

its material condition and sensuous pulsation'.<sup>3</sup> Novak's arguments, particularly within the chapter on *One*, seem to align with Eidsheim's; Novak continually makes reference to the listener not only as a participant in the drama but as a body perceiving different layers and types of material sounds (beyond the sounds' signification) through the senses.

While contributing much to the conversation, and certainly providing new modes of thought in the realm of both postmodernism and post-drama, Novak's writing at times feels clumsy and pedantic. Her footnote to the R. Murray Schafer text she discusses is a citation of the anthology *Audio Culture* rather than Schafer's actual book; her overuse of the word 'problematize' becomes grating. She also seems to insist on holding the hand of the reader throughout every section of the book: I felt cast as passive and ignorant as she led me, motion by motion, through her workings ('I will now explain ...'; 'then I will show ...'). For instance, rather than offering insights on the future of the term she has invented, or even simply leaving the reader with unanswered questions to mull over, the conclusion is a literal restatement of the introduction, a frustrating and unnecessary chapter-by-chapter description of the book one has just finished reading. Even with all of this taken into account, however, *Postopera* is an impressive stride towards an updated approach to opera studies, and 'postopera' is surely a welcome addition to the vocabulary.

Rebecca Lentjes

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*The Music of Nigel Butterley* by Elliott Gyger. Wildbird, 2015. \$39.99 AUD

'From Sorrowing Earth: A Celebration of Nigel Butterley's 80th Birthday', Arcko Symphonic Ensemble, Iwaki Auditorium, Melbourne.

The Australian composer Nigel Butterley (1935–) celebrated his eightieth birthday in 2015. The occasion was marked by several significant concerts (more in Melbourne than the composer's hometown of Sydney, curiously) and the publication of an important new book, *The Music of Nigel Butterley*, written by fellow composer Elliott Gyger (Wildbird, 2015). In some ways, this has

served as a sad reminder of how little known and little heard his fascinating music remains, despite his recognised and longstanding contributions to musical life in Australia, not only as a composer, but as a teacher and performer.

The most notable commemorative concerts of the year took place well outside the sphere of influence of the major orchestras. The leading edge of music creation and performance in Australia long ago shifted towards smaller, independent groups – but this was not always the case. Early in Butterley's career (during the 1960s and 1970s for example), many opportunities for large-scale commissions, excellent performances and recordings, came through the main state and federally funded orchestras, as well as through the powerful agency of what was then the Australian Broadcasting Commission (now a corporation).

Arguably, the most important commemorative event was Arcko Symphonic Ensemble's concert on 31 October, which presented several of Butterley's major works alongside a new piano concerto by Elliott Gyger, *From Joyous Leaves* (2015), composed as a birthday homage to Butterley. Gyger's concerto is a beautiful tribute: it takes as its initiating material a short piano piece of Butterley's, *Uttering Joyous Leaves* (1981), which is reworked into a new piece that movingly melds the two composers' musical thinking to offer a thoughtful and creative commentary upon Butterley's work. In this new piece, we find all Gyger's bright intelligence and intellectual playfulness, his subtle ear for orchestral coloration (one also hears cleverly apt references to some of Butterley's idiosyncratic orchestration), his keen sensitivity to musical materials, and his gift for original formal architecture. In this premiere, the solo piano part was played by the young Australian virtuoso Zubin Kanga, and both his performance and the work itself were so fine that one must hope for repeat performances in the near future.

Alongside this tribute from Gyger, the first half of the Arcko concert included the re-mastered version of Butterley's extraordinary radiophonic work *In the Head the Fire* (1966). It was a rare experience to hear this monumental, darkly powerful work realised in a concert hall. The piece won the Prix Italia 1966 (in the category of musical work for radio with words); Berio's *Laborintus II* was runner-up. Commissioned by the ABC, the work was scored lavishly for solo voices, choir and several instrumental ensembles of winds, brass, percussion and keyboards. For the original production, the various ensembles were recorded separately

<sup>3</sup> Nina Sun Eidsheim, 'Sensing Voice: Materiality and the Lived Body in Singing and Listening' in *Senses & Society*, 6/2 (2011), p. 149.

and the work as a whole stitched together in the studio. It is a formidable, frightening piece, strongly 'of its time', not just in terms of the 1960s recording technology and musical language, but also in the use of militant texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls, which must have had a particularly strong resonance in the period of rapidly escalating tension in the Middle East leading up to the Six Day War of 1967.

The second half of the concert was filled by a magisterial, passionate performance of Butterley's masterwork for orchestra, *From Sorrowing Earth* (1991), Timothy Phillips conducting the flexible Arcko Symphonic in their largest orchestral configuration. *From Sorrowing Earth* exemplifies some of Butterley's great strengths: his ability to build complex structures and large-scale forms from the deep contemplation of limited materials; his powerful and unusual approach to orchestration, often working with sections of the orchestra as opposing choirs (or perhaps, to use a more forceful analogy, batteries); and most importantly of all, his projection of an overarching line through the intricate structures of the work, such that one has almost the sense of a plainchant melody, a human voice, around which other aspects of the music swarm and hover. This is one of the great Australian orchestral works, and one that really deserves to be heard more frequently. For those of us who knew the work only from recordings, this live performance was a revelation – no recording can fully capture the vast sense of space opened up by the extremes of dynamic range, through which Butterley's music sweeps like a force of nature.

As important as these performances have been in re-awaking audiences to the importance of Butterley's music, Elliott Gyger's new book will perhaps be the most lasting legacy of this eightieth birthday year. It is an unusual book, in so far as it is primarily analytical in orientation but with a considerable amount of relevant biographical detail worked into the analytical discussion. As part of a new series of books on Australian composers, Gyger's work presumably had to conform to a series template – this has pros and cons. If one were to make any criticism of the book as a whole, it would be that there is no index, which would certainly have made the content of the book much more readily accessible.

While all of Butterley's music is covered in an even-handed and thoroughly comprehensive manner, the works are not discussed chronologically but rather organised by genre (solos and duos, chamber music, orchestral, vocal, etc.). Although unwieldy in some respects, this organisation does offer the advantage of intensive discussion of particular bodies of work (for example, the four wonderful string quartets, composed 1965–95). Gyger has a formidable analytical skill, and highly refined aural sensibility, both of which inform his analyses. Throughout the book, he has been able to unravel the often very intricate materials and processes behind Butterley's creative work and to write about these in an engaging manner that often makes one wish to hear the music immediately.

Butterley's way of thinking about music, as carefully revealed by Gyger, proves to be both genuinely intriguing and also remarkably consistent throughout his career. In his mature work, he forged an individual approach to musical materials and their organisation, often combining 12-tone rows and serial operations with modal material (both deliberately limited by a curious lack of enthusiasm for transposition), or building up seemingly 'free' deployments of the 12-tone field through the layered unfolding or montage of varied trichords and tetrachords. In these methods we may discern the clear influences of various other composers (Tippett, Ligeti, Berio and Lutosławski come to mind, and also Cage, Bartok and Stravinsky), but the resulting music is distinctive: refined and personal, yet fiercely intelligent.

One hopes that Gyger's invaluable analytical writing and advocacy for Butterley's work will inspire musicians to play more of his music in years to come. In the context of Australian music research, the recent reawakening of interest in Butterley's music is part of a broader reassessment of music of the past 50 years that has been triggered by the passing of Peter Sculthorpe in 2014. This book is a valuable publication for promoting an understanding and appreciation of Butterley's music but I sense that its importance goes beyond this: it helps us also to understand a great deal about the nature of non-tonal musical composition in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Alistair Noble