Reviews and Reports

URS PETER SCHNEIDER Liederbuch, parts 1-4 (£1.90)
Zeitraum, string and/or wind quartet (£1.80)

Obtainable from Ears Project, Top Flat, 6 Kingston Road, East Didsbury, Manchester 20.

DICK WITTS

If any country clearly exposes the dumb notion of nationalist culture, it's Switzerland. Distinctive features are its inhabitants' wealth (houses built like banks), arts patrons such as Sacher from Hofmann-La Roche ('Bartók acknowledges the support of Valium') and its concentration-camp treatment of immigrant labour, 'guest workers'. Aside from that, the composers could be living anywhere, even Britain. Problems of creativity are a question of harmony, hardly parochial.

39-year-old Urs Peter Schneider[1] lives near Bern where he teaches and began the group New Horizon a decade ago. He's known mainly for anarchic works that combine sound and action: in the effective *Quirinius,* which I heard and saw at the 1974 Lucerne Festival, the Neue Horizonte members struck both a wall-like sheet and semaphore-signal postures, producing muted resonances from the tuned gongs mounted behind the sheet.

As well as the music-theatre events he'll now and again create delicate, epigrammatic pieces which may be collected over several years to form an aural diary, similar in scope to Stockhausen's Klavierstücke. The *Song Book (Liederbuch)* is such a collection. Schneider intends to have 'ten parts on ten texts of German poets (11th-20th centuries), each of the texts composed in one, two, six or thirteen manners'. There will be 35 songs, meaning that each of the ten parts will contain different settings of the same text composed at different stages of his career. Most of his work has an immense gestation period: *20 Situations* (1960-69), *Babel* (1961-67), *Crosses* (1964-67), etc.

The first four parts of the *Song Book* are already completed. The texts are as follows:

1. 'Apart', a secular poem by Robert Walser (1878-1956), a Swiss writer who lived in Schneider's resident town of Biel (two versions).
2. 'Reason', a sacred poem by Angelus Silesius, really Johann Scheffler (1624-1677), a key proponent of the Counter-Reformation, a Lutheran turned Catholic (six versions).
3. 'Waltz', a two-stanza secular poem by Novalis, really Friedrich von Hardenberg (1772-1801), known chiefly for his mystical writings (two versions).
4. 'Nostalgia', a sacred poem by Heinrich von Lauffenberg (c1390-1466) (one version).

This makes eleven songs, all but the last on single sheets of manuscript paper. The piano part is limited to the treble stave. All songs employ diverse aspects of serial technique; the *Song Book* is serial in all senses. It's altogether a domestic affair: Schneider is a fine pianist and his wife Erika Radermacher a fine singer. The book is made 'für Erika', and they've included some of these songs on a recently-recorded L.P. Notice too that Schneider states the sacred or secular nature of the texts. Much of his music has ironic religious connotations: *Spiritual Exercises for peope of all sexes, Jesus Music, Babel,* etc. Traditionally all ruling-class music is absorbed with theology (Perotinus to Kagel): something to dwell on sometime, but for now we must pass by on the other side.

