

REPORTS

LETTER FROM URBANA

THE 1963 Festival of Contemporary Arts at the University of Illinois included twelve musical events as well as two lectures and a roundtable discussion which posed questions illuminated by the concert programs. Edward T. Cone's lecture, "The Irrelevance of Tonality," developed the thesis that there are musical works in the pitch organization of which the perception of a central point of reference is crucial to the heard structure of the composition, while there are others, more frequently encountered in contemporary music but not absent from the music of earlier periods, in which the structure does not so depend, though the music may in some sense employ tonality. Boulez' lecture, "Poetry—Center and Absence—Music," a reflection of his recent preoccupation with texts of Stephane Mallarmé, reexamined various historical approaches to the problem of relating music and poetry and culminated in an expression of his own views; an affirmation of the "abstract" manner of handling texts, but with an insistence upon the idea of a symbolic common ground of meaning originating in the poem and motivating the music. The roundtable, "Approaches to Improvisation," whose participants were the composers Robert Erickson and Barney Childs and the performers Bertram Turetzky, Dwight Peltzer, and Eric Dolphy, discussed problems of improvisation and aleatoric techniques in music, questioning basic aspects of the composer-performer relationship.

From the point of view of Cone's lecture, the works performed on the first weekend, in concerts given by the Walden Quartet and the Illinois Opera group directed by Ludwig Zirner, offer interesting contrasts. The comparison between the pre-twelve-tone serial technique of Webern's Opus 5 and the segmented twelve-tone organization of his Opus 28; the juxtaposition of both these against Schoenberg's hexachordally organized Opus 45; and the contrast of all with Mayuzumi's deliberately static pieces obviously demonstrated markedly different orientations to the question of tonality. Thus, the serial "free association" of Webern's Opus 5 constantly approaches total chromaticism but sometimes permits emphasis on certain tones, whereas the symmetrical set formation of Opus 28 practically guarantees that this cannot happen. On the other hand, Schoenberg's Trio creates a wealth of tonal ambiguity. It seems constantly to be providing "roots" and "tonics," but closer listening reveals alternative possibilities in almost every case. The situation is like that of looking at certain Abstract Expressionist paintings: they can be perceived as somehow representational, but the degree of ambiguity involved is such that one must finally conclude that the essential com-

position of the painting does not depend upon any such reading. Although Mayuzumi's pieces connect obliquely with Webern's Opus 5 in their intense preoccupation with timbre and minute detail, the resemblance stops there; to be sure, many of the pitch structures are symmetrical, but prolonged and reiterated tones and patterns establish artificial points of reference.

This procedure is also basic to Boris Blacher's *Abstrakte Oper No. 1*, different though its style may be. Here the triadic structures provide roots, but the symmetry of polychordal root groups and of root progressions provides several alternative tonics most of the time. When Blacher breaks this symmetry to establish a prejudice for one or another tonic, it is almost always for satiric effect. The promise of tonality is also, if rather chimerically, present in Gianni Ramous' *Orfeo Anno Domini MCMXLVII*. Ramous's elusive pitch continuity, not so triadic as Blacher's, depends (to my ear) more upon microformal interval relations than upon larger-dimensioned relationships. There is, however, a striking moment at the end, when a triadic cadence seems to have been established, only to be shattered by a dissonant-percussive final codetta.

The second weekend provided a shocking contrast to the first, particularly for those listeners who prefer or even require music to engage them intellectually. The weekend began with a piano recital by Dwight Peltzer (not actually part of the festival proper) which included Salvatore Martirano's *Cocktail Music* for piano, Webern's Piano Variations, Op. 27, Robert Erickson's *Ramus-Toccata*, Raymond Sender's *Thrones*, and Boulez' Piano Sonata No. 1. Martirano's, Erickson's, and Boulez' works, in very different ways, all move beyond the limitations of serial microform into a larger-scaled, freer idiom, characterized by expressionistic extremes of violence and delicacy. Erickson's toccata included improvised passages, and Sender's piece was entirely improvised on an amplified piano against tape sounds, in total darkness punctuated by flashes of colored light, accompanied by a revolving cylindrical star chart which no one could see in the dark.

