
BOOK REVIEWS

György Ligeti: Of Foreign Lands and Strange Sounds ed. Louise Duchesneau & Wolfgang Marx. Boydell Press, £45.00.

György Ligeti (1923–2006) was one of the most captivating and communicative composers of the last century. His music is able to engage successfully with listeners, a characteristic which was far more problematic for other contemporary composers of his generation. The main reason for this is that Ligeti's approach to composition was above all controlled by the ear (with a focus on textures and timbres), and not by rigid compositional systems. *György Ligeti: Of Foreign Lands and Strange Sounds* is a very welcome addition to the literature on Ligeti, and is the first in English to have such a wide range of topics. It consists of articles which were the product of a festival entitled 'Remembering Ligeti' organized in Dublin in November 2007, but it goes beyond the scope of the original festival, including contributions from additional writers.

The range of topics is broad, including: analytical discussions of works from throughout Ligeti's life; an analysis of his record collection; Ligeti's relationship with African music; two detailed examinations of his sketches; and two accounts of his approach to teaching. Consequently the book does not have a single focus but rather it illuminates his life and music through the use of complementary perspectives. The quality of the argument and analysis in the book is a little inconsistent at times, and the most fascinating work is that by Richard Steinitz and Jonathan Bernard, which explores Ligeti's sketch material. The discussion of his approach to teaching by Ligeti's students, Manfred Stahnke and Wolfgang Andreas Schultz, is also very revealing. It is impossible in this short review to cover every chapter, so I will focus below on those that are especially groundbreaking.

Ligeti had the ability to reinvent himself as a composer throughout his life; first when he escaped to the West in 1956 and then again in the 1970s and 1980s when his style became completely transformed. He was a controversial figure because of his avoidance of being aligned with any school or movement. As Manfred Stahnke points out, 'he was regarded as an absolute reactionary' (p. 233) by the avant-garde German composer

Helmut Lachenmann and his followers, especially after the composition of the Horn Trio (1982) and its extensive exploration of music from the past. Ligeti's Horn Trio was a pivotal work in his stylistic evolution, and Steinitz explores its sketches in great detail in his chapter.

The chapters by Ligeti's students give a raw insight into his compositional teaching technique and aesthetics. On a personal level as a teacher Ligeti was, according to Stahnke, both 'extremely exciting...[and] also vicious and unfair not only towards other, well-known composers, but towards his own students as well' (p. 233). This is clearly an unusual approach for a teacher, although Ligeti was not a typical composition teacher; as Stahnke also states 'Ligeti was not a real teacher. Or rather, that he was a "transposed" teacher, one who had long ago left behind the traditional "keys" of teaching and now strived to discover new territory' (p. 225). Ligeti approached his teaching in a similar fashion to his composition – that there are no easy answers and that every position had to be challenged. As Stahnke states, 'everybody had to find his or her own respective musical style without copying the teacher or other contemporary music masters' (p. 255). Stahnke also gives an insight into Ligeti's philosophy with the following comment: 'processes, which were "conceivable" as musical structures, were dismissed if the sounding image, that is what one in fact heard, was meaningless' (p. 228). In other words, if a musical structure only made sense on paper but not in sound, then it was considered of little use to Ligeti, hence his anathema to integral serialism and Xenakis's use of mathematics in his music. Stahnke goes on to quote Ligeti thus: 'I fault Xenakis for applying often unproven and somewhat naïve mathematical manipulations to music without further consideration. He believed that what makes sense as an algorithm will also be meaningful as music' (p. 234).

Bernard's chapter entitled 'Rules and Regulation: Lessons from Ligeti's Compositional Sketches' usefully analyses the different kinds of sketches Ligeti produced (most of Ligeti's existing sketches can be found at the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel). These divide into five types: jottings; drawings (or graphic scores); charts (pitches given but not staff notation); tables (these might be running totals of pitches and rhythms);

music notation (pitches with no rhythm, rhythm with no pitch, or full notation). The book has 16 colour plates of Ligeti's sketches (plus other sketches embedded within the text) which is one of its most valuable aspects. The plates are referred to by Bernard and Steinitz and provide an insight into how Ligeti's works evolved through the sketches. The first plate is of the orchestral work *San Francisco Polyphony* (1973–74), which consists of a mixture of a graphic score with a time-line, and many comments in Hungarian. The second plate is of *Atmosphères* (1960) and is purely graphic, with bar lines and bar numbers placed over the top of the lines and blocks. These examples give a clear idea how Ligeti thought about textural music; that it was the overall shape of the music that was most important. Bernard's conclusion is that Ligeti's use of technical principles in composition show a flexibility in their execution, but also a methodical way of using the musical materials, for example in the use of polyphonic rules in the *Requiem* (p. 164–65).