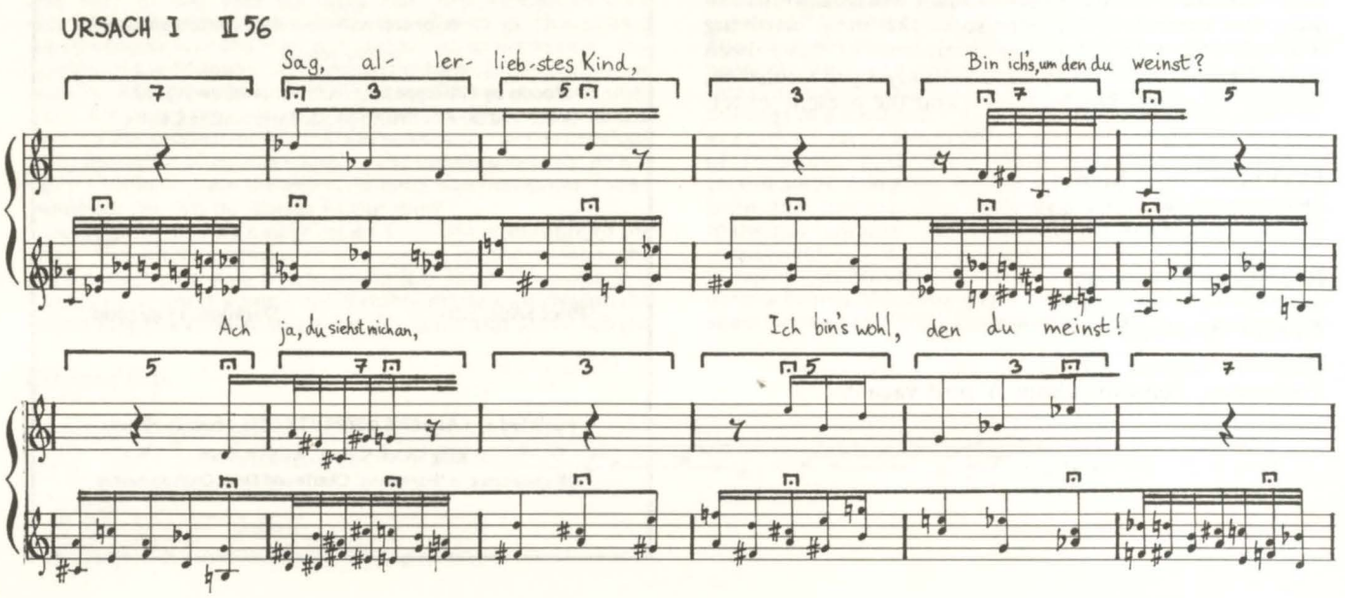
Due to limitations of space, I want only to tell you a little more about the second part of the *Song Book,* the six settings of Silesius' verse with its personal-punning title (Ursach/Urs sagt).

Sag, allerliebstes King	Say, dear child
Bin ich's, um den du weinst?	Is it me that you're crying for?
Ach ja, du siehst mich an,	Ah yes, you're looking at me,
Ich bin's wohl, den du meinst!	It's me that you mean.

24 syllables, 2x12 or 4x6. A suitable case for twelve-note treatment, one pitch per syllable. Here's basic information on the six settings:

1. (Feb 1956) One pitch per syllable; equal durations, but with tempo modification.
2. (Apr 1957) Two pitches on the fourth, sixth, tenth, 16th, 20th, and 24th syllables only.
3. (Mar 1959) Two pitches on even-numbered syllables only; rhythm: ♪♩.
4. (Mar 1967) Two pitches on last syllable only; rhythm: ♪♪ with tempo modification.

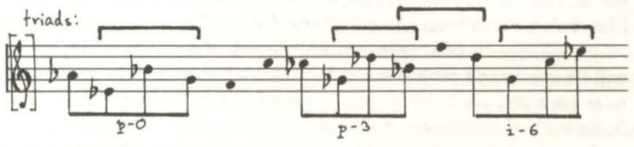
Example 1



5. (Aug 1969) Two pitches per syllable; unequal durations.
6. (Jun 1974) One pitch per syllable; rhythm: ♩. ♪. .

