SPNM TENTH COMPOSERS' WEEKEND
JULY 16-19, 1976

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This year's Weekend, directed by Barry Guy and Richard Orton with the assistance of Peter Aston and Paul Patterson, kept to much the same format as in previous years, with, however, perhaps more emphasis laid on formal lectures and seminars. The Weekend gives its participating composers, many of whom do not benefit from contact with the kind of stimulating environment found in, say, a university community or the London scene, the valuable chance of sampling rehearsals and performances of a wide range of music written for the available two small instrumental ensembles. This year these consisted of clarinet, violin, cello and piano, with or without double bass, and flute, trombone, guitar and harp.

The confessed aim of the Weekend — and even this was called into question this year — is to provide the composer with this sort of professional ensemble for which he can write a specific work, and with which he can rehearse and discuss it. This format, of course, necessarily does not attract the famous, but the advance notice of the instrumentations available is short enough to inhibit the slow worker. As in last year's session, there was an opportunity late each evening to hear tapes of performances of participants' works, of which there was no shortage. The importance of these occasions can certainly not be overemphasised.

A concert of Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* and Barry Guy's *Games (for all ages)* opened the Weekend's evening concert series. The Guy piece came out the stronger from performers who were in obvious need of an ensemble feeling which the *Quartet* was inclined to disperse and diversify. The performance of *Games* underlined the value of a sincere, non-cynical and, more important, a personal approach towards playing new music, which had already been implicit in James Fulkerson's workshop performance of a graphic score by Paul Johnson earlier in the day. Fulkerson sorted out ambiguities in the ensuing discussion as efficiently as those in the score itself. Sheer confidence of this sort helped to raise the standard of comprehension and conversation for the whole Weekend.

Though a lecture entitled 'Criteria in Contemporary Music', given by John Marlow Rhys, and a seminar of criticism following it, led by Hans Keller, promised to be the central verbal event, it failed as such, and attention slid away to the sideshows. These included host-professor Peter Aston talking on the composer and the church, Richard Orton cataloguing and connecting different activities all over the world under the umbrella of 'environmental music', Roger Marsh giving a suitably theatrical account of his own music-theatre works, and Peter Wiegold applying his editorial

experitise to sorting out some of the notational problems and anomalies of scoring new music. Denis Smalley offered otherwise inaccessible ideas derived from Pierre Schaeffer's research into the morphology and typology of sounds. He sent many composers away with at least some common vocabulary to apply to the compositions using tape that were aired over the Weekend: Lyell Cresswell's *Drones III* and Richard Orton's *Ambience* (both for trombone and tape), Bernard Parmegiani's *De Natura Sonorum* and John Schneider's *Voyage* amongst them.

Discussion-rehearsals accelerated towards a concert of participants' works — but with the spectre looming ahead of the collapse of the London concert (which customarily follows the Weekend), due to the unavailability of the performers. For those who had sacrificed rehearsals for lectures the concert produced pleasant surprises. Michael Maxwell drew superb mixtures of sounds from the ensemble of flute, trombone, guitar and harp, which tended to draw attention in a new way to the individual instruments used, outside the identity of the group. Henry Brown asked for his instruments and players to portray characters from Gogol's *Diary of a Madman* and pulled it off without a hint of simplicity. Edward Shipley's *Seventh Enochian Key* was a work inflated to almost epic proportions from a small ensemble and relatively few material resources.