Following this, the Hartt Chamber Players gave a controversial concert consisting almost entirely of works by young composers. In Robert Ashley's *Complete with Heat*, the ensemble improvised against a quiet but very droll tape piece. In Charles Whittenberg's Electronic Study II with solo double bass, Turetzky battled the tape and won, and in the last piece, a realization of Cornelius Cardew's *Octet '61 for Jasper Johns*, the improvising musicians, joined by two speakers reading fragments of a wordy essay by Cardew, pitted themselves against four simultaneously played tapes. The balance of this program was divided between partly aleatoric works (Bo Nilsson's *Zwanzig Gruppen*, and Roman Haubenstock-Ramati's *Interpolations* for flute and magnetic tape realized by Nancy Turetzky) and

COLLOQUY AND REVIEW

“straight” composed works (Charles Wuorinen’s *Concert* for double bass alone, Donald Martino’s *Cinque Frammenti*, and Stefan Wolpe’s *Suite im Hexachord*.)

Saturday’s “Improvisation and Indeterminacy” concert featured the premiere of Erickson’s Piano Concerto, composed for the festival, Loren Rush’s improvised *Mandala Music* for three or more performers, Barney Childs’ *Welcome to Whipperginny*, a work which makes extensive use of indeterminate ensemble techniques (played by the University of Illinois Percussion Ensemble under Jack McKenzie), Stockhausen’s jewel-like *Refrain* (performed by Joseph Dechario, piano, Donald Andrus, celesta, and William Parsons, vibraphone), and John Cage’s *Solo for Voice 2* (sung by Grace Wieck, David Barron, and Durant Robertson), performed together with *Cartridge Music*.

Finally, the Sunday jazz concert, following an afternoon roundtable on “Approaches to Improvisation,” brought together the Eric Dolphy Quartet and the University Jazz Band (John Garvey, leader). The character of this weekend was fundamentally connected with its focus on virtuoso performers. Peltzer, Turetzky, oboist Josef Marx (of the Hartt ensemble), and Eric Dolphy all project intense performance personalities. The emphasis on improvisation and aleatoric music sharpened this focus. The wish to get the performer back into lively involvement with the creative process, greatly extending his privileges and responsibilities of collaboration with a composer, pervaded all the West Coast works. The East Coast parallel (and its European reflection) seemed much more aimed at breaking the habitual patterns of the performer by requiring him to adjust to unexpected and unpredictable elements introduced by techniques of chance. Since this approach is typically wedded to experimentation with various kinds of graphic notation which are open to very free interpretation, the result is similarly to involve the performer more deeply in the act of creation.

If the Erickson pieces (and to a lesser extent the Childs) seemed more interesting than most of the improvisatory or aleatoric pieces, this was probably because the control exerted by the composers effectively determined the musical macroform of these works and guaranteed stylistic consistency in their details. The Cardew piece relied entirely on Turetzky’s considerable gift as a director of abstract theatre, and on his performers’ understanding of the need for theatrical projection. The Cage piece suffered because it had no director of comparable talent, but only an electronic technician who, however competent (as James Campbell obviously was on this occasion), had of necessity to leave the performers to their own devices. The three singers rose to the theatrical occasion, but the performers of *Cartridge Music* did not. Neither the Cage nor the Cardew work was given a viable macroform by its composer, and

PERSPECTIVES OF NEW MUSIC

Nilsson's *Gruppen* also suffered badly from lack of macroformal organization, a problem inherent in its chance technique.

