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BOOK REVIEWS

Nijinsky's Bloomsbury Ballet: Reconstruction of the Dance and Design for Jeux by Millicent Hodson. Pendragon, $76.00 (hb).

This is a companion volume to Millicent Hodson's study, *Nijinsky's Crime Against Grace: Reconstruction Score of the Original Choreography for Le Sacre du Printemps* (Pendragon, 1996). It is a valuable record of the process of researching and reconstructing the Diaghilev-Nijinsky-Bakst-Paquin-Debussy ballet *Jeux* (1913), which was first performed in its reconstructed form in Verona in 1996, more than 80 years after its first performance in Paris, a fortnight before *The Rite of Spring*.

The project documented in the volume is historically significant, for without it we would lack a good deal of information about *Jeux*, most pressingly its aesthetic genesis and structure as a dance, as well as a sense of the actual movements that Nijinsky juxtaposed and combined in it. Indeed, the serendipity of history is nowhere clearer than in the story behind the annotated piano scores of *Jeux* that Nijinsky used to make the ballet (he did not hear the orchestral music until the stage rehearsals). A copyist's production of Debussy's manuscript with annotations by the composer and the choreographer passed into Serge Lifar's collection on Diaghilev's death, was sold by Sotheby's in 1984 and remained in private hands until 2004, whereupon Yale University bought the score, along with a second annotated piano score (a publisher's proof with further annotations by Nijinsky). Only at this late, post-première stage in the entire reconstructive process did Hodson get to study these unique documents. Similarly serendipitous was the recent rediscovery and purchase by John Neumeier of further sketches by Valentine Gross that were thought to have disappeared, one of which is reproduced in colour (p. 235).

There is quite a lot of duplication across the panoply of texts in the volume, on account of the reprinting of earlier articles on the work previously published in diverse places. Two texts new to this volume that demand to be read are the detailed annotated chronology (pp. 30–50) and the wide-ranging essay on the historical, visual, and dance contexts for *Jeux*, 'The Three Graces and Disgraces of *Jeux*' (pp. 9–25). The former is the most comprehensive account of the genesis of *Jeux*, and neatly cross-references to all other accounts and hypotheses about dating and the precise order of events between a luncheon in the Bois de Boulogne in early June 1912 and a balmy Thursday evening on 15 May 1913. The latter essay provides useful cross-references to other Nijinsky ballets (not just *The Rite of Spring*), both completed and incomplete; some interesting interdisciplinary connexions into the pre-war Bloomsbury aesthetic; and a detailed account of the origins and meanings of Nijinsky's signature grouping, nicknamed 'the fountain' by Diaghilev and memorialized in Valentine Gross' famous pastel drawing, which is reproduced in both colour and monochrome (respectively pp. 233 and 8).

Of some importance are the connexions that Hodson draws with the Bloomsbury set. Plausible models for the three dancers in the ballet were Duncan Grant, the painter, and for the two female dancers Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell, the latter herself a Bloomsbury painter and wife of the critic Clive Bell; the complex triangular relationships between these and other members of the Bloomsbury set are similar to those in the choreography. Certainly Nijinsky was a frequent presence at gatherings in Bedford Square during the creation of *Jeux*, and a welcome guest at Lady Ottoline Morrell's parties; at one, he and Leon Bakst watched Duncan Grant play tennis in the garden – the latter exclaiming at the sight, 'Quel décor!'.

It is a treat to have the piano score of *Jeux* reprinted in full in the volume, and it comes with a huge range of carefully-selected supporting materials, juxtaposed roughly chronologically alongside the score's 685 bars, which illustrate elements of the rationale for the artistic and creative decisions made by Hodson during the process of reconstructing the ballet. However, despite her best efforts and multiple explanations of how to use it, it does remain quite rather densely packed. Perhaps if the production budget had extended just a little further into colour reproduction, the accretions and annotations (Debussy, Nijinsky, Diaghilev, Hodson) would have been easier to distinguish through colour coding. Still, this is nit-picking; it is a fabulous and enormous resource, and great to be able to cross-reference, in a single place, virtually all the multi-dimensional, cross-model elements of the totality that was *Jeux*.

In fact, as it happens, this volume seems to conform broadly (but coincidentally) to the rubric of

the AHRC 'Beyond Text' programme. Moreover, Hodson's commentaries and reflections on the process of undertaking the reconstruction – which come both in the course of narrative text directly on *Jeux* and as a variety of methodological asides in reprinted publications and explanatory texts relating to the annotations – tilt the volume toward the genre (is it a genre?) of Practice-as-Research, concerned as Hodson is with the expert practice of Nijinsky the choreographer. She quotes Lytton Strachey in a phrase that many a conservatoire student would do well to ponder, 'uninterpreted truth is as useless as buried gold' (p. xiv). The collection, presentation, re-working, and re-framing of thoughts, preliminary reconstructions, pencil sketches and photographic images of movement, correlations or corrections of different data sets (e.g. quietly correcting the over-emphasis on Dalcroze in Nijunsky's aesthetics (49)), interview transcripts, historical analysis, experimental rehearsals with dancers, and so on; all these materials serve to focus the many-sided trajectory taken by Hodson (and her regular collaborator, Kenneth Archer) towards a performable reconstruction of *Jeux* and a sense of what Susan Melrose would call Nijinsky's personal 'signature practice'.

