

Bedford's and Souster's engagement with pop music shows the creatively positive response of composers who came to compositional maturity when British pop music was having its greatest cultural impact. How these composers negotiated their situation deserves a whole book in itself.

Continuing the Manchester theme, Métier has released a CD of 'New Sounds from Manchester'. There's a direct link between the original Manchester school and one composer on the disc, Philip Grange having studied with Maxwell Davies. All the composers on this release have connections with Manchester University; three currently teach there, while John Casken was professor of Music until 2008. The music is varied, ranging from a brief piece modelled on an aquatic relative of jellyfish (Reeves's *Fireworks Physonect Siphonophore*, hereafter referred to as String Quartet No.1) to a substantial meditation on the killing fields of the Somme (Grange's *Ghosts of Great Violence*). The CD is, coincidentally, an example of what Rupprecht at one point in his book calls 'conservative modernism', a restraint in the face of European modernism; there is no desire to rethink the nature of the medium of the string quartet such as there might be in (for example) Xenakis or Lachenmann. Not that there's anything wrong with that; on the strength of the music here, the conventional string quartet still has something to offer composers.

Reeves's two pieces (I shall refer to *Dactylozoid Complex* as the second quartet ...) are closely related, String Quartet No.1 (the shorter of the two) sounding like a warm-up for the longer second quartet. They are strongly gestural, dramatic pieces inhabiting a similar sound world. The three movements of the second quartet all share the same basic material and follow a similar trajectory of dynamic activity followed by quiet static material, but grow increasingly long. The composer draws parallels between the music and the structure and behaviour of jellyfish-like organisms, suggesting that the string quartet itself functions rather like a jellyfish (there is no record of what the players think of this).

Richard Whalley's *Interlocking Melodies* was written as a tribute to Ligeti, whose presence (as filtered through Nancarrow) is occasionally detectable. Other aspects, particularly the melodic and textural writing, have a touch of Ravel, though this is perhaps inevitable when you're

dealing with whole-tone material (even if coloured by quarter-tone differences).

The title of John Casken's *Choses en moi* points to the use of self-quotation and allusions to earlier works of his. I'm sometimes puzzled by this sort of self-referentiality – does the composer expect the listeners to be as familiar with his output as they are? Is the piece a kind of 'spot the quotation' game? Why quote particular pieces and not others? Does it matter if the listener is oblivious to the references? And if it doesn't matter, then why draw attention to it in the programme notes? Having said that, *Choses en moi* is an attractive piece (again with a touch of Ravel in its textures – what is it with string quartets and Ravel?), elegantly structured and well-paced.

The most substantial piece is Philip Grange's *Ghosts of Great Violence*, clocking in at just short of half an hour. It is the one piece on the CD that comes close to being a traditional string quartet, in four movements, even having a kind of scherzo as the third (albeit a darkly sardonic one). The music has an elegiac quality, particularly in the first and last movements, and each instrument is foregrounded at some point (cello in the first movement, first violin and viola in the second, and second violin in the third). The title is deliberately ambiguous, and the music has a restrained quality in the face of the horror of the Somme. The music, like all the pieces on the disc, is played with dedication and commitment.

A couple of small niggles: 'New Sounds from Manchester' is perhaps a bit of a misnomer (to say nothing of an unimaginative title). There's nothing here that would frighten Bartók (or Bartók on steroids in the case of Camden Reeves). Also, how representative is it of current compositional practice in that city as a whole? Are there any composers who aren't at the university? And aren't there any female composers in Manchester?

Nick Williams

Louise Talma: A Life in Composition by Kendra Preston Leonard. Ashgate, 2014. £65.00

American composer Louise Talma (1906–1996) made her way in a man's world. She was the second woman recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship (after Ruth Crawford Seeger) and the first woman to be awarded two Guggenheim Awards, in 1946 and 1947. In 1963 she became the first female recipient of the Sibelius Medal for composition, and in

1974 she was admitted to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

Kendra Preston Leonard's book is densely packed with a level of detail that, for a single volume, is comprehensive to say the least. Many new sources have been drawn upon that are more easily accessible due to transformation in digital archiving procedures, notably Talma's personal archive which has, since her death, been partially catalogued by the Library of Congress. Her work is scrutinised for its personal, musicological and political stances. Also included within the text is a detailed analytical unpicking of works salient to this variety of approaches. The intellectual rigour behind the volume is dexterous and impressive, and the intermingling of analytical approaches could well be adopted for many more biographical and musicological studies. Viewing a composer and their work at a distance and separate from what has informed their work is anachronistic, so it is a pleasure to discover that so many narratives within Talma's creative life are made transparent to the reader.

The book begins by delving into Talma's personal narrative, her own account of her arrival in the United States, her origins and national allegiances leading to more fundamental questions concerning the identity of her father, his relationship with her mother, and his seemingly mythical status in her relationship with her mother. The extent to which the instability of her own narrative continued to be felt is strikingly borne out in the account of the moment that Talma felt compelled, at the age of 29, to confess the circumstances surrounding her parents' marriage' to her beloved teacher, Nadia Boulanger. Despite sheer dogged diligence, however, Kendra Preston Leonard has traced no record of any marriage. Leonard proposes that the uncertainties surrounding Talma's very identity were in some way fundamental to the creative life that followed, driving her construction of an ascetic, overwhelmingly purposeful life dedicated to the pursuance of her work. Similarly, Leonard identifies Talma's determination to safeguard her financial independence (as modelled by her mother) as a vital component in her maintaining the ability and means to create. This is scrutinised not so much from a feminist standpoint as from an enquiry into the role of identity and the mythologies one constructs around one's position in the world – a debate equally valid for composers of either sex.