Steinitz in his chapter 'À qui un hommage? Genesis of the Piano Concerto and the Horn Trio' also makes use of Ligeti's sketches, exploring the composer's writer's block during the composition of the Piano Concerto, which took from 1980–88 to be completed. Ligeti had hit a stylistic crisis with the concerto, which explains the large number of false starts for this work in the sketches. Steinitz effectively demonstrates how Ligeti gradually transformed his language through the composition of this work.

There are many other valuable insights into Ligeti's music in this book, including Wolfgang Marx's exploration of the theme of death in Ligeti's music, and Paul Griffith's discussion of Ligeti's orchestras. It is a text that will be warmly welcomed by all Ligeti scholars.

Mike Searby

From Time – To Time: The Complete Œuvre. Conversations with Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf by Klaus Huber, translated by Wieland Hoban (New Music and Aesthetics in the 21st Century Vol.7). Wolke Verlag, €29.00.

This is a very substantial book. Of Klaus Huber's Swiss-born colleagues, only Rudolf Kelterborn and Heinz Holliger have come near to matching the size and quality of his output in the second half of the 20th century. Outside festivals, the music is not all that familiar beyond the German-speaking world. Some of Huber's most important pieces call for unusually large and specialist

forces. Composed between 1975 and 1982, the central oratorio *Erniedrigt – Geknechtet – Verlassen – Verachtet* survives in Mathias Knauer's film of the Donaueschingen première. Although Huber still cherishes hopes of a staged version, the early performances are hardly likely to be repeated anywhere soon. But it was with such chamber-music pieces as *Des Engels Anredung an die Seele* and *Auf die ruhige Nacht-Zeit* that he launched his career, and miniatures are scattered throughout his oeuvre.

Frequently the shorter pieces form offshoots of larger compositions. One point to emerge from the conversations with Mahnkopf – published to mark Huber's 85th birthday – is the unified character of the artistic vision. One thing can lead to another; Huber doesn't believe in the *tabula rasa* as a compositional starting-point. Rather, in keeping with CF Meyer's description of man as an inherent paradox, his music springs from a need to reconcile opposing elements.

Currently based in Leipzig, Mahnkopf is a former pupil of Huber and an adherent of a movement known as the 'New Complexity'. In the course of 300 pages he elicits illuminating comments on nearly every major piece Huber has produced. A number of them, such as *Cantiones de Circulo Gyrate* (which was tailored to an amateur choir), the Second String Quartet (from which the book's title derives) and the 'dialectical opera' *Schwarzerde* (completed in 2001), enjoy a chapter to themselves. *Erniedrigt – Geknechtet* receives more summary treatment in view of Max Nyffeler's detailed analysis in *Melos*.

The conversations begin with the composer's teaching engagements in Basle, Freiburg im Breisgau and elsewhere: activities bringing him into contact with Wolfgang Rihm, Brian Ferneyhough and Younghui Pagh-Paan, now Huber's wife. Huber has nurtured as many budding talents as his own mentor Willy Burkhard did. Less wedded to textbook learning than teachers of Burkhard's era, he can say with justified pride that none of his students has imitated his own style or styles.

