NEW MUSIC DIARY

BRIGITTE SCHIFFER

Tuesday April 3 , 1979

Richard Stilgoe, the entertainer and television personality, was the star of a Gala Concert given in Leicester by the Leicestershire Schools Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra and Massed Junior Schools Choir. He recited Ogden Nash's verses to Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals* and scored a success that was not even equalled by that of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*. The main musical attraction of the concert was the world premiere of Douglas Young's *Journey between Two Worlds* for solo voice, double treble choir, steel band, rock group, hand bells, children's recorder and percussion group and a large orchestra, commissioned by the Leicester School of Music. It was performed, or so it seemed, by all the children of the region, and it was a tremendous affair, a joyful and boisterous occasion which was a delight for the parents and a challenge to the children. Peter Fletcher conducted with great authority and succeeded in drawing a remarkable performance from the young people, but what Young had hoped to attain — a vast co-ordination of all the groups, their entries and their movements — would have needed a Bernstein and, thank God, Fletcher is not that. Neither is Young, but together they succeeded in building up some spectacular climaxes without, however, achieving the balance that would have welded the different episodes into a unified whole. All the same, the immense effort put into the realisation of this ambitious project was plainly justified by the enjoyment of all concerned, and the event will be remembered by the young musicians as a unique experience.

Sunday April 22

London audiences were lucky in being given the opportunity to hear Màrta Fâbiàn, the distinguished Hungarian cimbalom player, in a concert at the Riverside Studios. Over the years people have become used to identifying this instrument with folk and peasant music, but a number of young Hungarian composers have drawn inspiration from Fabiàn's astonishing skills and the programme contained a number of recent works, most of them new to this country.

As Istvàn Lang's *Improvisation* for solo cimbalom unfolds, big gushes of sound are hurled through space and thrown against a barrier of brass tremolandos played at great speed and with great vigour. There are also delicate decorations and powerful rhythmic accents and, in the hands of this remarkable artist, Lang's *Improvisation* turns into a piece of extraordinary appeal and character. In Jòzef Soproni's *Tre Pezzi* for flute and cimbalom, the contrast between the fluidity of the woodwind intrument and reverberation of the plucked and pedalled string instrument was expertly exploited by the composer, and the flute exquisitely played by Tihamér Elek who was also the soloist in a *Soliloquium* for flute by Zoltàn Jeney. Andràs Ligeti was the brilliant interpreter of György Kurtàg's Eight Duos for violin and cimbalom, pieces that were marked by passionate outbursts and delicate filigrees, lyrical statements and melodious interludes in which both instruments joined. The programme ended with Miklòs Kocsàr's highly romantic *Repliche,* in which the composer achieved a fusion of cimbalom and flute, turning the resulting sound into a medium of great expressive intensity.

Wednesday May 2

As everyone knows, the English Bach Festival isn't what it used to be and hasn't been for quite some time. No longer do we congregate in Oxford for those sensational Xenakis retrospectives or on the South Bank for Stockhausen and Messiaen. Instead we congregate at Covent Garden to hear spectacular revivals of Rameau operas. Contemporary music has become a sideline, which was dealt with this year in 'a day of contemporary music to mark the 75th anniversary

of the birth and 30th anniversary of the death of Nikos Skalkottas'. Two concerts took place, one in the Purcell Room and another, later in the evening, in the Queen Elizabeth Hall. The four composers represented in both programmes were Benjamin Britten, György Ligeti, Nikos Skalkottas and Nigel Osborne, the last of whom is no longer a discovery but was the only newcomer, and a good choice too.

Britten's *Phantasy Quartet,* Op. 2 (1932) and Ligeti's Cello Sonata Sonata (1948-53) are early works of no more than documentary interest. The Dartington Quartet also played Britten's Third String Quartet, Op. 94, and Ligeti's Ten Pieces for Wind Quintet were played by members of the English Bach Festival Ensemble. As for Skalkottas, he was represented by his Third String Quartet, his Duo for violin and cello and the Andante Sostenuto from his Third Piano Concerto, a 22-minute long movement of which Marika Papaioannou gave a moving and memorable performance.

In the first concert Rohan de Saram played *Quasi una Fantasia* for cello solo by Nigel Osborne, a work commissioned by the EBF, which was inspired by Adorno and is dedicated to the memory of Skalkottas, with a sideglance at Theodorakis and Weill. Barely eight minutes long, the piece consists of small sections each of them containing a meaningful statement. Osborne's idiom is one of deep emotion and intense commitment, both conveyed by the cellist with great intensity.

In Osborne's *Prelude and Fugue* for four winds, four strings, piano and percussion (1975), played in the later concert, human relationships are explored and translated into a number of games governed by a set of rules and played out in a casual way between the individual musicians. On one level it is a study in communication; on another it is concerned with the poetics of structuralism; and on yet another, purely auditive, one it results in an ambiguous and shimmering fluidity, set off by some powerful outbursts and some very sparse and strangely contrasting episodes. The English Bach Festival Ensemble, under Yannis Ioannides, gave a strong performance of this seductive work, which was projected with great directness and well received by the audience.

On the same day, the Leicester Schools Symphony Orchestra and the Leicester Chorale joined the choristers of Westminster Cathedral for one of the New Macnaghten Concerts, which featured the *Shire Suite* by Michael Tippett, the *Missa Brevis* by Benjamin Britten, various arrangements of Charles Ives by Douglas Young and *Arcana* by Edgard Varèse. There were also two first performances: *In Parenthesis* by George Newson, commissioned by the New Macnaghten Concerts and giving the different sections of the orchestra challenging and rewarding tasks to fulfil; and *Feux d'Artifice* by Douglas Young, four minutes of juggling with irregular speeds, changing registers and variable dynamics — a clever little piece, played with great virtuosity by the young musicians under the competent direction of Peter Fletcher.

Friday May 4

The young American guitarist David Starobin and his ensemble (Rosalind Rees, soprano, Susan Palma, flute, and Susan Jolles, harp) introduced themselves at the Wigmore Hall with a programme featuring the premieres of works by Tod Machover (b. 1953) and Meyer Kupferman (b.1926), and first British performances of pieces by William Bland (b.1947) and Barbara Kolb (b.1939). Starobin is one of those performers who inspire young composers and we read in the programme notes that he has had more than 70 works written especially for him.

The eight-minute solo piece written for him by Bland, *A Fantasy Homage to Tomas Luis de Victoria,* is 'an etude in tremolo techniques', quoting extensively from Victoria and using traditional guitar devices. The strange combination of guitar and harp, chosen by Kupferman for his *Fantasy Duo,* subtitled 'Sound Objects VII', yields some very personal sound pictures of a fragile, evocative beauty, so that the composer's description of the piece as a dream journey seems entirely adequate.

Machover, a pupil of Carter and Sessions presently engaged in electronic research at IRCAM, contributed a short piece for guitar and tape called *Déplacements,* mainly concerned with 'the relationship between the abstract and unyielding tape and the striving guitar'. A ghost dimension emerges from the tape which combines with the live instrument in a way both highly imaginative and of great technical expertise.

The programme also contained pieces by Maxwell Davies, Toru Takemitsu and Stravinsky, but it was the 23-minute cycle *Songs before an Adieu* for soprano, flute and guitar, specially written by the young American composer Barbara Kolb for Starobin and Rosalind Rees, which met with the keenest interest. The accompaniment sets the mood for each song: small, ostinato-like patterns on the guitar depict the desolate flatness of a November morning ('Sentence'); a narrow network of lines (flute and guitar) surround the melody, sustaining e. e. cumming's words ('Now I lay'); soft arabesques and deep chords (flute and guitar) express frustration and disappointment ('Cantata'); agitated runs and flourishes of the flute form a background to the dramatic dialogue between a voice (spoken by the guitarist) and the soprano ('Gluttonous smoke'); the grave sound of the alto flute and some decorative guitar playing set the words of Guillaume Apollinaire ('Adieu'), beautifully sung by Rosalind Rees. The four songs have a strong impressionist flavour. Their deliberate simplicity is of a progressive kind and does not exclude a certain complexity of thought and idea, but it communicates well and was greatly appreciated by the audience at the Wigmore Hall.

Monday May 14

The unfortunate choice of the Purcell Room for a concert by the Aulos Ensemble proved, if not fatal, at least decisively detrimental to the works performed, especially to Philip Wilby's *Et Resurrexit Christus,* a work of 45 minutes' duration scored for three sopranos, five instruments, percussion, piano and chamber organ. It is intended for performance during the devotions of Holy Week and is designed for performance in a church. Nothing could be farther removed from the acoustics and the spiritual background of a church than the Purcell Room, and much of the essence of the work was, no doubt, missed by an audience which had already listened to over 40 minutes of modern music and was, by the time the *Resurrexit* started, already in a state of acute saturation. The work is in three parts: 'Ground', the first section, which deals with the event of Good Friday in a sombre and subdued mood; 'Psalm', the second section, an extended and at times passionate lamentation written for one unaccompanied solo voice; and a jubliant 'Surrexit Christus', the final section, which describes the resurrection of a living and immortal Christ. The sound may be modern and daring enough, but the thought behind it is entirely traditional, a discrepancy which may well explain Wilby's problem with musical language. By keeping closely to the original text and by illustrating the story step by step, Wilby allows the audience to follow and participate. The highpoints are mostly associated with the voices: the Seven Words on the Cross, set for three sopranos, and the Psalm, beautifully sung by Jean Knibbs, who was also the soloist in the third section. The composer conducted the excellent Aulos Ensemble, which gave a moving performance of this genuinely religious 'oratorio'.