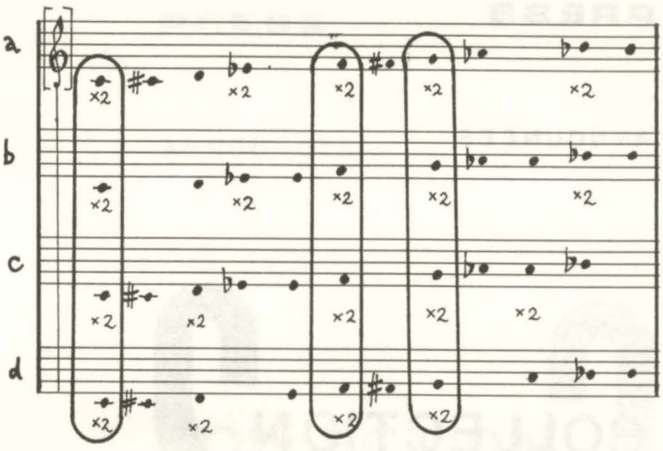
Each song is constructed serially, but with exciting variety. The most directly Webernised setting is the fourth (1967), while the first (1956!) employs triads in neotonal formations. This first setting is shown in Example 1. There are 15 keyboard dyads for each line of text, all major thirds or minor sixths. The voice supplements the dyads to make major triads by adding the fifth. The roots of the dyads and triads form the series shown in Example 2; notice the preponderance of perfect fifths and minor thirds (and their inversions) which produce imbedded triads.

Example 2



If the series shown in Example 2 is P-O, then the series associated with the remaining three lines of text are, respectively, I-6, RI-8 and R-2. The transposition of the second half by a tone heightens the singer's answer to her opening question. It also redistributes the constituent pitch classes while retaining the neotonal bias that places this song in such a distinctive harmonic netherworld. The strongest tonal references are achieved through duplication of pitch-classes: Example 3a shows the 15-note series reduced to a 10-element pitch-class set. Notice how, the endorse the hierarchy in the overall structure, the transformations of the series allow duplication of the same pitch-classes: F-C-G, themselves a sequence of fifths (Ex. 3a-d). As a whole, this song is a worthy union of systematic harmonic construction and text. The retrograde retracing in the second half matches the self-reflecting nature of the answer. Sensitive stuff.