Of the book's four sections, one of the more general in subject-matter comprises chapters on 'Time', 'Mozart', 'Poly-Work' and 'Maniera'. Mozart has influenced several Huber pieces directly. Huber calls the tiny *Petite Pièce* for three basset horns a 're-composition' of a Mozart divertimento, distilling some of its motivic elements. Departing from chronology, Mahnkopf then fast-forwards to *Ecce Homines*, a string quintet premièred in 1998 by the Arditti Quartet with Garth Knox. Huber divulges some verbal notes which anticipated the composition. Arising out of a 'trembling', the musical language was to

feature a) the modal *maqam* of Arabic music, b) third-tones, and c) nineteen-tone enharmonic mean-tone temperament, the last to be ‘examined [...] with reference to Wolfgang Amadeus’s harmonic chromaticism’. What’s most ‘Mozartian’ about *Ecce Homines*, though, is the articulation – ‘Mozart lived off folk music, off musical colloquialisms’.

Huber mentions two pre-Classical musicians in his note on mean-tone temperament. One is Nicolò Vicentino, who revived the ancient Greek modes in 16th-century Italy, the other Gesualdo. The latter receives a short chapter to himself a propos of Huber’s *Lamentationes Sacrae et Profanae ad Responsoria Iesualdi*. Gesualdo, he observes, is very precise in his orthography. ‘That makes him the great enharmonicist – not, as people generally believe, the great chromaticist.’ Elsewhere, Huber has maintained that third-tones, too, are a western European device, an innovation dating back to 16th-century Ferrara.

Like *Ecce Homines*, Huber’s *Intarsi* (‘Inlays’, 1993/1994) reflects some recent creative preoccupations. A chamber concerto for piano – or fortepiano – and 17 instruments, the piece offers a response to Mozart’s last piano concerto, KV 595. The title and the dedication to the memory of Lutosławski relate to the first of the four movements in particular. Huber regards the third movement as the most light-footed and yet abstract music he has ever composed: ‘a constantly shifting counterpoint; the phrases remain the same, but are integrated into different polyphonies. I contrast this with the chanting rhythm of “El pueblo unido que más sera vencido,” a folk rhythm by Sergio Ortega designed for the Chilean revolution [...] These two materials are developed polyphonically in a kind of witch hunt, which is why I call this movement “Rondissimo”.’

Drawing on both Arabic music and the rhythms of Messiaen’s *Catalogue d’oiseaux*, the finale of *Intarsi* provides an exotic epilogue. I have singled out this composition because I witnessed the première performance of the pianoforte version, with Andrés Schiff as the soloist. For all its intricacy, *Intarsi* has the vital spark of true ‘concert music’ – a beguiling experience which the Huber–Mahnkopf dialogue and the book’s reproduction of sketches for the piece can help to enrich.

Mahnkopf groups four chapters under the rubric ‘Aspects’. The last addresses the themes of *maniera*, mannerism (in the context of the late-Renaissance art movement), self-quotation and re-composition. Huber admits to relishing the enigmatic side of European mannerism, and it was in a book on the subject that he found that Dürer illustration which gave rise to his ...

inwendig voller Figur. Self-quotation, for Huber, is synonymous with re-composition; but he goes on to accept Mahnkopf’s view of the recurring quote as a personal signature. Or not so personal? For on the one hand Huber’s music includes recognizable signposts or references persisting from work to work. On the other, he has gradually come to acknowledge the subconscious role of a universal note-symbolism. The note A flat, for example, is the note of love, the note E flat a symbol of death.

Mahnkopf prefaces the conversations with an interview conducted in 2003. ‘Against the Reification of Human Beings and Their Music’ focuses on Klaus Huber the dedicated humanist. A native of Berne who in his ninth decade has commuted between Bremen and Umbria, Huber typifies the best of the Swiss in his defence of freedoms. Like Jacques Derrida, he favours a ‘reason of the heart’: a phrase that appears in numerous Huber pieces of the 21st century.

Glance at the concluding index of names, and those of various poets and philosophers stand out. His preliminary reading, Huber says, is serendipitous rather than systematic. Time and again he has combined verbal texts by widely differing authors: Teresa of Avila and Pablo Neruda, Hildegard of Bingen and Heinrich Böll. In *La Terre des Hommes* for two vocalists and 18 instruments, he endeavoured to ‘musicalise’ Simone Weil. But Huber’s literary leanings are no implicit endorsement of the poet WH Auden, who argued that words have an ethical dimension which music *per se* lacks. In the final chapter of the book, the composer speaks of the concrete aspect of music as a critical engagement with both the outside and the inner worlds. In that sense, ‘music is capable of truth’. The corollary: ‘Art can lie’. And you can hear that? Mahnkopf asks. ‘I hear that,’ Huber replies tersely, ‘and I note that it’s getting out of hand’.