Sette Spaci by John Buller, a piece for two winds, two strings and piano which opened the programme, consists of seven sections, each of them built around a seven-note chord that generates some intriguing webs of delicately interwining lines, occasionally interrupted by the harsh sound of some dramatic piano statements. It is a pretty piece, 13 minutes long, delicate and subtle, readily enjoyed and easily forgotten. A beautiful motet, *Cum Natus Esset,* and the rather uncharacteristic *Kammermusik 3* by Hindemith complete the attractive but over-long and over-ambitious programme devised by Wilby.

Wednesday May 16

It is hard to understand how one of the most interesting events of the month, an 'American Music Study Day' including three lectures, a lunchtime recital and an evening concert to celebrate George Crumb's 50th birthday, could pass almost unnoticed. Very few people took the trouble to find their way through the labyrinthine Barbican to the Guildhall School of Music and the first lecture, by Robin Maconie , on 'The Image in American Music', had to be cancelled for lack of attendance, although one would have thought that at least the students at the School would have shown some interest. The two afternoon lectures, one by Richard Steinitz on the music of George Crumb and the other

by Janice Hamer on 'America and the East', were given to an audience of five, myself included!

Even the lunchtime recital, given by such outstanding artists as Margaret Field (soprano), Rohan de Saram (cello) and the One plus One violin and viola duo did not draw a much larger audience for a programme composed mainly of songs by Schoenberg, Varèse, Roussel, Ives, Weill, Sondheim and Gershwin, most of them unknown in this country. It also included two works by Christian Wolff; the world première of his nostalgically Yankee *Rock about* and a strangely compelling Duo for Violins, both played by the excellent One plus One duo, Elisabeth Perry and Alexander Balanescu, and the London première of *Two Asanas* for piano by Janice Hamer, who intuitively caught the Eastern mood of timelessness and contemplation.

The George Crumb 50th birthday concert, given by members of Douglas Young's Dreamtiger ensemble, turned out to be an event of major importance, not to be forgotten by the privileged few who availed themselves of this rare opportunity to hear works by Crumb covering the period from 1955 to 1976. Three works by other composers were also included in the programme: Salvatore Sciarrino's short *All'Aure in una Lontanza* for solo flute, composed principally of shimmering harmonic tremoli; Colin McPhee's piano transcriptions of Balinese ceremonial music; and Douglas Young's *Lignes* for piano and claves, a study in articulation and phasing counteracted effectively by the static action of the claves.

Even in Crumb's first published work, his early Cello Sonata, there is already a hint of what was to come later, of the powerful imagination of a composer whose imagery is of an entirely personal kind and who is able to invent new performing techniques, draw new sounds from old instruments and stretch the means of expression to their utmost in order to realise his specific aural fantasies. Crumb has no models and belongs to no school, and his music does not show any influences. Having by-passed the post-serialists, he plunged without any hesitation into a world of textures and dreams, gestures and rituals of a very personal kind. His strange, sometimes exotic, often theatrical, always fascinating soundscapes can often be realised by a single instrument (as in the Cello Sonata), by a duo of violin and piano (the *Four Nocturnes),* by nothing more than a flute, cello and piano (*Vox Balaenae)* or, at the utmost, by two strings, piano and percussion *(Dream Sequence),* and each time the effect is charged with emotion and an electric undercurrent of excitement. The piano is occasionally drawn into a virtuoso display of percussive, resonant, melodious and sharply plucked sonorities, the flute can be ghosted by the voice and the cello is enriched by harmonics, glissandi and other sounds of an eerie, unreal character. The resulting imagery is irresistibly compelling, sometimes haunting, with dark forebodings, sometimes magical, with celestial visions. Emotion is the essence of Crumb's music, communication its key. For some the strong and immediate appeal of his music is suspicious; some object to his popular success, others miss the austerity of a Xenakis or the complexity of a Carter. I must confess to succumbing unreservedly to this kind of musical incantation, which projects all the more strongly when interpreted by such exceptional musicians as Rohan de Saram, the flautist Kathryn Lukas and their colleagues from the Dreamtiger ensemble. The American Study Day was a remarkable achievement on the part of Douglas Young as organiser, and pianist. The opportunity to discuss him as a composer must await another occasion.

Sunday June 17

For their anniversary concert in the RFH the London Symphony Orchestra commissioned Andrzej Panufnik (b. 1914) to write a work to be played without a conductor. A similar commission had been given by the London Sinfonietta to Nigel Osborne for a concert in the QEH only four months earlier, on February 21, and the memory of this work is still fresh enough in my mind to invite a comparison between the individual approach of the two composers to their respective tasks.

Osborne, when writing his 16-minute *In Camera* for 13 instruments (the thirteen principals of the London Sinfonietta), kept in mind the request for 'a piece of real chamber music': he first stressed the social aspect of a dialogue between different groups, then designed an elaborate interplay between solo and tutti, and finally allowed the guitar to dominate the scene as a brilliant soloist, finding challenging roles for each single instrument on the way and taking considerable risks which added to the element of suspense.

Panufnik, on the other hand, wrote a representative orchestral piece designed to achieve maximal display and minimal risk, and which was therefore always on the safe side, the side of the establishment, who got rich dividends for their daring initiative in commissioning a contemporary composer. Panufnik's *Concerto Festivo,* 15 minutes long, consists of three movements: a solemn brass fanfare, a lyrical centrepiece for strings and woodwind and an exuberant finale called 'giocoso', culminating in a boisterous and resounding tutti. In this case it was not each individual player but each section which was given some spectacular task, and problems, for both the performers and the audience, were carefully avoided. Nothing could have been more adequate for the occasion than this essay in orchestral virtuosity, which was brilliantly played and enthusiastically applauded.

The same day, twelve cellists from the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra gave a concert next door, in the QEH, which consisted mainly of minor works by unknown composers such as Klengel, Eder and David Howland, as well as a suite by César Franck, a *Bachianas Brasileiras* by Villa-Lobos and a suite by Boris Blacher: tit-bits suitable for whetting the appetite but leaving an uncomfortable and frustrating void. The Park Lane Group no doubt prevailed on the musicians to play some of their more demanding pieces, commissioned from, among others, Stockhausen and Xenakis, but one must assume that they were prepared neither to make the effort nor to take any chances.

Monday June 25 and Wednesday June 27

The most important event of this year's Festival of English Music at Christ Church Spitalfields, was the first London performance of Michael Finnissy's *Goro* for tenor and six instruments by the Nash Ensemble, who had premièred the work a few weeks earlier at the Bath Festival, for which it had been commissioned. In the programme notes Finnissy tells us that the piece is based on a nagauta, 'a form of shamisen music, meaning "extended song" but closer to dramatic recitation'. In view of the fact that the shamisen is a string instrument, not a vocal style or form, it is difficult to see its connection with extended song or dramatic recitation and, considering the highly un-Japanese delivery of the text, it is equally difficult to see why the words should not have been sung in English. As the links with the text are of the loosest kind anyway — the strident clarinet in B flat is called upon to illustrate a section concerned with the spring breeze, a nightingale and love, whereas the preceding section, calling for just retribution and sinister revenge, is set for voice, alto flute and harp — one would do better to treat this deeply poetic and, in parts, very beautiful work as a piece of pure music and ignore its exotic origin as well as its violent subject matter.

The 20-minute piece is divided into seven sections, each with its own very sparse, almost austere instrumentation. Long, wide-ranging and highly melismatic vocal solos, big swirls of sound cut off by long silences, delicate arabesques of harp with viola or flute and shimmering textures and mysterious drones, achieved by the most economical means, remain in one's memory. *Goro* is a piece of great imagination, evocative of some strange ritual and full of theatrical gestures. In this respect one is, at moments, reminded of Britten's church opera *Curlew River*, also based on a Japanese legend and making use of similar instrumental forces. In both works the harp adds to the soundscape a note of magic and mystery, unrelated to Japan but of an irresistible appeal.

The concert, which had started with a brilliant performance of Bliss's Clarinet Quintet (with Anthony Pay), ended in a light vein with Robin Holloway's Serenade in C. Each member of the Nash Ensemble ought to be mentioned separately, but, for lack of space, I will only name the excellent young tenor Alastair Thompson, who sang the vocal part of *Goro* with great skill and genuine musicality.

Two days later, we were treated by the Spitalfields Festival to a world premiere, a cycle of songs called *Variations,* commissioned by the Festival, written by Elisabeth Lutyens on poems of Ursula Vaughan Williams and presented with unfailing musicianship and

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commitment by Jane Manning (soprano) and Richard Rodney Bennett (piano). In these songs, describing the passage from winter to spring, there is little contrast, tension or variety but much lyrical thought and some textures of great delicacy. The music, concerned with moods rather than with images, succeeded in holding the attention for 47 minutes: no mean achievement.

Tuesday June 26 and Saturday June 30

In a programme judiciously devised by Julian Dawson-Lyell for a piano recital he gave in the Purcell Room, the new works were put into the context of modern classics. These terms of reference turned out to be particularly relevant in the case of Christopher Bochmann (b.1950), whose Sonata No. 2, *Sanctus*, 'based formally on the syntactic structure of the Sanctus and Benedictus movement of the Mass' and tightly held together within a framework of self-imposed laws and limitations, was preceded by Schoenberg's Three Pieces, Op. 11. Berio's highly atmospheric *Wasserklavier* and *Erdenklavier* were followed by Skryabin's Ninth Sonata, prefaced by a charming little *Albumblatt*, both played with great transparency and colour.

For the performance of Milko Kelemen's *Dessins commentés*, seven piano pieces inspired by Henri Michaux, Dawson-Lyell was well served by his familiarity with extended piano techniques. Every resource of the instrument had been mobilised by Kelemen in order to catch the flavour as well as the thought of the poems, and every modern piano device was used by the pianist in order to create a kaleidoscopic vision of individual pieces marked by some very effective improvisatory gestures.

The second part of the programme, which opened with a study by Stephen Oliver, ended with an exhilarating performance of Prokofiev's Seventh Sonata. The whole evening was a model of intelligent and high-spirited music making. More concerts of this kind would help considerably in overcoming the general suspicion towards new music.

