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THE MUSIC OF STOCKHAUSEN, by Jonathan Harvey
Faber and Faber, 1975 (£6.50).

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Anyone who sets out to analyse post-war serial music in general, and Stockhausen's in particular, has an unenviable task ahead of them. In the first place, there are no norms, no traditional forms which the reader can be assumed to know about. In the second place, by definition, there can be only one correct solution; for the first time in musical history every pitch, every duration, every dynamic is liable to be the inevitable result of a predetermined scheme. So exact analysis presupposes page after page of magic squares, permutation tables and the like, and yet these numerical details — essential to an understanding of the way a piece is made — can't of themselves give any idea of the inherent effect of a musical composition, only of the author's technical resourcefulness.

Of course, Stockhausen's music wasn't written to be analysed; and a composer who can say "I'm trying . . . to produce music that brings us to the essential ONE. And that is going to be badly needed during the time of shocks and disasters that is going to come" is clearly concerned with broader perspectives than those of composition technique. On the other hand, although Stockhausen trusts above all in the power of his recent works to rebuild the ethical force of music in the times to follow some impending cataclysm, it is the works of the 50s that have already done more than those of any other post-war composer to systematically rebuild musical language. It's precisely these older works that hold the greatest fascination for Jonathan Harvey — they account for well over half the book — and that in turn condition his general analytical tone.

"This important and innovatory study of Stockhausen's music makes available for the first time systematic analyses of his works" claims the dust-jacket. Well, that's the publisher's claim of course, not the author's. Still, if one is going to analyse serial works at all, then only a systematic approach — by which I mean one that reveals the complete system on which a work is based — is really legitimate. In most of those works from the 50s on which Dr. Harvey concentrates his attention, this carries one basic implication: one must show how the materials of a piece are derived in their entirety from a basic set of proportions, and if the composer has chosen to modify or supplement his 'pure' conception (there's hardly a work of Stockhausen's from the 50s which doesn't contain such modifications), then the analyst is duty bound to enumerate and explain the alterations in relation to the original conception; that is, to show what was so wrong or ineffective in the original format of the composition as to necessitate the revisions. If one doesn't do this, then one can't go much beyond a phenomenological investigation of the work's surface: one sees the effect without identifying the cause.

The analysis of *Piano Piece V* — and to a lesser degree that of *Piano Piece X* — suffers fairly acutely in this respect. In *V*, Harvey identifies only those 'character groups' which stand out clearly from the grace-notes + long note layer, and the serial arrangement of the grace notes goes by without a mention (though there is an allusion to it in the next chapter). One can't hold it against Harvey that he doesn't realise that the whole final page is added on to the pre-ordained serial structure (actually it borrows its proportions from the beginning of the next piece) so as to reinforce the feeling of a 'coda'; I doubt whether anyone who hasn't seen the basic sketches would. But this sort of thing is particularly important in Stockhausen's case since, for all the reputation he may have as a manufacturer of formidably all-embracing systems, it seems to me that if the works up to *Kontakte* prove any one thing, it's his genius for compromise, for recognising the exact point at which the conception threatens to swallow communication, and reacting accordingly. This leads to another fundamental consideration, namely that Stockhausen's works, and the early ones in particular, are not just organisational systems dreamed up out of the void, but a series of extremely acute responses to an awkward music-historical situation. So it's not really sufficient to show *what* happens: at some stage, one must also be able to identify sufficiently with the composer's aims and historical situation to show *why*. Here lies, I think, a serious shortcoming of Jonathan Harvey's book, and it's one which is the more disappointing since, as a composer, he is in the ideal position to give a composer's-eye-view of the inner motivation behind the technical processes.

Stockhausen's first representative piece, *Kreuzspiel*, affords an extreme example of what I mean. Harvey's technical analysis of the piece is perfectly sound: four pages of text and a couple of diagrams suffice to demonstrate all the technical essentials. But why *Kreuzspiel* at all, as the next work after a Violin Sonata which

employs a fairly watery brand of classic dodecaphony? Is it really just a matter of Stockhausen's having heard a piano study by Messiaen which attracted him as sound, a two-piano sonata by Goeyvaerts which attracted him as form, and then having spontaneously decided to set about changing the face of Western music? Hardly: there had to be some motivation more powerful than ennui with old traditions, something more than the novelty value of Messiaen's "fantastic star music" (as Stockhausen called it at the time). Indeed there was: "Nowadays there are hours when I have a singular longing to welcome the End, to relinquish everything human, and to enter into the One and Absolute". Not the recent Stockhausen in pessimistic mood, but a thoroughly typical quotation from a letter written shortly after the composition of *Kreuzspiel*; the aim of total serialisation, as conceived by Goeyvaerts and Stockhausen (though not by Boulez!) was to attempt a musical image of Divine Perfection: the more complete and consistent the organisation, the nearer it was supposed to come to the divine model.