According to Nijinsky's sister, Bronislava, in her much later memoirs, *Jeux* inaugurated Neoclassicism in ballet; it certainly embodied a parallel leap for Debussy that took him into his final works – the Sonatas and Etudes. Nijinsky was concerned with the representation of modern man, and included on stage newly invented electrical street lamps, as well as juxtaposing images and gestures abruptly, in a manner strikingly reminiscent of the contemporary silent cinema. The critic André Levinson characterised this as 'geometric schematization' (3, cf. 267) and many other critics of the time dubbed it simply as cubist. The clothing required from Maison Paquin was intended to represent the tennis player of the future in 1920, and much of Nijinsky's preparation for making the ballet was done by watching tennis games and analysing and internalizing their characteristic gestures and muscular movement groups. In an early vision of the ballet Nijinsky demanded that a plane crash down onto the stage at the end, to bring aesthetic, physical, and socio-political closure to the ballet (Debussy protested and the idea was dropped). The various styles of gesture in Nijinsky's choreography mixed Edwardian walks, suffragette postures, conversational gestures, geometrical lines and shapes, and the two women rose onto pointes only rarely. Characteristic of the choreography were 'the isolation of limbs – arms, legs and neck – in puppet-style stylisation or athletic moves; abrupt transitions between movements and gestures; blunting and weighting of [recognisably] classical steps; and the asymmetry of movement phrases' (264).

Another radically new feature of *Jeux* was its focus on interior emotional states and psychological realities that drift alongside the physical world of action. There is relatively little conventional ballet movement on stage, and what there is is 'all sculptural poses and internalised tensions' (9), with the three closely clustered dancers overwhelmed by the huge space which they are unable to fill (48). Various critics, both contemporary with *Jeux* and more recent, have described the aesthetic as 'a continuation of the present – trying to extend the present second' and as 'the intensification of related forms of movement' (respectively, John Neumeier and O. Raymond Drey, both quoted on p. 5).

These complex and always ambiguous interior emotional states were paralleled by the visual designs by Bakst and Nijinsky. Visual influences on Nijinsky in particular included Matisse, Picasso, Modigliani, Cézanne, and especially Gauguin and Rodin (for whom he modelled during the period of making the ballet), while Bakst created sets in which tree branches look like sinewy human limbs and the colours of the flats play with chiaroscuro in an uneasy way. One critic wrote of the 'indefinable atmosphere about the whole thing that is full of perverse charm and fascination' (260), while Debussy described the impact of the sets as 'a mysterious nocturnal landscape with that slightly evil *je ne sais quoi* that accompanies twilight' (21).

The weak reactions in the press to *Jeux* were in part a consequence of *The Rite of Spring*. They were also due to what was perceived as a disjunction between Debussy's music and Nijinsky's choreography – 'the polar opposite', according to Roland-Manuel (72) – although there remains the question of whether, even if this was the case, the music could have been, in Robin Holloway's words, 'a metaphor for, or simulacrum of, the varieties of sexual experience which are its subject-matter' (178). Another factor in the reaction to *Jeux* was the movement itself, even more than the potentially scandalous homosexual undercurrents of the plot and its implied sexual mores – which, said Nijinsky, had its origins in one of Diaghilev's erotic fantasies. The dance included many more embraces and kisses than Nijinsky's previous, and differently provocative, Debussy ballet from the previous year, *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*, the duet of which had only one rather neutral linking of dancing bodies. In the words of the art critic Roger Fry, what was taken up by *Jeux's* early audiences was the 'significant deformity' (267) of the gestures

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that Nijinsky had sculpted into choreographic form; one critic wittily quipped that the dancers were 'suffering from "tennis wrist" all over' (9).

The choreography was certainly one of Nijinsky's most abstract, tightly integrated in its multiple triangle formations in scenario, décor, and choreography, and his choreographic style made extensive use of the whole body, including the neck, which he treated as a fifth limb (61, 255). Hodson's genealogy of the Three Graces – the dancers were originally all female, faced each other in a different formation to Nijinsky's distinctly modern reinterpretation, and, at least prior to the 18th century, represented a quite different sexual sequence to the one worked over by Nijinsky, namely *'beauty* arousing *desire* leading to *fulfilment'* (16) – gives a plausible hook for interpreting the 'fountain' grouping and what it might have meant in May 1913, and hints at the depth of Nijinsky's thinking about and preparation for the creative process of making the ballet. Debussy, always slightly apart from the noisy menagerie of Les Ballets Russes, skirted round the issue of sexuality in *Jeux*, noting dismissively that 'any hint of immorality escapes through the feet of the danseuse and ends in a pirouette' (263).

What made the plot and its choreography new and perhaps also difficult for its few first audiences, was Nijinsky's de-coupling of the erotic and the exotic (which had been conflated in Fokine's ballets), and the stark reality presented by the modern dress, modern décor, and modern movements, which included steps and holds from popular dances like the Turkey Trot (137–9) and Tango (134–5, 274). What made *Jeux* a bold step forward was its 'forthright sensuality, [its] ability to arrest movement, [its] formal simplifications and brusque surfaces' (12) – qualities associated with the sculptor Auguste Rodin, who championed Nijinsky in the press on behalf of Diaghilev's strident publicity machine.