All this, of course, is idle talk or rather wishful thinking, because what the public really wants are concerts like the one given by the Londn Chorale in the QEH the following Saturday, when they presented a programme composed of Mendelssohn's Overture *Fingal's Cave*, Fauré's Requiem and the first performance of David Bedford's *Of Beares, Foxes and Many, Many Wonders*. The work is scored for four winds, two strings, a large percussion section and mixed choir and divided into two parts, 'Autumn' and 'Winter'. Lasting some 20 minutes, it is 'the setting of part of the account by the chronicler Gerrit de Veer of the search by William Barents for a northeast passage to Cathay. Stranded on the coast of Novaya Zemlya in 1596, their ship crippled by pack ice, Barents and his tiny crew were the first men in history to face the bitter cold and endless night of an Arctic winter, utterly alone...' but, unlike *The Sinking of the Titanic* by Gavin Bryars, who attempted a minute-by-minute reconstruction of the event, this is simply a description of the catastrophe, relating the plight of the men in a simple, straightforward, tonal language. The devices used are old and approved and so are the influences (Hindemith and Walton).Though the common chord has been acceptable again for quite some time and though the quotation of a Renaissance chorale (Praetorius's *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen*) seems suitable enough to evoke Christmas in the Arctic, what makes the work so undistinguished is the absence of anything by which to remember it. Even those who applauded so vigorously will be hard put to remember a single tune or hum any of the melodies they apparently so enjoyed.

Friday June 29

All other events of the month were eclipsed by a concert in which the London Sinfonietta gave a superb performance of Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*, subsequently recorded and now released thus making available an authentic version of this still almost unknown opera. It is difficult to understand how such a formidable work could have remained unperformed for over ten years and why neither of the two London opera houses have staged one of the most exciting and important operas by any living composer: all the more so in that it requires only six singers and 16 instrumentalists and would therefore be easy on the budget.

Punch and Judy, a one-act opera of one hour and 40 minutes' duration, was commissioned by the English Opera Group. The first performance took place at Aldeburgh in 1968, when the little Jubilee Hall shuddered under the impact of the aural onslaught and the 'locals' were dumbstruck and fearful. In all fairness it must be said that everyone was shocked and, though one was struck spontaneously by the power of Birtwistle's sound imagery, one was put off by the sheer din of screeching brass, wailing wind and screaming voices, an impression increased by the drastic staging of the work.

In the latest performance, however, all the subtle shades and lyrical undercurrents were brought out by a team of quite exceptional singers, among them Stephen Roberts, David Wilson-Johnson and the unique Phyllis Bryn-Julson, and even when extremes of dynamics and register were called for, one's ears were never tested beyond endurance. When one has a closer look at the score, one finds that every note is derived from a small set of pitches and intervals and that the underlying structure, as tight as that of Berg's *Wozzeck* and also composed of small set pieces within a larger frame, is responsible for the compelling and inescapable logic of the work. Like *Tragoedia*, an earlier work of Birtwistle's, it is concerned with the ritual and formal aspects of Greek tragedy. On another level dreams are played out, traditions brought in and one is held with an iron grip in the spell of this 'tragical comedy or comical tragedy', for which Stephen Pruslin, the well-known pianist, wrote the strange and highly formalised libretto. David Atherton conducted this extraordinary performance, in which every single member of the London Sinfonietta surpassed themselves in precision and virtuosity: a memorable occasion for which congratulations are due to the organiser, the conductor and all the participants.

Saturday July 7

Lysis is a new and variable chamber ensemble built around a nucleus of three people: Roger Dean, piano, double-bass and vibraphone (the director of the group); Ashley Brown, percussion; and Hazel Smith, violin. A concert they gave in the Purcell Room started very promisingly with a lively performance of one of Hindemith's most enjoyable and endearing little *Kammermusiken* of the 20s, the Three Pieces for five instruments, which was followed by Finnissy's eight-minute *Ru Tchou* for solo percussionist, an exciting piece of ceremonial drumming in which sections of varying density, dynamic, register and timbre, full of contrast and drama, are separated from each other by long and tense silences characteristic of ritual music from the Far East.

Lyell Cresswell's beautiful cantilena for trumpet, violin and double-bass, *Waiata Tungi*, based on a Maori lament and decorated with flourishes and arabesques, provided a welcome change from the virtuoso drum-tapping and beating of the preceding piece. This commissioned work would have formed a perfect ending to the first part of the evening, but two more pieces had to be heard before the interval: a short group improvisation and a long Violin Sonata by Charles Ives, played by Hazel Smith and Roger Dean.

Though Theo Lovendie's *Music for contrabass and piano* (1971) was full of clever ideas, there was not much more to the piece than some new techniques, some not-so-new gimmicks and a brilliant display of virtuosity, strongly influenced by jazz-playing and improvisation. The only other new piece on the programme, an eight-minute *Variation for Ensemble*, written for Lysis by John Wallace, started in an entertaining way but deteriorated gradually and outstayed its welcome.

July: St. Bartholomew's Festival

The following day, July 8, the 1979 St. Batholomew's Festival started with a lunchtime organ recital by Andrew Morris, who played works by Augustin Bloch, Miroslav Miletic, Simon Preston, Pal Karolyi and Herbert Howells as well as one of the four works by Paul Patterson included in the festival programme. The other recitals were given by Erika Wardenburg (harp), Monique Copper (piano), Karen Jensen (soprano), Rose Andrieser (guitar) and the violin and piano duo of György Pauk and Peter Frankl. Most of them

included in their programmes one of Berio's eight solo *Sequenze*, which were all performed during the seven festival days, and each event featured one or two items of special interest which attracted the audience and formed the core of the programme.

It was mainly the UK premiere of Barbara Kolb's *Three Place Settings*, with her *Homage to Keith Jarrett and Gary Burton*, which brought the public to the Anglo-American concert by the Lontano Ensemble on July 9, which I was unfortunately unable to attend. *Turenas* for quadraphonic tape, by John Chowning of Stanford University — a wizard with placing sounds in space — and Stanley Haynes's *Prisms* for piano and computer-synthesised tape, with its smooth transfer from acoustic to electronic sound, were the main attractions of the concert of electronic and computer music on July 10, which was organised and prepared with all the 'know-how' required but seldom achieved on such occasions.

The main attraction of the SPNM concert on July 11, in which the Arditti String Quartet and the Double Red Ensemble participated, was, no doubt, Berio's recent *Sequenza VIII* for violin, perhaps slightly less adventurous but just as difficult and inventive as the previous ones. It was beautifully played by Irvine Arditti, whose technical expertise proved to be on the same high level as his interpretative abilities. There was also Dominic Muldowney's *4 from Arcady* for four oboes, a piece in seven sections which kept the mind busy with its ever-throbbing pulse and its ever-changing time, and with its contrasts between austerity and exuberance, rigidity and freedom, and playfulness and aggression. There is never a dull moment in this ten-minute piece, which consists of a kaleidoscope of small structures that are, in turn, juxtaposed, overlapped, synchronised and telescoped. Time passed fast and the end came only too soon.

Numerous were the attractions of the lunchtime concert given by the excellent Suoraan ensemble on July 14. There was a competent and imaginative performance of Berio's *Sequenza I* by the young American flautist Nancy Ruffer, and a fascinating interpretation by Michael Finnissy of the early six *Epigrams* for solo piano by Brian Ferneyhough which, though complex and demanding enough, were made to sound much more relaxed and approachable than his later pieces. We also heard the first performance of Richard Emsley's *At Once* for two woodwinds, piano and vibraphone, which was sometimes faintly reminiscent of gamelan music: seven minutes of tinkling and titillating sounds, of lines that proliferate and disperse and of structures that split and disintegrate. It was altogether a pretty piece, pleasant to listen to and agreeable to remember occasionally.

The principal feature of the concert, however, was the world premiere of *Night Ferry*, a work for mezzo-soprano (Josephine Nendick), two woodwinds, piano and percussion, commissioned by Suoraan from Nigel Osborne, a setting of words by the Ulster poet Tom Paulin, just five minutes long but of such dramatic impact that all else became immaterial and time stood still. Like most of Osborne's works, it is committed music of the highest order and, with its terrific violence, its delicate lyricisms and its expressive power, it calls to mind memories of Luigi Nono's *Epitaph auf Frederico Garcia Lorca*, which so stunned its audience when first heard at Darmstadt in the 50s. In Osborne's piece, the voice passes imperceptibly from song to Sprechstimme and back to pitched recitation, to break into passionate outcries only twice, at moments of unbearable tension, whereas the drum beats on relentlessly, regardless of changes in landscape and mood, and will not be quietened until the very end, a tutti fortissimo of frightening intensity. Before this remarkable performance, Globokar's *Atemstudie* was thrown in for good measure, adding an extra dimension to a programme substantial and rewarding enough as it stood.

The Festival ended the same evening with a New Macnaghten Concert, given by Tony Coe's Axel and the Delmé String Quartet. The result was a sad mixture of so-called 'classical' music — Berg's String Quartet — and pseudo-improvised jazz, which succeeded neither in bridging gaps nor in establishing relationships and fell sadly between two stools.

Proms 1979

The 85th Season of the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts lasted from July 20 to September 15, 1979. The BBC commissioned only two composers, Oliver Knussen and Nicholas Maw, but two more first performances of works by Anthony Payne and David Wooldridge were also included in the programme. Striking newness and originality of thought were not found amongst the new works, but rather among those of well established composers such as Berio, Birtwistle, Carter and Lutosławski. It was a Prom season singularly void of surprises but with some remarkable programmes and some memorable single performances.