Naturally this music, as a reflection of divine permanence, is not dynamic in essence, but static. Hence the complete lack of harmonic movement in *Studie I*. When Harvey writes of this latter piece that "the limitation of the intervals to major thirds, minor sixths and minor tenths makes for a rather monotonous piece", he is making a perfectly reasonable musical judgement. When, however, in the next sentence, he claims that "it is a case of elaborate systematisation being used to achieve something that fantasy could have done much better in half the time", his assessment of the piece's aims is at a tangent to the composer's (which doesn't, of course, necessarily invalidate his judgement on its quality as music). In another letter dating from the time *Studie I* was being realised, Stockhausen writes: "It is unbelievably beautiful to hear such sounds, which are completely balanced, 'calm', static, and only 'lit' by structural proportions. Raindrops in the sun . . ."

Another shortcoming of the book as a source of 'systematic analyses' is, I think, attributable to Jonathan Harvey the composer rather than Dr. Harvey the analyst. In discussing the double function of each note in tonal music, firstly as an interval in relationship to the preceding note, secondly as one in relation to a tonic, Harvey goes on to observe: "Unless the double meaning of each note is made clear by the composer the significance of the music is less by half, or at least the pitch part of it is". The equation music = pitch (which the author allows to stand, despite the modifying clause) is central to Harvey's analytical approach; it's by no means an eccentric view of musical structuring, heaven knows, but it just isn't Stockhausen's, least of all in those works to which most analytical space is devoted. Pitch plays only a minor role in Stockhausen's formal thinking up to *Kontakte*; as often as not, it's the last aspect of a piece he thinks about.

A drastic example is *Piano Piece VI*: the composition went through several drastic revisions, during all of which the formal proportions, based mainly on durations and groupings, are either exactly maintained or enlarged, whereas at one stage the entire system for obtaining the pitches — little more than a mechanism in the first place, and bearing no relation to the remaining, organically organised parameters — was totally changed from a system based on filtered sets of 12 to systematic permutations of 6s. In *Piano Piece XI* the pitches have no autonomous existence at all: they are simply a transcription of the rhythmic values into interval ratios (the 2:1 ratios being rendered as 'dirty' octaves — sevenths or ninths). Once again, Harvey's actual analysis of pitch sets is perfectly sound for the most part; on the other hand, pitch and particularly its manipulation in terms of serial set relationships, plays almost no essential part in Stockhausen's broad-scale structuring (things are different in *Mantra*, the last piece Harvey discusses). This has a simple consequence: since for Stockhausen, pitch normally has only local, not formal, significance, there is a distinct shortage of analyses which explain Stockhausen's large-scale planning, one of the most imposing aspects of his work.

As I've suggested, the analytical shortcomings of the book result from its independence of the 'horse's mouth' as a source of information (in contrast to the books by Wörner and Cott);¹ yet in a way, this is one of the book's main strengths. For once, one has a sympathetic account of the music written from an upright stance, not on bended knees. And although the analyses, for all their faults, may constitute the chief novelty for English readers who haven't read — or can't read — the three volumes of Stockhausen's essays published in Germany,² it's the more speculative, philosophically tinged passages which provide the most food for thought. Harvey's attempt to locate the text compositions of *Aus den Sieben Tagen* within certain currents in European philosophy and literature is interesting, precisely because (and in the degree that) it diverges from Stockhausen's own interpretation of these pieces' raison

d'être (though it's a pity that he never actually comments on the acoustic results these texts have led to . . .). Seen in this light, even the defective analyses have a certain interest: they highlight the discrepancy between conception and realisation, even if — ipso facto — they are unable to comment on it.

To return to prosaic matters, the index to the book is as fine a piece of chaos as I have seen in years. *Inori* and *Herbstmusik*, both mentioned twice in the text, are omitted from the index. This latter also includes a fictitious work, "Vier Chöre" (correctly listed elsewhere in the same index as *Drei Chöre*), a wrong title ("Study for Orchestra") for *Formel* (always correctly titled in the text, though at one point wrongly described as a student work, i.e. pre-*Kreuzspiel*, only to be corrected a few pages later), a mis-spelling of *Monophonie* (also correct in the text itself) and a series of page references for the *Piano Pieces* which must have been arrived at by chance operations. No doubt this aberration is the work of the publisher, not the author. No correction is possible: it can only (to misappropriate a comment of Stockhausen's apropos of *Ytem*) "be purified by fire".

NOTES:

¹Karl H. Wörner, *Stockhausen: Life and Work*, introduced, translated and edited by Bill Hopkins (London: Faber and Faber, 1973); Jonathan Cott, *Stockhausen: Conversations with the Composer* (hdbk., London: Robson Books, 1974; ppbk., St Albans: Paladin Books, 1974). For reviews see CONTACT 7 (Winter 1973-74), pp. 34-36 (Wörner) and CONTACT 10 (Winter 1974-75), pp. 37-38 (Cott).

²Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Texte*, three volumes (Cologne: Verlag DuMont Schauberg, 1963 onwards). Richard Toop has translated the second of these, which will hopefully be published in due course (Ed.).