The book offers a comprehensive overview of significant influences on Talma, the composer: Nadia Boulanger, Catholicism, serialism. It was

in 1926, whilst a student at the Institute of Musical Arts (now the Juilliard School), that Talma first encountered the teaching of Nadia Boulanger, at the Conservatoire Américain in Fontainebleau, France. Boulanger became a profound influence, Talma returning for lessons with her, and subsequently teaching alongside her at Fontainebleau every summer for 30 years. Talma is one of only a few female students to have flourished in the class of Nadia Boulanger, submitting to her dogmatic influence in a number of ways, including converting to Catholicism in 1934, with Boulanger as her Godmother.

So close were the bonds between mentor and student that Chapter 4, entitled 'A solitude ten thousand fathom deep: Independence', is an intriguing chapter that examines Talma's steps towards an intellectual maturity and independence. It's unusual in that it surveys a composer's in-between, developmental stage: with Boulanger no longer her Svengali and with her mother dead, Talma goes her own way. Leonard then segues into an assessment of Talma's professional status circa 1943: approaching her fortieth birthday, she was experiencing a renewed independence, marked by a transitory period of experimentation in her music that then led to a seeming consolidation and maturity. At this time her work accrued an increasing number of awards and favourable reviews in the New York press. Issues of legitimacy, autonomy and status emerge and unfold within a beguiling chapter that seeks to unravel the connection between events or decisions made at a key moment in her personal life and the evolution of her musical output, which ordinarily might be overlooked by a more formal and academic narrative.

Leonard manages to combine discussion of issues in compositional aesthetics with a re-evaluation of the reception Talma's music received at the time, subtly suggesting that her works were regarded differently from those of her male counterparts. An example of this is found within Chapter 5 (on serialism) in which the author recounts that Talma was quite taken by the works of Irving Fine so, looking to develop further her style, she initiated an instructive exchange with him by correspondence about serial writing. This, combined with text and score analysis, formed the basis of her move into serialism. She, like Fine, wanted to work with rows constructed using a tonal or axial centre, which could then be combined with 'concurrent, overlapping, or alternating tonal materials' (p. 128).

There was a method, design and comprehension behind Talma's use of serialism as an expressive musical language that the author contends has been undermined by more than one scholar on the grounds not only that Talma's serialist language was not 'proper serialism', lacking in serial purity, but that she was incompetent and did not understand what she was doing. (There exists documented evidence of her stated intentions, which shows, to the contrary, how well she understood and achieved her serially framed designs.) The works of her contemporary Irving Fine, however, were not so disregarded. Leonard turns to Joseph Straus's recent volume¹ on the impact of twelve-tone music on compositional developments in the United States, citing Straus's advancement of a body of evidence gathered from American composers (including Talma and Fine) during the 1950s and '60s that there was a 'serialism myth', that serial purity was widely considered to be the artistic zenith. Leonard explains that this is not nearly the whole story: Straus contends that, if one truly examines the evidence regarding the extent to which tonality was combined with serialism by a significant proportion of American composers, serialism never had the American compositional world in such a firm grip. We are led to draw our own conclusions about what actually took place aesthetically, and what was once described as 'the dominant aesthetic' is now a discussion appropriate for reception theorists, indeed maybe even more pertinently for gender theorists.

Chapter 6 focusses on Talma's only full opera, *The Alcestiad* (1955–58), which is chronicled in detail as it marks a significant moment and a substantial achievement in her career. In particular, the creative stress Talma endured in order to compose the work is scrutinised; the inclusion of this analytical narrative is revelatory.

A characteristic of Kendra Preston Leonard's writing throughout could be said to be the quality of the 'yarn'. Put simply, each chapter draws you in. The author's writing style is such that at the beginning of a chapter, one is not entirely sure what road it will take; where we, the reader, will end up. It is a stimulating read, a book not easily put down, which hopefully signals the advent of more vibrant musicological writing that tells a story for now, rather than brushing off some dusty old documents found in a

university library and remodelling those into a worthy tome.

The strength I most admired in the writing style was the gentle prodding and nudging around boundaries of gender and queer politics. The autobiographical is clearly present throughout – Leonard gently scrutinises issues that subtly raise complex and contentious issues of personal politics. There is a clarity, poise and maturity in the writing which serves with vitality the advancement of Talma's work: I hope this book will reach a wide readership and lead to a resurgence of interest in the music of Louisa Talma.

Rose Dodd

The 21st-Century Voice: Contemporary and Traditional Extra-Normal Voice (2nd edition) by Michael Edward Edgerton. Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. \$54.00

Writing a 'voice' volume for a series on new instrumentation, as Michael Edward Edgerton was commissioned to do in 1995 with the first edition of this book, is a unique challenge, given that the voice is an instrument for which there is no standard model, and arguably no objective technique. In the face of this, Edgerton has done a remarkable job in capturing the purely technical possibilities of the voice based on its bioacoustical framework, analysing every potential aspect of the vocal mechanism, from the movement of air itself to the consequences resulting from the minutest adjustment of each articulator, to the production of complex multiphonics.

Edgerton's approach in outlining the 'extra-normal voice' is that of an active composer, examining what is physically possible in order to discover *more* possibilities. As stated in the précis of the book offered on the publisher's website, Edgerton explores 'experimental methods of sound production, offering a systematic series of approaches and methods for assessing, engaging, and, in some instances, overcoming the assumed limits of vocal singing'. Edgerton's new edition of the book includes a deeper exploration of techniques that require close microphone placement in performance, such as unvoiced sounds in the oral cavity, and he also furthers his study into vocal fold asymmetries (resulting in multiphonics). At times, the book can serve an inquisitive composer well, although those coming to this volume, no matter how curious, are likely to be overwhelmed at points by the technical language and detail. The reader should also be advised that this is not meant to

¹ Joseph Straus, *Twelve-Tone Music in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).