Even if you don’t want a piece of music discussed before getting a chance to hear it, the pupilled conversations are worth acquiring for the final chapter alone. Gathering up socio-political, technological, religious, artistic and even physiological issues into one provocative bundle, this last conversation has the subtlety of a Socratic dialogue. As a metaphor the so-called ‘communication’ highway of the internet is nonsense in Huber’s opinion. He quotes from Nyffeler’s 1999 collection of Huber articles, *Umgepflügte Zeit* (‘Time Re-Ploughed’): ‘Music communicates in a comprehensively humane way, never a unidirectional one. That means that one can never draw an unambiguous, definitive line between writing music, making music and listening to music’.

Klaus Huber has been generous in granting interviews, but *From Time – to Time* adds up to a

superb overview of a modern musical patriarch. Teacher and pupil end their colloquy on a hard-won positive note, by emphasizing the life-saving urge towards expanding horizons. Typos and the like are rare; the book features music examples and plans in abundance; and Wieland Hoban deserves a medal for his expert and fluent translation.

Peter Palmer

Explosions in November: The first 33 years of Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival by Richard Steinitz. University of Huddersfield Press, £24.99.

'I didn't want the job', Richard Steinitz writes. 'I was recently married, soon to be a father and composing in my limited spare time. Nor had I any idea how to plan and present a festival'. But somehow, in the cultural climate of increasing regionalization described in the opening chapter of this large, glossy, absorbing paperback, and against the background of his own experience as a lecturer at the then Huddersfield Polytechnic, it was to Steinitz that it fell to found the town's Contemporary Music Festival in 1978, the year after the York Early Music Festival and Yorkshire Sculpture Park and the same year as English National Opera North (now simply Opera North). Planning and presenting would have to be learned 'on the job': with resounding success, as it turned out. He remained in charge for 23 years and turned it into a festival of international importance, still Britain's only serious event of its kind, now lasting ten days every November and with a budget of around £600,000 (up from just over £7,000 in 1979, the festival's second year).

Such facts and figures, as well as the responses of both audiences and critics and behind-the-scenes negotiations with orchestras, ensembles, composers, sponsors and other festivals, are generously documented throughout, so that the book will be of interest to scholars and researchers as well as to the lay reader. Perhaps such histories are usually better written by a well-connected observer than by someone quite so close to the centre of the action, but Steinitz has – besides a real knack for clear exposition and engaging storytelling – an uncanny ability to look quasi-objectively at his own achievements, as well as to be equally fair-minded in reporting on the work of his successors, so that the kinds of assessment one might expect from a disinterested chronicler are not lacking here. (There's plenty more subjective content too, and the book is continually alert and amusing, sometimes disconcertingly indiscreet,

and just occasionally wrong-headed in its assessment of some composer or style.)

The 1982 festival seems in many ways to have established a template for much of the next two decades: the presence of Xenakis – 'as apologist, demystifier, human being', in Steinitz's words – encouraged him to use (as from now on he always would) advertising featuring the composer's face, and to build programmes around the composer's own preferred performers (an approach which would ensure the equal impact of visits by Lachenmann in 1986, long before that composer was celebrated in London, and by Ferneyhough in 1987). It's fascinating to hear the stories of these and other composer visits from Steinitz's own perspective; and it's instructive, in following the story through and beyond Steinitz's tenure, to note the shifts as well as continuities in the festival's focus over the years. Steinitz's own approach to programming, and indeed his own listening preferences, seem to have been unselfconsciously eclectic: he vigorously defends his inclusion of music by Henryk Górecki in 1993, albeit partly on the grounds that it 'demonstrated to a largely local audience that the festival was not to be feared', and documents his attempts to entice John Adams – of whom and of whose music he seems genuinely fond – to return after what proved to be a traumatic 1987 visit (the critics were dismissive, and Adams felt sorely out of place at a European festival).¹ On the other hand the eclecticism does seem to have been aimed always at presenting the widest possible range of *living* composers, and one senses that he was initially uncertain how to deal with the failure of the Cage/Messiaen/Ligeti/Berio/Stockhausen generation to be followed by another generation of 'stars' who by their name and their presence could attract wide audiences.