We can appreciate a certain irony in the closure of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées at the end of the 1913 season, bankrupt from its radical experiments with *The Rite of Spring* and *Jeux* (24) and unable to maintain the interest of the public as tastes temporarily retreated and critical walls were raised. *Jeux* had been performed five times in Paris and four in London, and then dropped (and, unlike *The Rite of Spring*, it would not get quite so mendaciously re-invented by its maker as concert music *sans danseurs*). The melancholy and sense of failure that dogged Nijinsky about *Jeux* as time went by were compounded by other factors (his expulsion from Les Ballets Russes prime among them), but as the critic Jacques-Emile Blanche predicted in a review back over 1913, what might seem initially to be the disgraces of the new ballets would come to be seen, finally, as their glories.

Anthony Gritten

Elliott Carter: A Centennial Celebration edited by Mark Ponthus and Susan Tang. Pendragon (Festschrift Series), £25.00.

Elliott Carter's hundredth birthday has been celebrated throughout 2008 with tributes both ambitious and modest in scope. *A Centennial Celebration* falls into the latter category. A slim volume that leans heavily on fond reminiscences and mostly eschews lengthy, in-depth analyses, it still yields some valuable insights for Carterians.

There has yet to be a full-length biography on Carter; David Schiff's *The Music of Elliott Carter* has served double-duty as an introduction to his music and a summary biographical sketch, while numerous interviews and articles have helped to fill in the gaps. Pendragon's *Festschrift* supplies anecdotes from a wide range of contributors which help to flesh out Carter's activities as a teacher, colleague, and friend. Notable among them are essays by former students Alvin Curran and Frederic Rzewski, which serve both to support Carter's reputation as a demanding and thorough teacher while dismantling the notion that his pedagogical approach contained a stylistic agenda. Curran does point out that his lessons contained one intervallic admonition: no octaves (interesting in light of the plethora of octave A's in Carter's recent BSO work *Interventions*!).

Composer Richard Wilson discusses 'Beginnings and Endings …'; in particular, pointing out some of their enigmatic features. He also records the wide-ranging topics discussed during an afternoon tea with Carter. While this might seem trivial at first glance, it is enlightening to note how varied and sophisticated the composer's reading list continues to be. Paul Griffiths's essay, 'Its Full Choir of Echoes, the Composer in his Library' is even more informative, charting literary influences and sung texts throughout Carter's career and thoughtfully analyzing 'Am Klavier' from the cycle *Of Challenge and Love*. One wishes that Charles Rosen had expanded further on his truncated discussion of the 'sustained line' in Carter; perhaps his essay is a foretaste of a more elaborate article?

Editor Marc Ponthus interviews Pierre Boulez about his relationship with the dedicatee and his music. The discussion helps to balance the volume by providing a European perspective on Carter's artistic trajectory. In one of the more offbeat offer-

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ings, composer/conductor Louis Karchin offers a meditation on preparing 'Anaphora' for performance while sitting outside in Lenox, Massachusetts near Tanglewood: just a short distance from where he first met Carter as a student in 1972. The essay weaves together personal reflections, performance practice issues, and a bit of eavesdropping on a nearby brass section rehearsing Stravinsky and Sibelius!

One can quibble here and there; some of the music included by composers seems to have little to do with Carter, and Walter Zimmerman's 'Metric Modulation' is a quixotic contribution. John Ashberry's offering consists primarily of a reprint of *Syringa*; one wishes he'd composed something new for the volume. While the reader may have to content themselves with tantalizing glimpses rather than bold, detailed revelations, *A Centennial Celebration* suggests several possible further avenues of inquiry, both biographical and musical, in Carter studies.

Christian Carey

Hallelujah Junction: Composing an American Life by John Adams. Faber & Faber, £18.99.

John Adams is an optimist and a good guy. He is much encouraged by the open-mindedness of the younger generation of composers, is generous to his collaborators and has called this memoir *Hallelujah Junction* not because he regards his piano-piece of that name as one of his own seminal works (it doesn't even get a mention) but because, presumably, he wishes to celebrate the potential of contemporary music.

Hallelujah Junction is a mixture of autobiography, keeping mainly to chronological sequence, and reflections on his own pieces, their genesis and reception, as well as a few thoughts on 20th/21st-century music in general. Adams takes us through his early musical upbringing in New Hampshire, where his father played in a dance band and his mother was for a while a small-time actress who sang. He learnt the clarinet and by the time adolescence kicked in had determined to be a composer, even creating an *alter ego* figure 'Bruce Craigmore' who 'enjoyed an international career ... and lived alone in a cabin on a remote lake'. The lake and two marriages aside, the rest of the book shows how pretty much all this came to pass.

Much of what we see of Adams now was evident as a twenty-something at Harvard: a social and political liberal, protestor against the Vietnam war, keen on the William Burroughs-inspired counter-culture of California – for which he left in 1970. He tellingly sums up the San Francisco of the early 70s as being 'neither too frantic, nor too laid back'. This love of equipoise is mirrored in his steering a middle course between the manifold schools of music that he was exposed to: 'the depressing tone of the post-war European avant-garde' (Boulez is an especial concern), and the showmanship – as he saw it – of Leonard Bernstein. Adams declined an invitation to join Lennie's Tanglewood conducting classes. The ubiquitous prog-rock bands are also tuning up around him, as the musical equivalent of LSD. There's also LSD. Adams ingests both, while simultaneously learning what he can from the mutually-feuding teaching duo of Earl Kim and Leon Kirchner. He is humorously open about his own first attempts at electronic composition. *Schedules of Discharging Capacitors* (1975) has a 'score from the faulty wiring era' and is mercifully unpublished. Finally from John Cage, the other dominant 70s influence, he learns to keep his ego out of his music and, Zen-like, learns too from Cage's negative example by 'earnestly avoiding being earnest'.