On July 30 — three days after they had given the British premiere of Crumb's *Star Child,* a piece which was ear-splitting rather than apocalyptic, irritating rather than grandiose — the BBC Symphony Orchestra, this time under David Atherton, presented another work by an American composer: Carter's *A Symphony of Three Orchestras,* one of the most demanding and most rewarding compositions of recent times. It had already been played in London once before , but this was an entirely new experience. During the 15 minutes of the performance the 'prommers' in the arena stood bolt upright. Not one of them sat down on the floor, as they so often do, or even as much as leant against the railings: so great was their concentration, so intense their listening that no one coughed, moved or relaxed until the last note was heard, and it was they, the young people from the arena, who applauded hardest, loudest and longest.

At the same concert Sir Michael Tippett conducted his oratorio *A Child of Our Time* — sensational when it was written, during the Second World War, but which has since lost much of its impact — and Lutosławski conducted the first British performance of *Les espaces du sommeil,* the setting for baritone and orchestra of a text by the French surrealist poet Robert Desnos, written in 1975 for Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, and admirably sung that evening by John Shirley Quirk.

In this shimmering and dreamlike nocturne, the unrelated, disconnected and incongruous images ('le pas du promeneur et celui de l'assassin et celui du sergent de ville') are held together by the ever recurring 'Dans la nuit... il y a toi', set every time to different pitches but identical gestures; and the ambiguity of the words ('toi': the imaginary, invented, made-up, unreal figure of a loved one) is first reflected in the hazy texture of the instrumental interludes and then, suddenly, contradicted by the anticlimax of the last line, when the baritone sings suddenly on a very high pitch, after the perennial 'Dans la nuit', an entirely unexpected 'Dans le jour aussi'. End of a dream; breaking of dawn; sleep torn apart. A very strange and disturbing piece.

The younger generation of British composers was represented by a single name, that of Oliver Knussen: at the age of 27 still a 'promising' young talent, whose Third Symphony (September 6), commissioned by the BBC no less than six years ago but only now emerging from its various stages as a work in one movement lasting under a quarter of an hour (and not 30 minutes, as listed in the prospectus) is yet another 'promising' work — over-brimming with ideas and with youthful energy, a work of uncertain shape and unmarked identity. The most interesting aspect of the symphony is Knussen's handling of time — where he acknowledges his debt to Hitchcock — but as long as he is engaged with writing symphonies, he should come to terms with the dialectics of the symphonic idea before trying his hand at systemic processes and polyrhythmic structures.

Placed between Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky (of the French period), the work was given a sympathetic performance by the BBC SO, under the American conductor Michael Tilson Thomas, who underlined Knussen's 'French connections' to good effect.

French connections were also very much in evidence in the two concerts of Pierre Boulez' Ensemble Intercontemporain, although only a single French work was featured in their programme: *Variants* by Patrick Marcland, a pleasantly undoctrinaire essay in serial techniques, which was preceded by Berio's *Chemins IIb* for viola and small orchestra — a piece of strangely austere and uncharacteristic viola-playing dominated by a small

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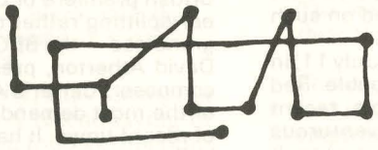

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number of gestures and performed by Gerard Caussé with great vigour and self-denial.

In the second half of the programme the orchestra was joined by the John Alldis Choir for the first British performance of Harrison Birtwistle's *...agm...* five months after its world premiere in Paris under Boulez. With Peter Eötvös, the new resident conductor of the Paris-based ensemble, the performance sounded equally precise and assured and communicated a sense of hieratic and monumental grandeur.

Set for 16 voices and three instrumental groups, *...agm...* is cast in the mould of Sapphic poetry. Twice before, in 1965 (*Entr'actes and Sappho Fragments*) and 1968 (*Cantata*), the great poetess of Lesbos had been Birtwistle's source of inspiration, but on both occasions he had used translations and something undefinable had always eluded him. Having discovered that Sappho's poems are actually much more fragmented than the translations had suggested, he went back to the original for his investigation of the nature of the fragments, their tendency to cohere and their irresistible striving for unity.

The very idea of 'fragment' is embodied in the title. The three letters 'agm' are part of the word 'fragment' and of its Greek equivalent 'agma'. They are also contained in most of Sappho's words and are at the same time used as abbreviation for 'Agamemnon', associated with the hunting net of death, which Birtwistle identifies with the implacable Sapphic metre or 'stanza'. As it happens, most of the words included in the three sets of fragments chosen by Birtwistle from the so-called 'Crocodilopolis cries' of Fayoum contain only these three letters, which are set in the original Greek.

Unity is achieved by relating everything to a central pitch and a central pulse, and the metre, sole survivor of the partly accidental, partly deliberate fragmentation of the Sapphic papiri, provides the grid through which phrases, words or syllables can be fitted into sets and can be made to cohere.

The verse-like structure of the work, the juxtaposition of heavy blocks and the explosive climaxes, the violent contrasts and the uncompromising dissonances, all these are typical Birtwistle gestures. And yet there is something completely new in this work: a greater harmonic continuity, a greater limpidity in the hard-edged and hard-boned sound complexes, a lyrical streak deeply buried in the dark textures of heavy brass and low strings, and we are forcefully reminded that 'Sappho's stanza is merely a way of holding things together' and that 'her main concern was to present an apostrophe to love'. Birtwistle's work is all that: an apostrophe to love, a lasting monument to Sapphic poetry and a powerful piece, his greatest achievement and his most impressive work to date.

Monday October 1

Thérèse, a one-act opera by John Tavener, was commissioned by the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden as far back as 1969 and was completed in 1976; its belated première took place on October 1. It is a many-levelled and many-layered work about the making of a saint and the making of an opera, also about the paradox of Thérèse as the 'little flower' of the Catholic church and the hard eyes of an ascetic that stared at Tavener from a photograph of her found some time ago. It was the posthumously published autobiography of Thérèse Martin (1873-97) which turned the uneventful life of this pious, sentimental, morbid and passionate girl into a 'cause célèbre' and led to her eventual canonisation, due to massive pressure of public opinion.

By introducing into the text such remote figures as Arthur Rimbaud and such unlikely locations as battlefields and concentration camps, Gerald McLarnon, Tavener's librettist, succeeded in turning the rather sordid story of Thérèse's life into a plot of action and suspense, almost a thriller, and provided the composer with all the ingredients of a successful traditional opera. Tavener responded appropriately: he wrote some potent orchestral interludes and some extended arias, held together by symbolism of the most basic kind, for which colossal forces were mobilised and use was made of the entire space of the Royal Opera House.

A look at the score reveals that the music also abounds in palindromes, circular and spiral devices, but what strikes the ear is the faux-naif aspect of the strongly ritualistic Tavener sound — which appealed to many, but not to all. Edward Downes conducted a strong performance of the work, that benefited considerably from David Williams's imaginative production, Alan Barlow's clever sets and the outstanding achievement of the singers.

Friday October 5

Four days later, the world premiere of *An Actor's Revenge* took place at the Old Vic Theatre. A Japanese composer, Minoru Miki, had been commissioned by the English Music Theatre to write an opera and the project was viewed with some suspicion, based on the deeply ingrained Western fallacy that all thing ancient and alien should for ever remain in their original state and be denied all development and evolution: a suspicion that proved entirely unfounded and was quickly overcome.

An Actor's Revenge is based on the story of Yokinojo, a famous Kabuki actor, and the revenge he exacts on the three men responsible for the death of his parents. Set in the 18th century, the opera was conceived and staged in the tradition of the Kabuki theatre. The producer, Colin Graham, well versed in Eastern tradition through his collaboration on Britten's *Curlew River,* was assisted by Kinosuki Hanayagi, a noted exponent of Kabuki, who trained the English company previous to their performance, and what we heard was no cheap imitation of one kind or another.

The music played by the EMT ensemble of seven was neither pseudo-Eastern nor evocative and atmospheric, but of a style modern enough to incorporate certain melismatic and rhythmic gestures which have long since ceased to be the hallmark of the Far East and are eminently suitable for the accompaniment of the singers on the stage. Meanwhile, a Japanese ensemble of three (koto, shamisen and percussion) was seated separately and made a display of breath-taking virtuosity, accompanying the dances and playing occasional interludes. The costumes were genuinely Japanese, and the difficult part of the title role was sung in English by one actor and mimed in Japanese by another EMT actor. If all this suggests a mixture of incompatible elements, then I have badly failed to describe a musical experience that was entirely enchanting and that revealed new ways of rapprochement between East and West.

Tuesday October 9

Singcircle's first concert of the season in St. John's Smith Square. There is no need to stress the accomplishment of the singers, the musicianship of their director Gregory Rose or the competence of their sound-technician Simon Emmerson; their performance was impeccable. If only they weren't so serious, if only there was, occasionally, a spark of humour, if only they would, from time to time, let themselves go. Their total lack of theatricality was particularly conspicuous in the two pieces by Berio: Sequenza III, an essay in new virtuoso vocal techniques sung by the soprano Penelope Walmsley-Clark with great skill but little stage presence; and *The Cries of London*, a featherweight exercise in verbal manners and vocal gestures, which stood at the end of the programme and would have done very well as an encore.

Of the three new works, Emmerson's *Ophelia's Dream II* was by far the most substantial contribution: he was the only one to exploit to the full the vocal, dramatic and electro-accoustic potential of the ensemble, and the work's process of disintegration, achieved through gradual division, splitting up and subsequent transformation of the verbal material, had a haunting urgency that left a deep mark on the first performance of this Singcircle commission. Hugh Barton's *Fire and Rose* for five amplified voices added little to our experience of the genre and Jean-Claude Risset's *Inharmonique* for soprano and pre-recorded tape will mainly be remembered for the gentle singing of Lynda Richardson, which formed a telling contrast with the sound track.