In fact it's natural that, as 'contemporary music' itself has developed a history, the festival should now represent both the extension of that concept into new presents (most notably in an extended focus under its most recent artistic director Graham McKenzie on improvised and experimental work) and a newly historicized interest in those now largely departed modernist father-figures. Meanwhile, their younger successors in notated composition, while producing marvellous and varied music, are not 'names' in the same way, and perhaps the sorts of audiences the festival can hope to attract have changed accordingly

¹ A public interview with Adams during this visit, fortuitously captured on cassette tape by an audience member, is to be transcribed and published in a separate volume, alongside interviews with Xenakis, Cage, Grisey, Eno, Lachenmann, Rihm, Dillon, and a near-legendary two-hour discussion between George Benjamin and Pierre Boulez that took place in 1989.

(my own sense as a festivalgoer is that the audience now is more 'professionalized', certainly that it overlaps less with the townspeople). Steinitz notes these developments without passing judgment: perhaps they are for another retired artistic director to contemplate, another third of a century down the line ...

The book's production standards are generally high. There is substantial provision of images, ranging from photos of concerts, staged events and the numerous educational workshops associated with the festival, to programmes, advertising materials, and even pages from Steinitz's planning diaries. The format – roughly A4 (a bit wider), glossy pages, good-quality image reproduction – is effective, making the book browsable as a coffee-table offering but also easily readable from cover to cover. The structure, mixing chronological narrative with more subject-oriented chapter divisions, works well; a couple of instances of repetition could have been weeded out, but they are impressively few for a book whose primary impulse and function are in any case documentary rather than literary. Copy-editing is generally accurate but seems to have been done by someone without a good knowledge of the subject, and several names are misspelt (in the text, the index or both) – a pity, since Steinitz is otherwise so informative and generous in recording the contributions of others to this extraordinary journey. Still, the abiding impression one is left with is of gratitude for the work this remarkable man has achieved, and for the thoroughness with which he has now documented it.

John Fallas

Thomas Wilson – Introit: Towards the Light by Margaret Wilson and David Griffith. Queensgate Music, £15.00.

'The only explanation for music is the music itself. It must stand or fall by its own merits': thus once declared Thomas Wilson (1927–2001), whose own considerable output seems custom-built to meet the most exacting of standards. Important commissions from the Edinburgh Festival, the Proms, Scottish Opera and the BBC helped to establish him as one of the leading British composers of his generation. He made distinguished contributions to most forms, including symphonies, concertos, chamber and instrumental works, vocal and choral pieces, brass band, music for radio and television, ballet and opera. In addition, he played an active role in British musical life, holding executive and advisory positions in such

organizations as The Composers' Guild of Great Britain (Chairman 1986–9), The Arts Council and The Society for the Promotion of New Music.

One of Scotland's foremost composers, Wilson was actually born in Trinidad, Colorado. Shortly after his birth, the family returned to the UK and settled in the area of Glasgow, the city where he was to spend the rest of his life, studying music at the University and taking up a teaching post there in 1957.

Early influences included Bartók, Stravinsky and Berg and his keen interest in the latest, most advanced techniques led to an assimilation of aleatoric and electronic elements into his carefully developed musical language. His works are characterized by their clarity of form, limpid textures and precisely chosen instrumental colours, derived from an unusually wide-ranging palette. A typical Wilson work will unfold inexorably rather than springing into action fully-fashioned, disparate elements set out in an introductory section and gradually coalescing into a more structured entity as the material evolves. One of his favourite forms is that of a single, unbroken movement divided into contrasting sections, which provides the satisfying paradox of extreme diversity contained within a powerful unity.

Always preoccupied by the apt selection of notes and the challenge of realizing their full potential rather than seeking novelty for its own sake, he was wont to re-use ideas in different genres if he felt they would benefit from such treatment. Thus, material in the Piano Concerto derives from an earlier song cycle entitled *The Willow Branches* and a work for solo piano, *Incunabula*, whilst the origins of the Fifth Symphony date back two decades to parts of the Fourth String Quartet and *Mosaics*, a piece for chamber ensemble and synthesizers.