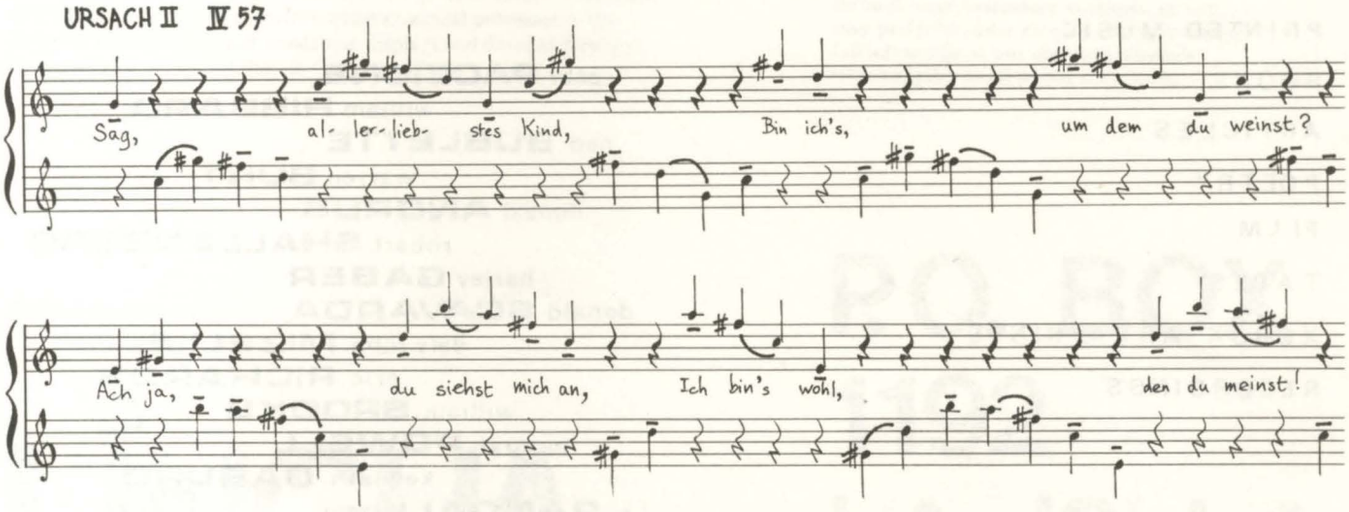
Example 3



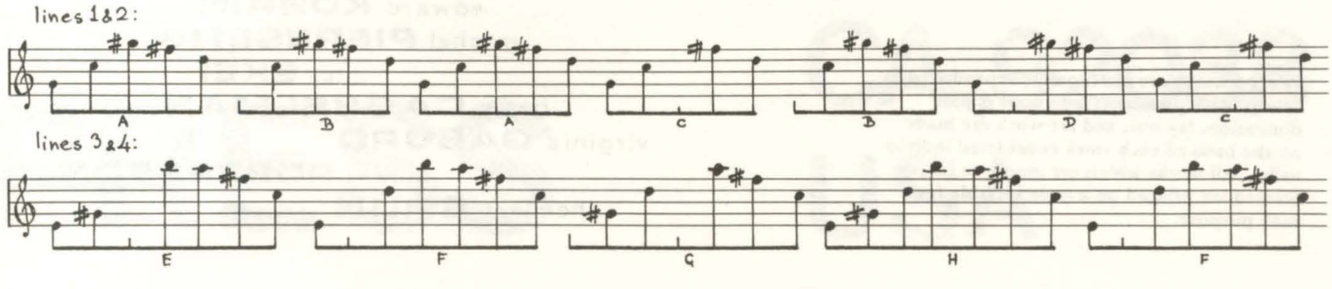
Compare the second setting of two years later (Ex. 4). Here the material is restricted to two sets, five pitches of the first half, seven for the second, repetitions of which undergo a process of subtraction (Ex. 5). To imply that textual answering mentioned earlier, the second half retrogrades and exchanges the division of contour between pianist and singer, and employs reformed cyclic sets. Throughout the book there's this marvellous marriage of piano line and voice. Such subtle interplay is explored to expose further resonances in the construction of the text. Anyhow, the above extracts should give you some idea of a fascinating collection of songs that has a lot to offer us.

Time and space now only for a brief account of *Zeitraum* (1977), another reflective, still, eloquent work for string or wind quartet (or mixture). Its twelve sections are separated by long spaces as though etching a series of monoliths. Each section is a twelve-pitch series presented four times in succession, distributed over a four-octave span in different dispositions at each presentation. The equal halves of each

Example 4



Example 5



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And there are other resonances. Lingua Press asked each author whose work is published in Collection Two for a response to the following invitation:

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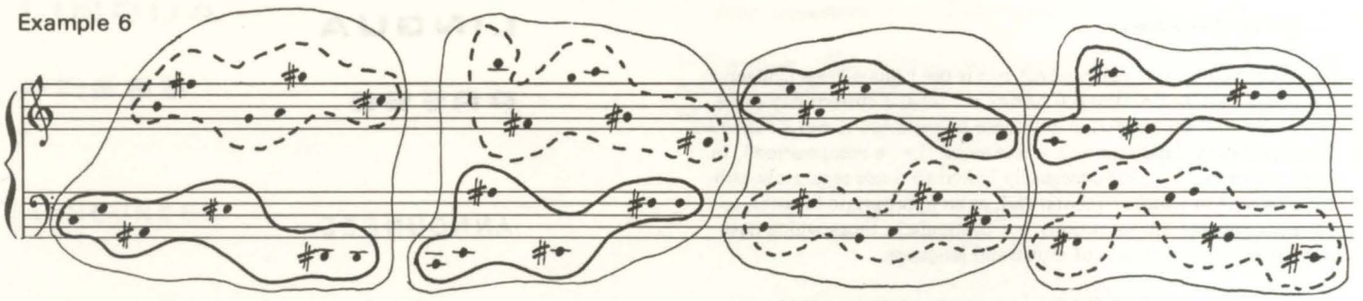
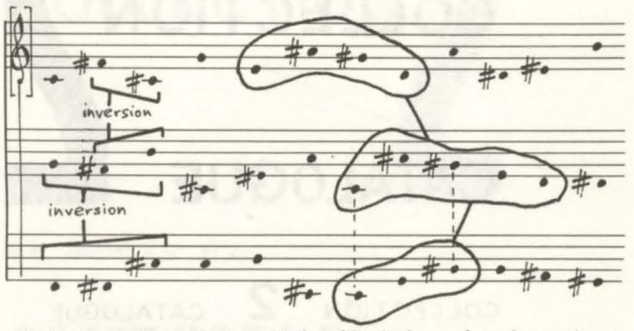
Example 6