Thursday October 11

It is not easy to explain how Jan Latham-Koenig, such a gifted young musician and such a good pianist, could have got his bearings so entirely wrong, but it must be said that his ensemble's concert in the Purcell Room was disappointing, though the programme had been planned with great care. Milhaud's *La création du monde*, requiring 18 players and including an important percussion section, was totally unsuitable for the hall and had an ear-splitting effect entirely due to the acoustic conditions, whereas Schoenberg's First Chamber Symphony for 15 players without percussion however was not hampered by acoustics but rather by a strange misconception of style, through which Schoenberg was made to sound crisp and sharp, as if the work belonged to the Berlin of the late 20s, whereas Weill's *Dreigroschenmusik* sounded as nostalgic, languorous and romantic as if it belonged to the Schoenbergian Vienna of 1907. In between these two modern classics the ensemble played two works by Ferneyhough: *Coloratura* for oboe and piano (Robin Canter and Latham-Koenig) and *Prometheus* for wind sextet, both beautifully played. The structure of the ensemble piece was articulated by three cadenzas, and what had seemed inpenetrable in the confusing programme note became clear and audible in this well-prepared reading.

Wednesday October 24

A red-letter day, marked by the electrifying and memorable performance of *Eclat/Multiples,* one of Boulez' latest works in progress, which the BBC Symphony Orchestra played with admirable commitment under the composer's direction. The experience was unique in its gripping intensity, its spectacular colourfulness, its fantastic contrasts, surprises, intricacies. *Eclat/Multiples* grew out of *Eclat* (1965), an eight-minute work for nine non-sustaining instruments (piano, celesta, harp, glockenspiel, vibraphone, mandoline, guitar, cimbalom and tubular bells) and six sustaining instruments (viola, cello, flute, cor anglais, trumpet and trombone) that was to be extended by an as yet unspecified number of 'multiples', sections of growing complexity involving a growing number of sustaining instruments.

An entirely new section was to have turned this performance into a premiere, but what we actually heard was the approximately 30-minute version of 1970, scored for the non-sustaining nonet and the sustaining sextet with the addition of nine violas and one basset horn: i.e. a total of 25 instruments. Explosion, fragmentation and reflection of light: *Eclat/Multiples* was all that at the same time. The initial explosion burst on you with unprecedented vehemence, like a kind of super-firework; splinters of sound were caught up in uncontrollable turmoil, shafts of light were broken and reflected and glittering splashes of colour were set off by a display of dazzling virtuosity. The totally unpredictable interplay between the different and contrasting instrumental groups, the very raison d'être of the piece, resulted in an aural exercise of bewildering diversity. To have turned a work of such complexity and such rigorous aural logic into an exhilarating show-piece of instrumental virtuosity is in itself an achievement for which the concert will long be remembered by participants and listeners alike.

Thursday October 25

Two German guitarists, Wilhelm Bruck and Theodor Ross, gave a duo recital at the Goethe Institute. This was the first of a series of six programmes planned for the 1979-80 season, the latest extension of the British/German exchange concerts, devised with the purpose of providing more chances for young composers to have their music played and greater opportunities for musicians from both countries to meet one another and exchange experiences.

Bruck and Ross are intimately acquainted with the ideas and techniques of Kagel and have been performing his works for many years; with their performance of *Montage* they gave an excellent demonstration of what Kagel's 'Instrumentaltheater' is all about. Unlike what is known here as music-theatre, a combination of sound and action, of drama and music, Kagel's work achieves a complete identification of instrument and theatre, of acting and instrumental playing so that the music itself is the theatre and the theatricality is part of the score. In a way Kagel's humour is of a very serious nature, and it would be a great mistake to see in this display of innocence and of childish games nothing but a bag of tricks: the invention is highly original, the effect highly stimulating and the skill involved — while alarm clocks, bull-roarers, bass harmonica and a whole arsenal of other noise-producing objects tick, buzz and ring — is quite considerable. Bruck and Ross's guitar-playing proper was put to a severe test with the performance of the two other pieces, Eight Traditional Pieces for guitar by Michael von Biel (b.1937), who confined himself to traditional playing techniques, and *Salut for Caudwell* by Helmut Lachenmann (b.1935), who went out of his way to explore all the sounds that can, if one tries hard, be drawn from a guitar: an exercise of instrumental alienation which sounded rather 'passé', although it was written as recently as 1977. If nothing else, it demonstrated the great versatility of the two artists who drew the weirdest effects from their instruments and were much applauded by a minimal audience of cognoscenti.

Wednesday November 7

John Buller's *Proença*, the outstanding BBC commission of the 1977 Proms, was repeated in the RFH with the same artists: Sarah Walker (mezzo-soprano), Timothy Walker (electric guitar) and the BBC SO under Mark Elder. Again the audience was kept spellbound for nearly 40 minutes by the significant relevance of the subject, the appeal of the music and the excellence of the performance.

Proença is a setting of 16 Provençal troubador lyrics from the 12th and 13th centuries, and the work is all about song in its social, poetic and musical implications. Through the songs — which may be either verbal, when the structure is determined by the meter, vocal, when pure melisma predominates, or instrumental, when the guitar intervenes to express what can no longer be sung — we witness the history of the troubadour civilisation from the unprecedented flowering of troubadour poetry to the savage destruction of Provençal culture 150 years later, in the course of the Albigensian Crusade.

As his basic material Buller uses three troubadour melodies, which are transformed into interval groups and rhythmic cells. The work falls into eleven sections, progressing from the spring-like desire to sing new songs, to sexual love, small feudal wars, to the mounting social unrest and the final collapse and the massacre of St. Ségur, where 240 men and women were burnt to death. While the voice, singing in the original Provençal, alternates between verbal chanting and free melisma, and the orchestra proceeds from the polyphonic playing of small groups to the build-up of a colossal agglomeration of textures, the guitar adds a new song and a new voice, that of coming protest and revolt.

Song has always been a powerful political weapon, and Buller draws an eloquent parallel between the extermination of a courtly, yet liberal civilisation by the northern Franks and the church and the brutalising of a pop group during the Chicago Convention of 1968, as described by Norman Mailer in his book *The Siege of Chicago*. Just as the guitar becomes a symbol of rock 'n' roll, the poem of the troubadour Arnaud Daniel stands for protest, and when the voice is silenced by terror and the guitar is left to carry on single-handed, everything is suddenly eradicated from memory: the ever-increasing weight of layer upon layer of independent patterns and ostinati, under which the structure eventually collapses; the ever-growing urgency of the wind instruments going over eventually to multiphonic chords in an effort to intensify their playing; the 78-note chord on the strings, repeated three times in order to symbolise the massacre. Even the more intimate moments recede into oblivion, and after the orchestra has reached a point of no return and the voices have whispered their last 'amor', quickly absorbed by a clarinet, all that remains is the image of Sarah Walker reciting and vocalising from memory, of her tenderness and her passion and of the strangely untypical and greatly appealing guitar playing of Timothy Walker. But once the terrific impact of the work has worn off, memory will return and gradually deepen as time passes.

Thursday November 22

The occasion of another of those only too frequent and unfortunate clashes. In the Purcell Room the excellent young Medici Quartet played works by Britten, Bennett, Muldowney and Simon Bainbridge, but as the pieces by Bainbridge and Muldowney were early works, I opted for the first performance of Douglas Young's *Vers d'un voyage vers l'hiver* at one of the BBC College Concerts.

Commissioned by the BBC and broadcast on 'Music in our Time' prior to the performance in Logan Hall, *Vers d'un voyage vers l'hiver* is a setting of poems by Guillaume Apollinaire scored for twelve voices. It is a work of many facets and many vocal techniques that catches the ambiguity of Apollinaire's words as well as the spirit of his surrealist poems — passing without transition from dreamy musing to outright violence, tossing pitches and words with surrealistic unpredictability, superimposing sweet melodies and angry verbal outbursts, whispers and vocalises with soft but persistent drones in between — and lends some sort of stability to the shifting images of the hallucination-inducing train journey. Past, present and future are telescoped into a moment of drama that leads to, but is not resolved, only halted, by the chorus, the work ends on a note of suspense, a kind of question mark that sets on speculating about the other, yet unwritten, madrigals in a sequence which *Vers d'un voyage* is eventually to be the central piece. The BBC Singers gave a fascinating performance under the assured direction of John Poole. The other works in the programme, by John Reeves and Henri Pousseur, were played by the London Sinfonietta.

Thursday November 29

The second concert of the Goethe Institute series was given by Anomaly from the Birmingham Arts Lab. The programme promised well, but in the course of the evening it became more and more difficult to relate to the pieces. Simon Emmerson's *Shakespeare Fragments*, a 15-minute piece for soprano, flute, tuba, piano and live electronics, did not add up to much more than the 'steadily shifting and intersecting melodies' described in the programme note and rang a disturbing number of bells. Dominic Muldowney's *Two from Arcadia* for tuba and cor anglais, a first performance, was strangley alienating on first acquaintance, but repeated hearing will probably bring the work into focus. Not so John Casken's *la Orana, Gauguin* for soprano and piano, which was sung with great expression and much sensitivity by Lynda Richardson, but missed the passion of Ravel's *Chansons madécasses* and the sensuality of Debussy's *Chansons de Bilitis* and had little to offer beyond atmosphere and illustration. Melvyn Poore's *Tubasoon* for prepared tuba and four-channel amplification sounded like some sort of updated Globokar without Globokar's humour and theatricality: a brilliant showpiece for Poore's own virtuosity on his instrument, but little else. To end the concert, we head Richard Orton's *Escalation* for flute, clarinet, tuba and piano. Little could be made out of the programme note, but the piece showed genuine imagination and ingenuity in the use of the instruments, and unless I am very much mistaken it ended with a joke of the Ligeti kind: an instrumental joke, well placed and much enjoyed.