Having brilliantly resisted all those siren blandishments, what is Adams's own musical philosophy? It is hard to say, because *Hallelujah Junction* is not a polemical book. He acknowledges the enormous influence of early Philip Glass, especially *Satyagraha* (1980), and Reich, especially *Music for 18 Musicians* (1976). The latter is described as the 'summit of his unique musical personality', while Reich's later music from *Different Trains* (1988) onwards is characterized as being 'unwilling to relax the grip on the musical elements'. Like Reich's early descent from the summit, Glass's earthbound progression appears to be underway; of his more recent oeuvre the opera *Appomattox* (2007) comes in for passing praise, but other than that a distinct silence is audible from Adams concerning minimalism, other than it being regarded as mining a now 'depleted ore'.

Adams's own route away from what he describes as the 'modernist aesthetic's fatal error of super-refinement' has been partly achieved through his engagement with American vernacular music, even while honestly expressing doubts about the pop-mélange 'songplay' *I was Looking at the Ceiling and then I saw the Sky* (1995), partly by harking back to pre-Modernist models (e.g. the gymnopedie slow movement in *Naïve and Sentimental Music* (1998), party through his literariness. Adams arrived at Harvard with the aim, soon abandoned, of reading Ancient Greek classics in the original. In later life he has learnt both Spanish and German. Just as Schiller's *On the Naïve and Sentimental in Poetry* was an inspira-

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tion, so acquaintance, at the prompting of the indefatigable Peter Sellars, with 20th-century Latin American poetry prompted *El Niño* (2000). In addition, Adams's political interests continue, which is why as he neatly puts it, '*Nixon* made me famous, *Klinghoffer* infamous'.

But *Klinghoffer, Ceiling/Sky, Doctor Atomic* and *El Niño,* the most recent pieces for the stage, have not been unalloyed successes, and the reasons may suggest themselves in reading this book. Adams's thoughtful interest in contemporary social issues: feminism, the A-bomb, the Middle East conflict and social disaffection make for fascinating discussions on how such pieces are brought into being and the political fallout that often follows; but that only points up how text and debate are so foregrounded in these works that music is often relegated to the role of accompaniment. 'Insufficiently interesting musical ideas' seems to be the principal criticism of *Doctor Atomic*. The contention of ideas is not opera's strength, and that aspect of *Atomic* makes its 'stagier' set-piece moments – the aria 'Batter my Heart', the chorus 'Your shape stupendous' the more striking. Adams's most recent opera *A Flowering Tree* (2006) is more successful because it is a simple, symbolic and lyrical fable and Adams's sympathy for Eastern cultures can find excellent ground to grow from.

Hallelujah Junction is such a generous-hearted, considered and readable book that it almost disarms criticism. In concert Adams has programmed Feldman, Nancarrow, Reich, Glass and Zappa alongside his own music, so that there's no doubting his ecumenism at least up to the point before Boulez. Like most artists, Adams's view of the contemporary scene is tilted in favour of the kind of music that he himself writes. One doesn't want to tempt Adams to cast aspersions on his fellow-composers, but his perspective at the heart of American musical life makes him well qualified to answer questions that some reading this book may well have on their minds: why did minimalism become so popular in the Seventies? If his own style is 'post-minimalist', what is his view on what will endure of Glass, Reich, Bryars (with whom he once corresponded), even Tavener and Pärt (the latter gets half a sentence, the former nothing). Will the complexities of Carter and Ferneyhough last? For what exactly should we sing *Hallelujah*, and in what voice?

Robert Stein

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Landscapes of the Mind: The music of John McCabe compiled and edited by George Odam. Guildhall School of Music & Drama Research Studies 6. Ashgate, £35.00.

Though indicated as number 6 in a research studies series from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, strangely enough there is no mention (other than in passing in the list of contributors) of either the previous or forthcoming subjects in the series. *Landscapes of the Mind* is a title suggested by John McCabe himself, and this idea appears to be appropriate to many of his compositions in terms of locations real and imaginary, and of the worlds inhabited by his dramatic works.

Surprisingly, this substantial 257-page symposium is the first major published study of John McCabe's music. It consists of two chapters covering McCabe's life, an interview with the composer, and seven chapters (by Verity Butler, Paul Hindmarsh, Tamami Honma, George Odam, Guy Rickards, and John Vorrasi) which discuss his music for various media including orchestral, chamber, brass, incidental, and piano. There are also 70-odd black and white photographs, and music illustrations including sketches, printed music and full score extracts (although tempo indications in parenthesis would have been useful) – on the whole placed adjacent to a relevant page of text: a cunning enticement in a book more likely to be 'dipped into' then read complete. At the front of the book comes an apology for the lack of an excerpts disc. The end-placed discography is, however, extensive, consisting of over 20 pages and covering recordings both as composer, and as performer, often in the works of others.

A foreword by the late Vernon Handley is followed by a strongly opinionated preface from the editor. There is much that one could take issue with here, although the account given about the changes to PRS royalties (leading to diminished financial returns) in the late 1990s is obviously a valid point. But in other respects this, and other points made, raise more questions than they answer. Whilst it is evident that McCabe has continued to succeed as a composer, in every sense of the word, in an increasingly frugal 'classical music' scene, he has survived changes that have occurred long since he started out, and one wonders what route he would now choose if he were starting afresh.

