmstadt 1988 was the one of actual concert performance. It was, basically, good to hear such an enormous amount of new music in not much more than two weeks, and one accepts that one is not only going to hear a great many pieces one doesn't like but is also going to tire towards the end. From the listener's point of view, it is unfortunate that the long programmes of works by participants in the course come chiefly during the last days of the Ferienkurse, when one is already less receptive than earlier. There is, presumably, no alternative, since pieces must be selected, prepared and programmed during the summer school itself; or can pieces *really* not be selected, at least to some degree, in advance? I heard argument rage on all sides about this during the Ferienkurse, but the fact remains that composers who have organised their performers in advance have much more chance of getting a work on a programme than those who, following the rules, turn up with their scores in hopeful anticipation of a performance; so why not attempt to bring in a little more democracy here too?

However overwhelming the need is to present long programmes in quick succession at the end of the summer school to allow participants' works to be heard and performers to be heard as well, for the listener the effect is disastrous. Not only are long concerts placed end to end from at least the early evening onwards, but it is quite clear that no-one has any idea of *how* long these programmes will actually be. The knock-on effect not only reduces the conscientious listener to pulp by around one o'clock in the morning; it is, more importantly, unreasonably unfair on both composers and performers. Particularly, I'd say, on the performers, who are anyway, it seems, being asked to do far too much in too short a time; performers expect to be in a sense the servant of the composers, but the decent limits of this are being overshot as things stand. Planning such matters is never easy, but when I sat through (very nearly to the end) a concert in a large church in nearby Speyer (the only break we got from the venues in town, a relief in itself) and heard some 40 pieces in turn without any interval and without having been given the opportunity to get anything proper to eat since lunchtime, I realised that there was nearly no planning at all. If anything, things got worse from then on, until one realised in despair that the point of the whole thing, whatever it was exactly, certainly had nothing to do with being able to listen to and assess the music for itself.

Once again, an endless parade of egos and images was being put on view for the glorification of the participants only. The troubles were, it seemed to me, that glory was in short supply anyway in such conditions and that, more importantly, any educational purpose the summer school may have intended was utterly lost. One might argue that these concerts were not for listeners in the way most concerts are supposed to be. But even if the only reasons for putting on so many performances were to give the composers the chance to hear their own music and the performers the chance to practise their skills on new work, the circumstances under which these performances took place reduced the opportunity of learning anything from them, as I have already indicated, to nearly zero: apart, that is, from some insights into how *not* to arrange things and, perhaps, into how human nature operates under such conditions. Besides, everyone was potentially a listener for the majority of the time, so the frustration of inadequate listening conditions affected all. In this case I have no solution except to programme more carefully, which means more selectively, thus cutting out even more composers than is already the case. At least this would give the performers a better deal, which seems important since it is apparently becoming harder to persuade good players to submit themselves to the Darmstadt experience; word has got around about how they get treated, so something must be done.

The Kranichsteiner Musikpreis for composition this year was, unusually, awarded to a single composer, the 32-year-old German Klaus K. Hübler (not to be confused with the veteran Klaus Huber). Accounts of the process by which the prizes are awarded at Darmstadt inspire one with even less confidence than usual about the fairness and usefulness of music competitions. But in this case the decision seemed a just one, since the short programme of Hübler's compositions offered during the course suggested a serious and individual talent in the field of New Complexity. Works such as, most notably, *Arie dissolute* (1987) for viola and nine instruments offer something emotionally quite different from the music of his teacher Ferneyhough; Robin Freeman's assessment, in his review of Darmstadt 1986, of Hübler as 'a talented and ambitious composer who is taking his time to mature'[6] seemed accurate; I hope British listeners are given the opportunity to hear that talent maturing.

For the first time in several years no British composer shared in the Kranichsteiner Preis, though Roger Redgate was one of two regular participants who were commissioned to write a work for the 1990 Ferienkurse (the other was the Canadian Rodney Sharman). Performer prizes were, though, given to two British players, the pianist James Clapperton and the clarinettist Colin Honour (the other one went to the American soprano Lisa Jablow).

In conclusion, I'm glad I went back to Darmstadt after fourteen years, and the experience was in several

ways salutary. But I'd have to have a strong reason for returning again in the near future. Without some changes, on the planning front at least, those going next time are doomed to the frustration of a great deal of good energy going to waste.

1 See the following: Roger Heaton on Darmstadt 1980, *Contact 22* (Summer 1981), pp. 33-6; Christopher Fox on Darmstadt 1982, *Contact 25* (Autumn 1982), pp. 49-52, and Darmstadt 1984, *Contact 29* (Spring 1985), pp. 44-7; and Robin Freeman on Darmstadt 1986, *Contact 31* (Autumn 1987), pp. 35-8.

2 Paul Mounsey, 'Music in Brazil: Willy Corrêa de Oliveira and Gilberto Mendes', *Contact 31* (Autumn 1987), pp. 21-6.

3 Richard Toop, 'Four Facets of "The New Complexity" ', *Contact 32* (Spring 1988), pp. 4-50.

4 Lev Koblyakov, 'Pierre Boulez "Le marteau sans maître": Analysis of pitch structure', *Zeitschrift für Musiktheorie* (1977), pp. 24-39.

5 Konrad Boehmer, *Zur Theorie der offenen Form in der neuen Musik* (Darmstadt: Tonos, 1967). [A second edition is now available from the same publisher; appearing in 1988, its main text is identical to that of the original. The address of Tonus International Music Editions is D6100 Darmstadt, Ahastrasse 9.]

6 Freeman, op. cit., p. 37.