Sunday, December 2

What the American trombonist James Fulkerson played at his Wigmore Hall recital — works for tenor and bass trombone by Stephen Montague, Giacinto Scelsi, John Rimmer and himself — required a fabulous technique and a great familiarity with electronic devices, which were handled with great authority by Barry Anderson, founder of the West Square Electronic Music Studio. How it happened that the pieces sounded so similar is difficult to explain, but the monotony was such that I did not stay for the second part of the concert, which featured works by Roger Marsh, Jonty Harrison and Globokar.

Monday December 3

The programme of the Redcliffe Concert in the QEH was a model of imaginative planning. It included one rarely heard work by Maxwell Davies (*Stedman Caters* of 1968) and one practically new work by John Marlow Rhys (*Capriccio* of 1978), both for almost identical instrumental forces and of similar duration; the two works, played with visible pleasure by the excellent Redcliffe Ensemble and conducted with great insight by Lionel Friend, complemented one another in more than one way.

Davies's *Stedman Caters*, divided into nine sections and approximately 15-minutes long, vibrates with many delicate resonances, and although there are some faint reminiscences of the quasi-hysterical sound one remembers from some of his expressionist works such as *Revelation and Fall* (which were very much in evidence at *Stedman Caters'* first performance by the Pierrot Players), these were very much toned down by Friend, who emphasised instead the sparseness and austerity of the sound. *Stedman Caters*, as well as its earlier companion piece *Stedman Doubles* (1956), is derived from the well-known change-ringing method, on which the serial material of the work is based. This very special brand of serialism should best be defined by the medieval name of 'musique savante': difficult to apprehend but easy to assimilate and to enjoy.

Rhys's *Capriccio* is exactly what the title says: capricious, unpredictable, imaginative and entertaining as well — a fun piece, a toy piece, clockwork cum perpetuum mobile cum machine. What the composer has set himself to investigate is the process of repetition, which is explored on the level of passacaglia, ostinato and systemic procedures, also through various other patterns, each of them linked with one specific section and strictly confined to the internal structure of that section.

Another form-building element is the use, at certain points, of very short sections, which produce a sense of climax through the increased rate of changing patterns; whereas the opposite effect, that of decay and disintegration, is obtained through the fragmentation of patterns and an increasing distance between their occurrences. While the internal structure of each section is obsessed with repetitive processes, repetition of any sort is strictly banned from the overall form, which could be viewed as a set of variations on a compositional process or, as the composer himself puts it, as an essay in systems of repetition.

As one leaves the concert, humming the tune of harp cum toy piano, one tries to recall echoes that rang: not so much of Carter, Xenakis and Kagel, influences acknowledged by Rhys, as of Birtwistle, of certain gestures and intervallic groups from *Punch and Judy* in particular. And just like Birtwistle (. . . *agm* . . .) Rhys, using the image of 'strips of wallpaper in a supermarket', shows a marked interest in the nature of the fragment. There is also the link of the mechanical toy (Birtwistle's *Carmen Arcadiae mechanicae perpetuum*). and though it may be wrong to speak of Birtwistle as an influence, there is an unmistakable affinity between them which it would be hard to overlook.

One also recalls some especially attractive aural events such as the humorous association of piccolo and bass clarinet, a tender sostenuto for vibraphone and harp or the ticking away of clarinet, marimba and strings. With great skill the scholarly exploration was turned into an exuberant piece of music-making.

Wednesday December 5

Four new works from the 1979 SPNM Composers' Weekend were performed in the Purcell Room by the Locrian String Quartet, the Phoenix Wind Quartet, James Shenton (viola) and Helen Tunstall (harp) under Peter Wiegold's lively direction. Standards were set by two modern classics, Lutosławski's String Quartet (1964) and Birtwistle's *Tragoedia* (1965), and a good level of compositional skill was achieved by all four young composers.

Mercury by Gwyn Pritchard (b.1948) is a piece of many layers, shades, contrasts and transformations, as unpredictable as quicksilver and just as captivating in its elusive manner. *Hommage a Miro* by Roger Redgate (b.1958), a commission of the Phoenix Wind Quintet, consists of three movements: some rather pointillistic 'Constellations', a highly lyrical 'Notturno' articulated by three solo cadenzas, and 'Imaginary Portraits', full of intriguing little jokes which add up to an entertaining set of

variations. *In the Presence of the Goat* by David Murray (b.1948) is a multi-sectional work, consisting of eight movements and based on Birtwistle's *Tragoedia*, with some good ideas but too little shape to hold the listener's attention for its twelve minutes' duration. Whereas the fourth piece, *Glittering of Spring* by Mark Bellis (b.1953), was a piece of enchanting little touches of colour here and there, and of subtle hues and shades achieved through clever scoring and conveyed through expert playing, from which this first performance benefited considerably.

Thursday December 6

The third BBC College Concert of the season took place at the Royal Academy of Music, where the London Sinfonietta, conducted by Peter Eötvös, played works by one Soviet and two Hungarian composers and presented the first UK performance of *The Sickle*, the first of two song cycles on Russian texts by Nigel Osborne (b.1948). The Radliffe Award for British music — won in 1977 by the second work, *I am Goya* for baritone and four instruments, on a poem by Andrei Znesensky — led to the belated 'discovery' of Osborne in England six years after he had been discovered on the Continent and long after many of his works had been performed at most of the international festivals. *The Sickle*, on poems by Esenin ('The Golden Grove') and Mayakovsky ('Our March'), scored for soprano, amplified acoustic guitar and chamber orchestra, was premièred at The Hague in December 1977, repeated at the Warsaw Autumn of 1978 and finally brought to London through the combined efforts of the BBC and the London Sinfonietta.

Vibrating with deep emotion, the work is a kind of 'scena' in two acts: the first a landscape vision of wide expanses and latent energy, throbbing to the plucked sounds of guitar, harp and strings; the second a dramatic conflict bursting on the listener with unexpected violence and thrust forward with an urgency that is generated by the words, immediately taken up by the music and cut off with an abruptness that precludes all appeasement and withholds all solution. The text was expertly sung and movingly recited by Jane Manning; the London Sinfonietta was at its very best and special mention should be made of the guitarist Timothy Walker, who played his very demanding part seemingly without effort.

Sonnets of Petrarch by Elena Firsova (b.1950), written in the typical idiom of the 30s, and *Sorozat*, a set of five movements for chamber ensemble by Attila Bozay (b.1939), a brilliant performer himself who knows how to obtain spectacular effects from his players, shed an interesting light on present-day music in the Soviet Union and Hungary. The evening ended most appropriately with a performance of Ligeti's *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures*.

Sunday December 9

The Lontano concert given at St. John's Smith Square may have passed unnoticed but for the performances prepared with loving care by Odaline de la Martinez. *Terra Rossa* by Creswell is built around fragments of a 'well-known Italian red flag song' and to the composer the earth-red pigment of the title suggests 'music of bright colours and contrasts — dramatic and obvious — angry and uncompromising'. To the listener the gentle musing of flute (Ingrid Culliford), cello (Tanya Prochazka) and piano (Odaline de la Martinez) sounded more like a serenade, soft-coloured and restrained, and so did Barbara Kolb's *Figments* for flute and piano, with fragments surfacing as in a dream and all cohesion avoided. James Wood kept an equally low profile with his 13-minute Japanese fantasy called *Kagen*, scored for piccolo, cello and koto doubling percussion (the latter played by the composer). Surprisingly enough, this is neither 'cheap imitation' nor annexation of alien goods, but the entirely authentic and original creation of a new sound world, without any model but his own imagination and with no other links than a very obvious affinity with the Far East. The form is that of refrain and verse and the sound is that of magic. Time stood still and it took the audience quite some while to break out of the spell.

Wednesday January 2, 1980

Exceptionally enough, this year's first contemporary music event, though given by two young musicians playing 20th century music, was not part of the Park Lane Group's 'Young Artists and 20th Century Music' series, which we have come to regard as a kind of official opening of the new year. Marianne Ehrhardt (flute) and Susan Drake (harp) played works by Stephen Dodgson, Jacques Ibert, Arnold Bax, Jesus Guridi, André Caplet and William Alwyn in the Purcell Room, most of them quite pretty, with decorative flourishes and gliding arpeggios, pleasing to the ear and relaxing to the mind. In this context, Michael Finnissy's *Kagami-Jishi* for flute and harp, specially commissioned for this recital, was all the more arresting: a highly ritualistic piece with strangely disturbing resonances and ghostly reverberations that suggest the 'mirror reflection' aspect of the title rather than the 'ecstatic dance' of the girl. What we heard was a dedicated and, from what one can tell, faithful performance of an unspectacular but at the same time very demanding piece. Marianne Ehrhardt also played Berio's *Sequenza I* for flute with great skill and assurance.

Monday January 7 to Friday January 11: 'PLG Young Artists and 20th Century Music' series

In the course of five evenings in the Purcell Room, no fewer than 33 works by contemporary composers were presented, eight of them written for and mostly commissioned by the 'young artists' of the series. Benjamin Britten and Gordon Crosse were represented in each programme and every single evening provided some rewarding experience.

Folksong was obviously the theme of the first concert, when One Plus One, the excellent violin and viola duo of Alexander Balanescu and Elisabeth Perry, gave the first performance of Douglas Young's highly stylised and greatly entertaining arrangement of traditional Irish music, marked by a lively virtuoso dialogue and called *Slieve League* after a famous place on the West coast of Donegal. They also played Christian Wolff's energetic and humorous variations on the American Civil War song *Rock About*. David Owen Norris was the excellent piano accompanist to Susan Tyrrell (contralto) in Britten's rather pale and untypical *French Folksongs*.