The musical chapters can be read singly, as a whole, in any order, and provide valuable insights into the music, for potential performers, interested readers or writers who wish to pursue selected works in more detail, and there is much in the writing to make one want to do just that. But, for me the most interesting parts are the two biographical chapters. These are written by two different contributors, which creates some slight and unnecessary overlap. The first (by George Odam) deals with McCabe's early life up to the end of his student days, the second (by Guy Rickards) with his professional life from then on, up to the present. Odam's concise account of his formative years is full of details of his German and Irish heritage, his Liverpool upbringing, an early accident with an open fire – the burns from this led to a breakdown in his immune system (and temporary deafness) which kept the boy from school for long periods – and also the lasting significance of long annual summer holidays in the Lake District. Of course a preponderance is given over to events of musical significance: McCabe's copious pre-instrumental musical calligraphy, his prolific juvenile compositions, his piano lessons from a young age with Gordon Green (through whom he met many of the great and the good, very early on), through to his entry to the R.M.C.M. This all reads as though his path in music was pre-determined. Or is it that, as researchers, we hone in on the facts which are only retrospectively important, largely ignoring the rest, allowing the reader the satisfaction of picking up on these significant gems?

The second chapter (by Guy Rickards) continues with McCabe's emergence as professional pianist, his approach to the composer Karl Amadeus Hartmann, which led not to lessons as he had hoped, but further study at Munich Music School. On his return to the UK begins the account of his long and slow rise to national prominence, told through the steady stream of performances and commissions, and friendships with leading luminaries down the years including Barbirolli, Ogdon, Schurmann, and Hoddinott. Rightly, mention is also made of McCabe's lifelong fascination with Haydn, and his pioneering early recording of the complete piano sonatas. The chapter also lists his various teaching appointments, his other recordings both as composer and performer, and (to bring matters up to date) the successes he has found in his recent ballets *Edward II* and *Arthur* (parts 1 and 2) and their various ongoing satellite works. Most importantly, space (and many photographs) is devoted to the life he has shared for well over 30 years with his second wife Monica. The summary ends on a positive note: neither compositions nor commissions show any signs of 'running dry'.

To say that this will remain the standard book on McCabe for many years to come is to state the obvious. Perhaps its finest achievement is that it spurs one to explore more of his music: to seek out recordings and performances, or better still to

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study and perform it oneself: timely encouragement as the composer now enters his 70th year.

Tim Mottershead

Nicholas Maw: Odyssey by Kenneth Gloag. Ashgate, £35.00.

Nicholas Maw's *Odyssey* was always a likely candidate for inclusion in Ashgate's 'Landmarks in Music Since 1950'. With a duration of 90-plus minutes, the work's sheer scale virtually precludes it from becoming a repertoire piece in the concert hall. On the other hand, nobody who has experienced a live performance of *Odyssey* could limit its importance to a place in *The Guinness Book of Records*.

By delineating Maw's individual sense of adventure, Kenneth Gloag makes an immensely stimulating addition to the series. In a preliminary note he rightly acknowledges the writings of Arnold Whittall. He was also fortunate in being able to draw on Maw commentaries by Anthony Payne and Andrew Clements,[1] the latter of whom wrote programme notes for the incomplete and complete first performances of *Odyssey*.

Nevertheless, Gloag successfully conveys his own perception of the work. Two preliminary chapters place it in broader contexts. The first, entitled 'Between Romanticism and Modernism', deals as much with thinking about music as with music itself in the 20th century. A closing section on post-modernism is a useful guide to recent critical approaches. It also makes the key point that Maw himself recently (2002) preferred vocabulary to style as a critical marker. This eclectic, basically counter-romantic outlook embraces neither intricate collage *à la* Berio nor the extravagant time-travelling to be found in Michael Gandolfi's *The Garden of Cosmic Speculation*. Maw's self-contained language has inner consistency. His compositional stance does, however, pose questions of how to respond to the music. Gloag addresses these questions in his seventh chapter, 'Reception'. The second and eighth chapters set *Odyssey* in the wider perspective of Maw's compositions before and since.

Much 20th-century music reflects a preoccupation with rhythm and timbre. But as befits Maw's conservative leanings, those components of *Odyssey* which Gloag singles out for scrutiny are melody and harmony. Chapters 4 and 5 ('The Melodic Source' and 'The Harmonic Dimension') follow on from a succinct general account of *Odyssey*. The work's six distinct sections are, Gloag stresses, not strictly movements, because they all have their 'points of repetition and recurrence, transformation and development'. But they also deal in contrast – an element that is heightened by the score's dramatic climaxes (effectively captured by conductor Simon Rattle on the CD recording enclosed with this book). Chapter 3 introduces the ten-note aggregate serving as Maw's cardinal 'time chord', and the work's thematic core is presented in the formal context of the whole. The perceived open-endedness of the finale leads to the fourth chapter's discussion of Maw's 'endless melody'. In his briefer fifth chapter, Gloag offers a speculative appraisal of recurrent harmonic factors.

While these chapters lay a basis for further analysis, Gloag's sixth chapter ('Time and Narrative') will also be of interest to students of hermeneutics. True, Maw appears to have adopted the word odyssey only in its sense of an epic journey. Literary parallels are doubtful at best. This composition offers nothing directly traceable to Homer. Although Gloag mentions the *Ulysses* of James Joyce in passing, Joyce's 'modernist appropriation' of the cultural past differs from Maw's oscillations between romantic and modern. (I once suggested a parallel with Nikos Kazantzakis's *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, but I would not care to pursue the analogy.) Rather than a specific work on the Ulysses theme, Gloag invokes Paul Ricoeur's study of time and narrative. Despite reservations about the very notion of narrative in music, he then argues the relevance to Maw of two out of the three elements that Anthony Newcomb has discerned in Mahler's 'narrative', one being thematic transformation, the other plot archetype (the 'spiral quest').