Wilson first attracted critical attention in 1955 with the première of his First Symphony by the BBC Scottish Orchestra under Colin Davis. Embarrassed by what he came to regard as its youthful excesses and inordinate length, he later withdrew this work, along with his first two string quartets. Thus, the Third String Quartet of 1958 (recorded on Delphian DCD34079) is his first acknowledged piece as well as one which he described as a turning point in his stylistic development. He produced his only strictly serial work, the Violin Sonata, in 1961, but this turned out to be a one-off experiment as his writing took on a predominantly expressionistic vein with a much looser application of serial principles, as may be heard in his Piano Trio of 1966 (also on Delphian DCD34079). Three pieces from the period reveal his mastery of the orchestra: Symphony No. 2

(1965), as near to atonality as he ever ventured; Concerto for Orchestra (1967), a compelling single-movement work that focuses on the interaction between contrasting material and textures rather than orchestral virtuosity, and *Touchstone* (1967), a portrait of the clown in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* in the form of an extended orchestral scherzo.

During the following decade Wilson made major contributions to several fields, flexing his creative muscles to master each genre in turn. *Sequentiae passionis*, for large chamber choir and orchestra (1971), is an imaginatively scored, hour-long setting of episodes from the Passion, whose three parts – Betrayals, Passion and Death, and Resurrection – each begin with a broadcast pre-recording of plainsong melody accompanied by percussive effects. *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1974) is a large-scale operatic treatment of James Hogg's classic novel that deals with the struggles of good against evil and is notable for its dark humour. String Quartet No. 4 of 1978, included on Meridian disc CDE 84445, is a powerful one-movement utterance; its outbursts of irrepressible energy and aggression are in stark contrast to the muted expressivity of its introductory section, wherein lies the source material for the rest of the work. Symphony No. 3 (1979) is also cast in a single span, whose opening portion is deliberately tentative and unfocused, allowing greater refinement and clarity to emerge in later sections as the work attains a genuine symphonic sweep.

During the 1980s and 1990s Wilson produced a series of concertos – for piano, viola, violin and guitar – all of which spurn traditional pyrotechnical displays for their respective soloists in favour of well-defined structures illuminated by striking sonorities. In common with works from the same era, such as *Introit (Towards the Light...)* for orchestra (1982) and the popular *St. Kentigern Suite* for strings (1986), these concertante pieces are distinguished by their lyrical warmth. Among other large-scale compositions of his later years,

the Chamber Concerto (1986), the Chamber Symphony (1990) and the Fourth, *Passeleth Tapestry* (1988) and Fifth (1998) Symphonies are of especial note.

The story of how all the above works came to be written, together with many insights into the character of their creator may be found in a new biography, *Thomas Wilson – Introit: Towards the Light*, written by the composer's wife Margaret in collaboration with David Griffith. It is a compelling account of the struggles and successes of a determined individual with uncompromisingly high standards. Universally well-liked, he forged valuable musical friendships with fellow composers such as William Wordsworth, Robert Crawford, David Dorward and, especially, John Maxwell Geddes, who makes several illuminating comments in the book on his friend's output, character and legacy. Due credit is given to conductors such as James Loughran, Alexander Gibson and Bryden Thomson for their role in putting contemporary Scottish music on the map, as well as promoting Wilson's music.

There is a comprehensive list of works: it is a pity they are not indexed, as all of them receive due attention and several are described in detail through the generous use of programme notes, transcriptions of interviews, press reviews and extracts from essays and articles. These selections help to making this publication an invaluable resource for anyone wanting to attempt a more analytical exploration of Wilson's canon, an undertaking the quality of his writing positively invites.

As with all good biographies of creative artists, it inspires readers to acquaint – or reacquaint – themselves with the subject's oeuvre. However, the sad truth is that only a tiny fraction of Wilson's compositions – and almost none of his large-scale pieces – are currently commercially available on disc. Let us hope this situation will change very soon. Until then, Margaret Wilson's new profile of her husband is a timely reminder of the full extent of his distinctive and enduring body of work.

Paul Conway