A new work by Simon Bainbridge (b.1952) for oboe and piano, commissioned simultaneously by Nora Post for a concert at the University of San Diego and by Melinda Maxwell, the PLG 'young artist' of the evening, and therefore called *For Mel and Nora*, was the highlight of the second concert. It is a piece of tremendous wit and charm, playful and inventive, tailormade for the vivacious and engaging Melinda Maxwell (who also gave a brilliant performance of Berio's *Sequenza VII*) and for Julian Dawson-Lyell, a remarkable piano accompanist.

Mark Hamlyn was the solo trombonist of the third evening. After Berio's *Sequenza V*, he played *Sound the tucket sonance and the note to mount* for trombone and two-channel tape by Barry Anderson (b.1935), one of the numerous commissions of the series but not an entirely successful work. Like Boulez in *Eclats/Multiples*, Anderson sets out, with less expertise and to slighter effect, to 'explore and relate two classes of sound and of sound events: short attacks and sustained tones'. For Hamlyn it was a challenge met bravely and with confidence.

Unfortunately I missed the fourth evening, with David Owen Norris's performance of Messiaen's *Quatre études de rythme*, which was described by the *Financial Times* as 'clearly exceptionally well understood and absorbed', and a new work by Crosse, *A Year and a Day* for solo clarinet. So we come to the last evening, which was one of the most enjoyable, when the very young and very expert Myrha Saxophone Quartet played Dominic Muldowney's enchanting *Five melodies for four saxophones doubling seven more*. From the very start, when the soprano saxophone sets in very softly with a high F, one falls under the spell of these 'melodies' doodling along systemically. Muldowney uses minimal material to maximum effect, small patterns that permutate, revolve around themselves and undergo changes of accent, articulation and mood from those of a pastoral idyll to those of boisterous outdoor games. Commissioned by the quartet and designed to show the versatility of the ensemble and their theatrical abilities, the five little pieces also make considerable demands on the

inventiveness of the players, and the performance would have greatly benefited from an acoustically more suitable and more spacious hall.

Thursday January 10

The London Sinfonietta gave this season's fourth BBC College Concert at the Royal Academy of Music. The programme was of particular interest and it was therefore all the more regrettable that it coincided with the fourth evening of the PLG Young Artists series. The first part consisted of Stravinsky's *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* and the first UK performance of *Ophelia Dances* by Oliver Knussen (b.1952), which was first introduced by Michael Tilson Thomas and the Chamber Music Society of the Lincoln Centre in New York five years ago. Scored for an ensemble of nine instruments, the piece has that very peculiar fluidity we have come to associate with Knussen's music — a sort of 'French connection' — where everything shimmers and shines, gliding freely from one image to the next. A touch of magic rather than tragedy is a feature of this seven-minute piece, which ends in an atmosphere of relaxation and regret.

Ronald Zollmann, the young Belgian conductor, also directed Boulez' *Domaines*, a musical mobile that demands instantaneous decision-making by solo clarinettist and conductor in turn. The soloist Anthony Pay moved from one group to the next, engaging the players in highly virtuoso arguments, but one kept wondering how much of it was genuinely spontaneous and how much had been planned in advance.

Saturday January 12

Capricorn gave the first performance of another new work of Finnissy's, the *Folk-song Set*, in its 1979 version. Dating back to 1969, the set of four songs has since acquired a flexibility of vocal line particularly suited to Josephine Nendick's voice and a transparency of texture for which Capricorn found exactly the right brand of softness and delicacy. Christopher O'Neal (oboe) gave a beautifully articulated and intensely lyrical account of Edison Denisov's *Romantic Music* for oboe, harp and string trio, also written in the late 60s, and Josephine Nendick sang Sandor Balassa's *Hajak* ('Tresses'), a setting of two poems by Charles Vildrac, with the right mixture of genuine feeling and deliberate simplicity. The concert also included performances of Carter's Duo for violin and piano and Barry Guy's *Play*, an instrumental re-interpretation of Beckett's *Cascando*. The latter was conducted with great intelligence by Lionel Friend, musical director of Capricorn.

Thursday January 17

A concert by Suoraan at St. John's Smith Square will be remembered partly for the outlandish names of works such as *Evryali* and *Psappha* (Xenakis), *Tàlawa* and *Sikagnuka* (Finnissy) and *Ääneen* (James Clarke), which make it almost impossible to recall the pieces by their title, and partly for some extraordinary achievements on the part of the performers, whose skills were put to a fearsome test.

Finnissy's *Tàlawa*, a Suoraan commission scored for mezzo-soprano, flute (doubling piccolo), oboe, piano and percussion, received its first performance. Like the earlier *Sikagnuka* for flute solo, it was inspired by Hopi Indian mythology, and both pieces had the soloists each playing a variety of instruments, sometimes simultaneously, singing as well as playing the flute and rushing over the piano keys in all directions so as to cover the entire keyboard non-stop. Josephine Nendick threaded her way through all this commotion with a smooth, very even and almost inaudible voice, and most of the time one was much too absorbed in the efforts of the players to concentrate on the music itself. One wonders whether the same or even a better effect could perhaps have been obtained by graphic notation, which would have given the hard-driven performers, Nancy Ruffer (flute), Christopher Redgate (oboe) and Finnissy himself (piano) more time to think instead of being entirely preoccupied with the accuracy of pitches and with rhythmic precision.

When writing the two pieces, Finnissy must have had in mind works by Xenakis and Brian Ferneyhough, both models of extreme complexity, and his interpretation of *Evryali* was almost too fluent, with more than the average of right notes and no display of struggle, panic or exhaustion. The other work by Xenakis, *Psappha* for percussion solo, was given a slightly diluted and shapeless performance by Anthony Wagstaff, and the over-demanding programme was rounded off with works by the group's musical directors, Clarke and Richard Emsley.

Monday January 21

The BBC Symphony Orchestra gave a long overdue performance of Maxwell Davies's *Second Taverner Fantasia* under the direction of John Pritchard, who had conducted the first performance of the work with the LPO 15 years earlier. At the present performance one missed the peculiar sharpness of Davies's instrumentation and some of the shock caused by his extreme processes of distortion and parody as opposed to formal development. Even on a formal level the work sounded more conventional than one remembered it, nearer the mainstream of symphonic tradition. Having since heard many other works, especially the Symphony, one might have listened with hindsight and discovered in the *Fantasia* signs of the new direction Davies's language was to take eventually and which had escaped us then, but the BBC SO seemed less familiar with Davies's language now than was the LPO in 1965. Unless such works become part of every leading orchestra's repertoire, neither the listeners nor the musicians will ever be able to catch up with the development of contemporary music.

Tuesday January 29

About a week after the *Taverner Fantasia*, Pritchard conducted another work based on transformation with, perhaps, a certain amount of parody, though not in the medieval sense of the word: Kagel's *Variations without Fugue for large orchestra on the Variations and Fugue on a theme by Handel for piano, Op. 24, by Johannes Brahms (1861-62)*. Having commissioned Kagel once before to write a work for the celebrations of the Beethoven year in Bonn in 1970 and left to face the scandal caused by his *Ludwig van*, the German authorities showed quite some determination and faith in commissioning him again, only three years later, this time for Hamburg to celebrate the 140th anniversary of Brahms. Although the work must have alienated some, no so-called 'sacrilege' was involved this time and the work was well received. In a fictitious 'letter to Brahms' Kagel explained he would make some 'insignificant alterations' to Brahms's work, but that he did not 'intend to touch the rhythmic structure', only 'to alter the sequence of the variations and the harmony'. Rather than a distortion, as in the case of Davies, this is a re-interpretation of Brahms's set of variations on a Handel harpsichord piece, a speculation on how Brahms would have written his variations today and on how he would have reacted if he had been given Kagel's commission. The outcome is a virtuoso orchestral essay of historic, aesthetic and stylistic dimensions. In true Kagel fashion, there is also a joke of sorts when everything is heading towards a climax: the entry of the fugue. This never materialises as the work is explicitly a set of 'Variations without Fugue'. To this fictitious and deliberate frustration was added, on this occasion, the real one of being deprived of Handel's original on which the whole work is based, and which Kagel asks to be played on the harpsichord as a concluding gesture, on account of a failure in amplification. Notwithstanding this technical breakdown, the work was extremely well received and the LPO, who also gave a splendid performance of another arrangement of Brahms, Schoenberg's orchestration of the Piano Quartet in G minor, shared the success with Pritchard, their perceptive and intelligent conductor.

Sunday February 24

In the fifth BBC College Concert of the season, which took place at the Royal College of Music, Michael Gielen conducted the BBC SO and the BBC Singers, and the two Kontarsky brothers played the *Dialogues* for two pianos and large orchestra by Bernd-Alois Zimmermann. *Dialogues* is an offspring of Zimmermann's opera *Die Soldaten*. Its material is largely based on the opera's interludes, and the work was written immediately after the opera in an attempt to show that the music was at least eminently performable,

even if the opera, decreed 'unstageable', presented certain problems and required revisions before it was put on in Cologne in 1965. *Dialogues* was played by its dedicatees, Aloys and Alfons Kontarsky, with devilish dash and daring. For a work of such strict serial organisation, the music is surprisingly accessible, full of invention, variety and expressive power, and full also of quotations from all styles and periods, which are compressed into a timeless simultaneity of past, present and future in what Zimmermann used to call the 'sphericity of time' (the co-existence of Debussy's *Jeux*, Mozart's Piano Concerto in C, K.467, and the Gregorian 'Veni Creator' in one single movement) and which inaugurates a new compositional process. Unfortunately the concert hall of the RCM was entirely inadequate for this pluralistic music, which requires an unusually large platform so that the musicians can be seated far from each other. The stage was cluttered, the audience was crammed together and the two soloists were hidden behind the orchestra, but this did not prevent the listeners from reacting with spontaneous and demonstrative applause.