One might have expected the jazz concert to raise interesting questions about improvisation. The existence of a jazz improvisation tradition of long standing and the fact that Eric Dolphy is identified with a position of revolt against some major premises of that tradition seemed to augur a lively performance. On the contrary, Dolphy's quartet seemed far less free from restraints than, for instance, Peltzer, and was also less sensitive to psychological timing and to the effect it was creating on its audience. The jazz band, though not so "far out," was considerably more provocative.

It is possible to see in these trends a reaction against the mechanization of performers by impossibly complex technical demands, and against the anti-theatrical effect of synthetic music (with no performer); on the other hand, this preoccupation with chance may mean an abandonment of creative responsibility, and perhaps an improvising performer is merely a sloppy composer. The roundtable discussion of March 10 raised some important questions regarding these tendencies and—fortunately—did not pretend to have answered them.

The third weekend emphasized works with elaborate serial organization, of which three deserve special mention: Rochberg's oboe piece, *La Bocca della Verità*, Babbitt's solo cantata, *Vision and Prayer*, and Boulez' *Marteau*. Babbitt's restraint in using the legendary synthesizer for such subtle, precise, and unpretentious effects is in catholic taste, as is his treatment of the Dylan Thomas poem. The *Marteau*, on the other hand, certainly has a delicate, intricate, exotic vitality—in fact, its surface is so glittering that it is hard to see inside; but if the glitter is essential to the style of instrumentation, its length seems excessive for what it has to say. Rochberg's piece has a sober, astringent quality that makes a forbidding surface but the virtuosity of its instrumental writing helps to counteract this severity. One might be tempted to conclude that Rochberg's polyrhythmic complexity sounds, after all, like rubato, but this would overlook the cleanness of rhythmic contour and precision of linear independence which his work has.

The final weekend began with a concert of predominantly conservative music which included performances of Harrison Birtwistle's mild *Refrains and Choruses* for wind quintet by the University of Illinois Faculty Woodwind Quintet, Russell Smith's *Palatine Songs*, by soprano Jane Schleicher and a chamber ensemble conducted by George Hunter, Leon Kirchner's virtuosic *Sonata Concertante*, by violinist Paul Rolland and pianist Howard Karp, Chou Wen-chung's *Metaphors* by the University of Illinois Wind Ensemble, Robert Gray conducting.

COLLOQUY AND REVIEW

Marilyn Mason's organ recital was again predominantly conservative. The program's centerpiece was Schoenberg's somber *Variations on a Recitative*, Op. 40 and also included Ross Lee Finney's *Fantasy*, Daniel Pinkham's *Concertante No. 3* for organ and percussion, Charles Ives's *Adeste Fideles in an Organ Prelude* and *Variations on America*, John Cook's *Flourish and Fugue*, Normand Lockwood's *Quiet Design*, and Edmund Haines's *Suite for Organ*.

On the final Sunday evening program, the University Symphony Orchestra conducted by Bernard Goodman, played Dallapiccola's *Variazione per Orchestra*, Charles Ives's *Decoration Day* from *Holidays in a Connecticut Country Town*, and Burrill Phillips' *Perspectives in a Labyrinth* for triple string orchestra. The Phillips work exploits spatially articulated counterpoint and antiphony, and asserts its energetic character in lean, atonal textures. Pianist Stanley Fletcher with Robert Gray's Wind Ensemble gave a performance of Messiaen's *Oiseaux Exotiques*, whose virtuosity and exuberance sustain interest in what is principally brilliant texture and color for a surprisingly long time. The music festival closed with a performance of Bartók's *Cantata Profana*, under Harold Decker's direction. The soloists were tenor James Bailey and baritone Bruce Foote.

Some regrets: that Elliott Carter's *String Quartet No. 2* and Alberto Ginastera's *String Quartet No. 2* had to be cancelled, although the works that replaced them (Schoenberg and Webern) were certainly not inferior; that Conlon Nancarrow's pieces could not be programmed because of the lack of a special player piano, and that Ives's *Decoration Day*, already recorded, was selected rather than a less easily obtainable piece.

—Ben Johnston