series are clearly separated into treble and bass staves (Ex. 6). Each series is disconnected. However, motivic connections and permutations occur as slowly dissolving traces of the past. Examine the last three sections (numbered from zero) (Ex. 7). Incidentally, section 9 is formed of tritones, the most systematic of the series.

Example 7



The musicians share out the 48 pitches of each section to invent an almost intangible four-part harmony. Certain pitches are punctuated by interior rhythmic repetitions or their component harmonics highlighted, and rates of vibrato are varied. But this inner lighting — timbral polyphony — serves to emphasise the overall finesse and sense of slow floating. Its serene concentration is quite singular, and that's why I recommend *Timespace* to you, as an amiably social piece to penetrate. It takes up perhaps 20 minutes of your time. It may be attempted by groups of any standard. Even the Amadeus could cope with it, if they cared.

NOTE:

[1]For further information on Schneider see his entry in John Vinton (ed.), *Dictionary of Twentieth-century Music* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974). (Ed.)

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

Dear Sirs,

In his article 'Intermodulation: A Short History' *(Contact 17),* Tim Souster provides a list of 'inspirations'. Unfortunately, some of the information is incorrect. Firstly, the Stockhausen concert featuring *Mikrophonie I* and *Prozession* took place in 1967, not 1966. Secondly, the performance of Cardew's *Schooltime Compositions* at the International Students' House should be dated 1968, not 1969. Thirdly, and finally, the work by Terry Jennings in the long concert at the Round House was a String Quartet, not a String Trio. This last mistake is curious because Tim Souster himself was playing second violin!

Yours faithfully,
Howard Skempton
27 Waldeck Road
London W13 8LY

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DAVID ROBERTS

Since this is a rather large batch of scores I have had to talk about most of them in more general terms than I should have liked. However I have attempted to give a more detailed treatment to some of the musical processes involved in *Ave Maris Stella* which I hope will compensate in some measure for the relative superficiality of the remainder.

The most recently published of the batch was in fact the earliest to be written. *Stedman Doubles* was composed in 1956 while Davies was still studying at the University of Manchester and the Royal Manchester College of Music. At that time, and related to his interest in Messiaen, the composer was much preoccupied with the music of India (upon which he wrote his Mus.B. dissertation) and the work is explicitly built upon an Indian model. The title is taken from the well-known change-ringing method upon which, we are told, the serial material of the work is based. (The precise nature of this relationship between bell-peal and set is obscure, at least to me, though I know of several instances in other works where permutation patterns are based on bell changes.) In its original scoring the piece was for clarinet and three percussionists, in which version it was never performed. Davies revised it in 1968,condensing the three percussion parts to a single part and modifying the clarinet part to take account of Alan Hacker's performing capacities, thus producing a highly virtuoso work. The published version, though dated 1968, differs slightly from the one in which the work was given its first performance in that year.[1] On that occasion certain sounds were 'modified electronically in performance' — at least, so ran the programme note; the rudimentary electronics, which contributed little to the overall effectiveness, have disappeared from the published score. *Stedman Doubles* has been performed but infrequently, and together with the Trumpet Sonata (1955) and the Five Piano Pieces (1955-56)