Dialogues was preceded by Zimmermann's *Stille und Umkehr* ('Stillness and Return'), a 10-minute orchestral essay of Webernian transparency and tenderness, which had been commissioned for the Dürerjahr and was posthumously performed in Nuremberg in 1971. The whole work, scored for an ensemble of 42, mainly brass and percussion, revolves around a drone surrounded by eerie, almost inaudible figuration and accompanied by a haunting, endlessly repeated blues rhythm. One can see how Zimmermann, who finished the work a few days before his suicide in 1970, gradually loosens his grip on pulse, time and sound until the ultimate withdrawal, marked in the score by a laconic 'morendo'. A special note requires the conductor to play the work throughout in the same tempo, with great calm and the strictest observance of the dynamic markings, which vary between 'piano', 'pianissimo' and 'as soft as possible'. Gielen fulfilled all the conditions and conducted a very beautiful and moving performance. The memorable concert ended on a note of reverence and fervour with a performance of Gesualdo's *Tre Sacrae Cantiones* and Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles*. The soloists were Ameral Gunson (contralto) and Michael George (bass).

Thursday February 28

Herbert Henck's piano recital at the Goethe Institute was the third event of their 'Contemporary Music Series' this season, designed to encourage the exchange of contemporary music between Britain and West Germany. Henck (b.1948) belongs to that generation of fabulous young pianists who have extended instrumental techniques far beyond past limits, keeping pace with the demands of composers like Stockhausen, Xenakis, Ferneyhough and Finnissy. Having reached that degree of proficiency, Henck has shifted his preoccupations from a purely technical to an analytical level, and in order to 'create better understanding of contemporary music' he brings into his performances a degree of clarity that makes the most hermetic music accessible and easy to follow. Everything he touches becomes immediately of riveting interest. Even his introduction, though spoken in halting English, had the audience attentive to his every word, but all the same some printed programme notes would have been appreciated.

Klavierstücke 5 and *6* by Wolfgang Rihm are a mixture of modern gestures and traditional thought closer to Brahms than to Chopin; the one, called *Tombeau*, dark and taciturn; the other, *Bagatelles*, in a lighter mood. This was followed by Gehlhaar's five-minute *Klavierstück I-1*, subtitled 'Intersection', an essay in density, with textures being in turn loosened and compressed and with varying degrees of cloudiness, for which Henck found a whole range of different shades and nuances. The second part of the recital started with one movement from Walter Zimmermann's *Lokale Musik*, the title referring to Frankonia, his homeland, and to his ecological message, which is expressed in the preparation of the piano with home-grown Frankonian earth and stone. The preparation had to be simplified for practical reasons, but the little piece, a collection of Frankonian folkdance rhythms and melodic patterns as typical of the German brand of systemic music as the original work's total length — seven to eight hours — was light in substance despite the seriousness of its message. It provided a well placed moment of relaxation before the onslaught of Stockhausen's *Klavierstück X*, played with an insight that opened new vistas and showed this well-known and often heard piece from a new perspective. The variety of glissandi, from featherweight brush strokes to violent cascades, of clusters, from the loosest aggregation to the closest density, and of resonances reverberating in all directions before passing, imperceptibly, into an eloquent silence, together with the sheer power and authority of the playing, left the audience dumbfounded, and one can only hope to hear this amazing artist again in the near future. A close study of his book on Stockhausen's *Klavierstück X* is warmly recommended to all students of modern piano music.

Sunday March 2

In the third recital of their 'Contemporary Voices' series, New Macnaghten Concerts presented the Five Centuries Ensemble of four young American artists full of initiative and adventurousness: Carol Plantamura (soprano), John Patrick Thomas (counter-tenor), Martha McGaughey (viola da gamba) and Arthur Haas (keyboard instruments). The full title of their concert, 'Music of two cities', aroused great anticipation, and the ICA was overflowing with eager listeners attracted less by the new music of New York than by the madrigals of Ferrara, which never fail to enchant audiences, even when sung slightly out of tune and with less skill than some of the British Renaissance-music ensembles. The six works from New York were mainly typical examples of minimal art that amounted altogether to less than 30 minutes of music. Cage's *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs* for voice and closed piano was sung with unwanted expression, and his *A Valentine out of Season* for prepared piano, also from the 40s, had about it an air of nostalgia. Feldman's *Voices and Viol*, specially written for the performers, was predictably dreamy and only the *Three Airs for Frank O'Hara's Angel*, Lukas Foss's contribution to the Five Centuries Ensemble's repertoire, brought out their very real theatrical potential. Carol Plantamura seemed rather miscast in Berio's *Sequenza III*, and one had to wait for the encore, a most hilarious account of a hit song from the early 20s, *I'm in Heaven*, to become aware of the group's sense of humour, their flair and charm, and to enjoy a moment of genuine exhilaration and excitement.

Tuesday March 4

The last of this year's BBC College Concerts, given at the Royal College of Music by the BBC Symphony Chorus and Orchestra under Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, featured a work by an unknown Russian composer, Alexander Knaife (b.1942), which aroused some curiosity. However, *The Canterville Ghost* for soloists and chamber orchestra, after the tale by Oscar Wilde, is a sadly predictable piece of neo-romantic music, reminiscent of Shostakovich and Prokofiev but without their vigour and wit. A performance of Stravinsky's rarely heard *Threni* for soloists, chorus and orchestra, written in an hieratic style and a strictly serial idiom, concluded the concert, which suffered again from a lack of space and, as a result, a lack of balance and clarity.

Wednesday March 5

The first performance of George Benjamin's first major orchestral piece, *Ringed by the Flat Horizon*, by the Cambridge University Musical Society's orchestra confirmed all one's hopes and expectations. At the age of 20, Benjamin is in full command of compositional techniques. He has acquired a formidable amount of skill and knowledge from his teacher Messiaen and, little by little, under the guidance of Alexander Goehr, he is extending his field of activity. Inspired by a passage from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the work is a kind of symphonic poem which describes Eliot's 'hooded hordes swarming / Over endless plains... / Ringed by the flat horizon only', a magnificent fresco of great eloquence and atmosphere, using all the new technical devices but traditional in its formal outline. The orchestration is colourful, the images are precise, nothing is left to chance and surprises are only too rare. Having attained such an astonishing degree of mastery, Benjamin should now break out of the boundaries of academic training, try his luck on new paths, venture into

unknown territory and be ready to take some risks, meet some challenges and overcome real or self-made obstacles, whatever the consequences may be.

Wednesday March 12 and Thursday March 13

The Electro-Acoustic Music Studio at the City University, London, presented some recent works by its composer and performer members in three public events called 'Electro-Acoustics in Concert'. The planning was carried out with utmost care and technical hitches and breakdowns were successfully avoided. The programmes consisted of pure tape pieces (by Jonty Harrison and Alejandro Vinao), pieces for singers and electronics (Simon Emmerson), instruments and tape (Steve Ingham), amplified instruments (John Adams) and amplified voices (Alan Belk, Berio, Kevin Jones and Roger Marsh). The university's resident vocal group Vocem provided delightfully lively performances of Berio's *A-Ronne* for eight amplified voices, Belk's *Where the murmurs die* and Emmerson's enchanting *Ophelia's Dream*, and Belk gave a thrilling account of Roger Marsh's *Dum*. The mini-festival attracted a great many listeners eager to familiarise themselves with electro-acoustic music and many prejudices were overcome in the course of these two days.

Thursday March 27

The fourth concert of the Goethe Institute's 'Contemporary Music Series' 'Solo/Duo'. What Richard Bernas (piano) and Roger Heaton (clarinets) had to offer was not so much a concert, more a way of life: a demonstration of total commitment and a display of new performance techniques and theatrical skills. For many it was an initiation, for some a test of endurance and tolerance.

The even flow of Cage's piano music with its long-drawn silences and mysterious resonances, the slightly dated, yet highly entertaining gimmicks of Globokar's *Vox instrumentalisée*, the theatrical aspect of Christopher Fox's *Divisions* for clarinet solo, Kagel's oddly nostalgic *Unguis incarnatus est* for piano and bass instrument (in this case a bass clarinet) and, between the different items, short passages from Kagel's 'Metapiece' (*Mimetics*) for piano, were played by Bernas and Heaton in exactly the right spirit and with the appropriate distribution of futile (or not so futile) gestures. Richard Orton's *Pièce de résistance*, nine solid minutes of tonal, systemic doodling on the piano, may have outstayed its welcome, but such pieces have to be long in order to produce the right effect, and a last little moment of *Mimetics* put a definite and appropriate end to it.

Sunday March 30

A recital by Heinz Holliger and Vinko Globokar at the Riverside Studios was beset with misfortunes and technical breakdowns. The time when one took this sort of occurrence in one's stride belongs to the past, and rather than give the wrong impression of a concert marked by extraordinary technical exploits on the part of two outstanding artists, I prefer not to go into details and reserve my judgement.

Monday March 31

Fortunately there was another chance to hear Holliger no later than the following evening, at a London Music Digest concert entirely devoted to Berio's first eight *Sequenze*, written between 1958 and 1976. Six of the eight soloists on this occasion were the original dedicatees, and hearing the eight *Sequenze* in sequence, it was particularly gratifying to realise that they have lost none of their novelty and direct appeal. Unlike the latest experimental extensions of performing techniques, probing into the mechanical potential of instruments and disregarding the musical result, Berio's extensions were the direct outcome of the avantgarde composers' ever-growing demands and have since become part of every self-respecting performer's equipment. Certain images, that of the pastoral flute and the arpeggiando harp, have been blotted out, a new, polyphonic dimension has been added to the playing of wind instruments; the ever-present challenge has turned into a powerful incentive. The diversity of the pieces is remarkable, their inventiveness staggering and their scope virtually unlimited. The addition of *Sequenza IX* for percussion (1980) would have added another 15 to these 68 minutes of sheer delight and deepest gratification.