One general subject which remains unaddressed is that of the monumental in art. Large-scale works tend to be viewed as the products of optimism, an optimism born of social prosperity. Bruckner's symphonies were sustained by an industrial boom as much as his Catholic faith. Maw's *Odyssey* coincided with a period of pioneering space exploration; could it have been completed in the age of the credit crunch? Or is it the creative artist's role not simply to reflect but to challenge the times in which he lives?

Peter Palmer

[1] On page 54 Clements appears in a reference as 'Elements': a typo that had me momentarily baffled.

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The Music of Hugh Wood by Edward Venn. Ashgate, £60.00.

This well-presented book has been rewritten and expanded from the author's doctoral thesis. The first book from a scholar who has previously published on various British composers, including Adès, Britten, Goehr, and Tippett, it is a promising debut alongside which future studies of Hugh Wood's music will certainly have to be judged, and consistently thorough, informative, useful, and lively. Thorough, in that it goes through Wood's entire output (including his writings) with a fine toothcomb and devotes an appropriate amount of space to every musical work, large and small, setting these individual narratives within and against an initial two-chapter introduction to stylistic issues in Wood's music. Informative, in that its appendices include generic and chronological work lists, discography, and personalia, and in that after reading this book, or even after just browsing through and across it, you come away with a large amount of knowledge about the composer's approach to creation and his music. Useful, in that its narrative descriptions and analytical interpretations of the music deserve to become standard fare for programme-notes for future performances, and in that it will help to publicize Wood's music and stake a claim for his importance as a creative artist; especially useful is an 11-point summary of the key or recurrent features of Wood's musical language (p. 67). Lively, in that Venn's neatly and carefully tailored prose consistently succeeds in conjuring up images and impressions of the music that bring it to life and reflect upon its expressive style clearly and efficiently, and that make you wish very much to hear more of it.

Indeed, if there is a curiosity in reading *The Music of Hugh Wood* (and it is obviously not a fault of Venn's), it results from the fact that Wood's music isn't as well known as that of many of his contemporaries, despite a brief peak in popularity during the early 1990s that even ran to the première of the Variations for Orchestra at the Last Night of the Proms and European performances of the Cello Concerto by – wait for it – Boulez! (101). When at a conference last year I mentioned to the author that I had been asked to review his book, he kindly offered to lend me copies of the scores and recordings, in the quite reasonable assumption that I wouldn't have easy access to them. Venn is tempted to call this the 'Hugh Wood problem' (xii); how are we to follow up and debate the value judgement that, e.g., Wood's quartets are 'his major contribution to this genre' (xi), when they are not recurrent fixtures in, say, the Wigmore Hall or South Bank? The issue also concerns the distance between this study and its subject: how, given that it is the first to tackle the subject in a sustained manner, does it manage to maintain a healthy critical distance from the music, especially since Wood himself made extensive comments on early drafts of the text?

I believe it does, and that Venn successfully avoids lapsing into mere praise of the music, even when he obviously likes specific works more than others (the Symphony seems to be one, and Venn does a skilful job unpacking it analytically: see136–52, 28–9, 41–2). Some might argue that this shouldn't be possible until there is more criticism (good and bad) out there to take issue with, more theses to archive, more articles to dispute, more recordings to catalogue and compare, and so on. But I think Venn's text holds together well, on the basis not of adequation, whereby the book would simply attempt to recoup the cultural work of Wood's music and recast it anew for latecomers and those who missed the performance or did not buy the CD; but, rather, in terms of an internal logic that the book itself sets up in the course of its progress, through the vicarious beauty of its own literary descriptions, arguments, narratives, and denouements, which are obviously set in motion by the musical gestures and events composed by Wood in his music.

So, how does Venn go about describing and defining Wood's music? After all, he claims that it is highly individual and belongs to no obvious school other than the bland catch-all 'post-Schoenberg' (22); this might have made the choice of a specific methodology one to pause on. Largely he proceeds by annotating the various material traces of the music, most prominently its scores (there are plenty of good musical examples through the book), and by trying analytically to unpick the interface between syntax and semantics in each work. Other than the brief scene-setting that opens each chapter, there are scarcely any biographical-hermeneutic digressions, which in any case Wood would consider vulgar, even in special cases like the Cantata and *Marina*, the geneses of which had extremely personal and private contexts.

Thus, this book is jam-packed full of programme notes – and very readable they are, too. There are plenty of listener-friendly adjectives, often clustering around cognate forms of words like 'sincere', 'deeply', and 'motivated', and metaphors (often quasi-onomatopoeic) like 'whip', 'sustained', 'driving', and 'outburst'; and there are judicious arguments explaining how otherwise disparate events are 'fused' or 'integrated' into an expressive 'whole', and so on. This is perhaps

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to be expected in the first major study of a composer about whom there has been relatively little written, and for whom the nature of the musical 'whole' perhaps cannot yet be taken for granted or assumed in broad outline, as it can with, say, Birtwistle. Such adjectives and metaphors, as Venn notes in his Preface (xi), form the vanguard of critical territorialization, helping him to establish a discourse appropriate to Wood's music, and to propose the language as broadly mutually agreeable to the community of interested parties (readers of this journal, concertgoers, critics, musicians, and others). Maybe later on, as this book ages and as Wood's music is (hopefully) played more frequently, these currently singular adjectives will harden and solidify into theoretical and analytical terms, tropes, analyses and approaches to the music, and new adjectives will spring up in their place. This will be especially important with regard both to the extensive vocal output, which includes 'some of Wood's most compelling music' (118), and where there is another level to consider, of the musicality of words; and with regard to Wood's quasi-programmatic music, especially the post-Beethovenian narratives of the Symphony, Violin Concerto, and Third Quartet (about which Venn writes well; Wood's quartets probably deserve a volume to themselves in Ashgate's series *Landmarks in Music since 1950*).

With regard to the Piano Concerto, I remember going to the 1991 Proms première with my Dad, and being rather surprised by the lushness of the orchestration and imaginative colouring of its textures and piano writing, and in particular by the liberal inclusion of jazz elements in the second movement. Of course, that only shows how little I understood and how much I assumed about contemporary music, but it also speaks of the directness and honesty of expression that characterize Wood's music. These are elements which Venn captures well in his analytical hermeneutics, and of which Joanna MacGregor (misspelt only in the index) was a natural and persuasive advocate as the soloist. Again and again Venn returns to the idea that Wood's music grows out of an urge to express something more than just the self, its subjectivity, subject position, or identity: that music is more than just the composer's Facebook entry. He writes that

> the mixture of styles and techniques in the concerto are motivated by expressive necessity rather than the toying with (ransacking of?) the past that characterises some of the younger generation of composers. (185)

Such buzzwords seem to be, to put it mildly, unimportant to Wood, whose creative drive is led by something else, coming from the humanistic genealogy to which Tippett and Beethoven before had subscribed. Venn offers various summaries of the ideology, including this elegant one:

> The evocations of love and loss and the elevation of individual over collective experience to be found throughout Wood's oeuvre speak eloquently of the importance of holding on to that which makes us human (226–7)

The final Envoi closing the main body of *The Music of Hugh Wood* is, perhaps inevitably, not really long enough to do justice to its subject, or to allow Venn to let rip with his evidently fertile critical imagination. It does hint, however, at the broad outlines of how we might answer questions about the import and place of Wood's music, like two of those that Venn poses:

> Faced with such events [as the catastrophes that saturated the twentieth century], what is the individual – the divided, alienated modern subject – to do? What can an artist offer a society or another human being? (225)

A return to a comment by David Fanning in 1993 on the music of Wood and Goehr might be *a propos* here. In the context of considering Wood's reputation, Venn muses on Fanning's words:

> how historical they now seem, how distant in their earnest complexities from the values of today's musical scene, which may of course be precisely their strength, if you take the view that most recent contemporary music has sold its soul to commercialism. And I wouldn't for a moment deny that there is beauty and deep feeling in them. Still, I do wonder if such works aren't destined to be more respected than loved. (quoted xii)

Fanning's comment, ambiguous as it is and perhaps had to be (it was published in *The Independent*), could also be taken as suggesting another inroad into Wood's music: it demands patience. (Wood himself was certainly patient with my undergraduate tutorial group for Keyboard Skills; more patient, I am sure, than we deserved.) All music demands care and attention, but not all music needs patience and time. Some (the more commercial fare in particular, as Fanning implies), get their message across quicker (especially when speed is itself the message), or with fewer reflections along the way. Such might be said to be the postmodern (or at least technocratic) musical muse: don't just express yourself (as you must, for there's no choice), make sure you do it efficiently and productively (there's a good citizen, thank you).

I cannot really say that those pieces of Wood's that I have heard (including *Scenes from Comus* in a feisty performance by Alison Wells to celebrate Wood's retirement) strike me as doing this at all well; if anything, they remain loyal to an earlier (or at least different) paradigm, in particular one to which the adjective 'Modernist' is often appended (Venn frequently chooses to use the word 'Romantic' to buttonhole Wood's position in this respect, with caveats). In them there is a consistent inconsistency, a probity about how to make musical decisions, a dogged resistance to easy solutions, a reflective, questioning quality that tracks every expressive gesture, that carves out the underbelly of each move and idea with a different (and perhaps much older) notion of creativity. Such creation requires, not the machete, hacking swathes of space through the undergrowth in preparation for the inevitable onslaught of what approaches up ahead, but the magnifying glass, holding up the nearby flora and fauna to the light and examining it in wonder and awe, unperturbed by what lies ahead. (Such was certainly the impression of Wood's extraordinarily detailed undergraduate analysis lectures on Berg, Schoenberg, Debussy and Stravinsky orchestral works, which revealed an intimate wisdom about and love of the music.)

Coming at the issue from a different tack, it is interesting that on a fair number of occasions Venn invokes the figure of Brahms, either to clarify a specific allusion or technical issue in Wood's music or to point out more generic similarities between the two composers and their general aesthetic outlook with regard, for example, to syntactic-formal continuity, tradition, and late style. This is, it seems to me, a key observation, and one ripe for serious further investigation ('Wood the Progressive', 'Any fool can see that: On tradition in Hugh Wood's music' etc.). It is this complex of aesthetic themes that music criticism needs to acknowledge in order to take on board what Wood's music might have to offer us – and, perhaps, *pace* Fanning, to love it as well as respect it. It will have to understand, and, more importantly, acknowledge, once more what Wood asserted back in 1977 in the *TLS*, namely that 'this lovely, irreplaceable flower of the spirit [Art] may burgeon upon any old dunghill of rhetorical contradiction' (quoted 227). If indeed, *d'après* Wood, art is a flower, then long may Venn continue to develop our olfactory abilities to sniff out the music from the noise.

Anthony Gritten

The Innumerable Dance: The Life and Work of William Alwyn by Adrian Wright. Boydell, £30/$60 (hardcover).

This, the first large-scale biography of William Alwyn (1905–1985), offers an admirably clear and unbiased account of his life from a happy childhood in Northampton, via studies at the Royal Academy of Music and professional life as a flautist in the London Symphony Orchestra, his mid-life successes as a composer of concert and film music, including scores for *The Way Ahead* (1944), *Odd Man Out* (1947), *The Fallen Idol* (1948) and *The History of Mr Polly* (1949) and his work on various committees, including helping to found the Composers' Guild of Great Britain, through to the last 25 years of his life spent with his second wife, Mary (known before her marriage as the composer Doreen Carwithen) in Blythburgh, Suffolk. Though these last years were his happiest on a personal level, they were blighted by professional neglect and a resultant bitterness. It was a strange, almost perverse decision on Alwyn's part to move to Suffolk (Wright calls it 'unwanted, unnecessary') and it inevitably led to his being referred to by the press as 'the other Suffolk composer', though it did not lead to his joining the 'Aldeburgh set'. Carwithen features strongly in the book and, gratifyingly, her own creative output has a separate chapter devoted to it.

I would have welcomed more detail on Alwyn's membership of the BBC's Central Advisory Music Panel. This is referred to in passing in a positive light, championing the cause of a second Musicians' Union and highlighting the poor state of music in children's television. As a panel member, Alwyn's judgements on the scores of his fellow composers could, apparently, be harsh and, in the case of his friend William Wordsworth's Second Symphony contributed, by Alwyn's own admission, to that work being refused for broadcast. A selective review of his judgements in his capacity as a panel member would have been of great interest. However, we are given a very clear picture of Alwyn's views on some of his fellow composers' works from the unexpurgated version of *Ariel to Miranda* (1967), parts of which are reproduced in the book. The results are more illuminating for what they reveal about Alwyn's attitude to his contemporaries rather than the pieces themselves: for example, he finds Rubbra's Sixth Symphony 'amateurish and pointless', Arnold's *Tam O'Shanter* Overture 'a banal empty piece', Stanley Bate's Fourth Symphony is a 'singularly inept work' and William Wordsworth's Fourth is dismissed

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as a 'grim and depressing work'. As Wright sagely observes, 'if Alwyn had read such barbed comments as this about this own work he would have been furious': one of the most striking aspects of Alwyn's character which emerges from the book is his considerable and unshakeable estimation of the lasting value of his own work.

Due consideration is given to Alwyn the novelist (in a chapter entitled 'Soundless Music'), as well as his activities as a poet, painter and translator, but perhaps even more emphasis could have been given to his compositions. Though certain pieces are considered in detail, others receive surprisingly scant analysis. I agree with the author, in his Preface, that 'bringing every one of [his] works into the narrative would have resulted in little more than an annotated list of Alwyn's output', but the choice of pieces for in-depth consideration is occasionally questionable. For example, I would have liked to have seen more room devoted to a description of the three string quartets and the Second Symphony of 1953 (Alwyn's personal favourite among his five examples in the genre). The other four symphonies, the two large-scale operas *Juan, or The Libertine* (1971) and *Miss Julie* (1976) and *Lyra Angelica* (1954) all get further coverage, with some justification, but why *Autumn Legend* (1954) and especially the *Derby Day* Overture (1960) should also deserve more comprehensive treatment is a mystery.

It is a pity there are no musical examples in the book to illuminate the author's descriptions of the works and show us Alwyn's evolving style. I find the composer at his most engaging in his later works,when he appeared to turn his back on the oft-quoted and self-propagated 'Romantic' tag and his artistic 'pursuit of beauty', in favour of a grittier and terser mode of expression such as that encountered in the *Sinfonietta* for String orchestra (1970) and the Symphony No.5, *Hydriotaphia* (1973). It would have been good to have seen some musical quotations from these direct and incisive utterances to contrast with his earlier, more opulent manner.

Adrian Wright's *The Innumerable Dance* (the title is taken from an early Alwyn overture based on Blake's *Milton*) is eminently readable and manifestly well researched, drawing extensively on the composer's letters and other autobiographical material as well as conversations with people who knew him. Especially notable is its impressively balanced view of its subject: his could almost certainly only have been achieved after the death of Doreen Carwithen, a fiercely uncompromising defender of her husband's work. It allows us to judge the true breadth and ambition of Alwyn's achievements for ourselves,and the results are far more eloquent than a more hagiographical approach. Despite limited coverage, it succeeds in making the reader (this one, at any rate) want to listen anew to Alwyn's compositions: fortunately, many of them are currently available on disc – several, including the symphonies, in different versions – and they are helpfully listed in Andrew Knowles's discography. Even more useful as a reference source is Knowles's List of Works, highlighting the range and volume of Alwyn's creativity, although his films are more thoroughly detailed in the Filmography section of *William Alwyn: The Art of Film Music* by Ian Johnson (2005), also published by Boydell Press.

Paul Conway

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