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BOOK REVIEWS

Britten's Children by John Bridcut. Faber & Faber, £18.99

Four decades ago, in his caustic little music survey *Brandy of the Damned*, Colin Wilson pondered Benjamin Britten's obsession with childhood – and especially boyhood innocence. 'There is no reason', he wrote, 'why innocence should not be a valid theme for music; but to dwell on it for thirty years argues a certain arrested development'. One can well imagine the surge of vindication Wilson might have felt on reading the first chapter of *Britten's Children*. On the first two pages, author John Bridcut describes a series of Letts Schoolboy Diaries belonging to the composer. In one, Britten's entries in the 'Personal Memorabilia' section include his height, weight, bicycle number, season ticket number, train and bus times to and from school etc, then above the publisher's name, altered to read 'LET'S!', he has added 'SHALL WE?' All very typical public-schoolboy stuff, you might say; but then comes the punch: the year is 1954, and the Benjamin Britten who wrote all this was 40. The chapter concludes with Britten's response to a remark from his devoted assistant Imogen Holst. She has just told Britten how impressed she was by his writing for boys in the song 'Now Rouse Up All the City' from Act Three of *Gloriana*. Britten's reply gives the chapter its title: 'It's because I'm still thirteen'.

Wisely, perhaps, Bridcut does not elaborate on this. It is hard enough for professionals to diagnose a person's psychological peculiarities when that person is present, far harder when all you have to go on – apart from the composer's own correspondence, and (more problematically) his art – is someone else's memories. One may feel that here is something very similar to the at times bizarrely childlike Anton Bruckner's obsession with teenage girls. But then we know that Bruckner's father died when he was 13 and just entering puberty, a trauma which could well have caused something in Bruckner's development process to become 'arrested' at that point. With Britten, a possible aetiology is much harder to identify.

Comparison has been drawn between Britten's role as friend-mentor to so many teenage boys and the ideas about the erotics of education expressed in Socrates's speech towards the end of Plato's *Symposium*, from which the modern idea of 'Platonic' love derives. Socrates argues that when teacher and pupil are drawn to one another sexually, the sublimation of that feeling can itself lead to ever higher intellectual and imaginative achievements – he compares the process to climbing a 'ladder' of creativity. But Socrates presupposes that the teacher is not only an adult, but fully conscious of himself as adult. After reading this book one may find oneself wondering if Britten ever truly saw himself as a grown man. In addition to those Letts diaries, we hear of his lifelong passion for what he called 'nursery food', and the fascinating fact that his initial attraction to Peter Pears might have been partly caused by a resemblance between Pears's vocal tone and the 'unusual sound' of Britten's mother Edith's singing voice.

It is also surely significant that, as Bridcut points out, 'Britten's friendships were so often to arise with boys who had physically or emotionally absent fathers.' Even the hero of his own *Saint Nicolas* appears – in part – to have attracted him for similar reasons:

> My parents died.
> All too soon, I left the tranquil beauty of their home,
> And knew the wider world of man.

Britten may have talked of playing the role of 'stepfather' to these wholly or partially fatherless boys, but as Bridcut points out, the small age gap between the young Britten and some of his protégés does not 'lend credence' to such an interpretation. Inevitably Britten's own shadowy, ambiguous, mostly distant relationship with his own father springs to mind. Talk of the enigmatic Britten senior leads one inevitably to the bafflingly hands-off 'guardian' in *The Turn of the Screw*, just as the image in that opera of the boy Miles at the piano, surrounded by adoring females, echoes uneasily some of the accounts we have of Britten in his own childhood home. It is at least legitimate to ask if Britten was ever really 'in love' with his 'stepchildren' in any objective sense at all, or whether what obsessed him was the reflection they offered of himself on the brink of adolescence – 'still thirteen'?

Bridcut may also have been wise – especially given the current moral climate – to chose the non-gender-specific title *Britten's Children*, but the

theme is unmistakably 'Britten's Boys'. Very occasionally, girls – like the three sisters of Humphrey Maud – may have managed to creep under the barbed wire of Britten's defences (all four children were named dedicatees of the *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*), but one also notes Britten's readiness to cast adult women in his female children's roles (eg Flora in *The Turn of the Screw*), or written comments like the one to young James Bernard after the latter had begun his studies at the RCM: 'I agree that the scruffy girls are a nightmare & a pest – it is maddening to have them around & I the way, but it's possible to ignore them'. Girls were certainly never invited to join Britten on the tennis court, or to engage in his equally popular sport of 'skinny dipping'.

One thing that does emerge with reassuring clarity from this book – as with the award-winning BBC TV documentary *Britten's Children* from which Bridcut's book partially derives – is that there is barely any credible evidence that Britten attempted to express his feelings for his adopted favourites in any overtly sexual way. The only anomaly in this respect is the relatively early relationship with Harry Morris, whom Britten invited to join him and his family on holiday in Cornwall in 1936. Morris left suddenly and mysteriously (Britten's diaries offer nothing by way of explanation), and while he was clearly still disturbed by what he interpreted as an 'advance' by Britten, Morris seems to have been unable to be any more specific. In every other case discussed in this book (and there are plenty), Britten's adoration seems to have progressed little further in physical terms than that of Aschenbach for Tadzio in *Death in Venice*. There is some coat-sharing in Sienna with Wulff Scherchen (son of the conductor Hermann Scherchen), numerous embraces and chaste kisses, and even chaster bed-sharing, but beyond that, nothing.

However glad one may be for that, there remain things in this book that leave an unpleasant aftertaste – most of all, what happens to Britten's adopted boys when it is clear that Britten is no longer able to recognize in them that crucial reflection of his own idealized pubescent self. Humphrey Carpenter's biography has already introduced us to the chilling notion of Britten and his 'corpses' – those friends who, for whatever reasons, suddenly found themselves dropped by Britten, rarely with any word of explanation. It is hard enough to condone when Britten is dealing with adults, harder still when the 'corpses' are boys or very young men to whom he has previously poured out his affection and encouragement in the most gushing terms. Britten's neglect of Wulff Scherchen, during the latter's internment as a 'friendly enemy alien' in Canada during the Second World War, makes horrible reading, as does his repeated accusation about Wulff's behaviour – 'vindictive' is the distinctly self-justifying word he clings to in his correspondence – when the two meet again after the war.

But the account of the dismissal of the original Miles, David Hemmings, is perhaps the most disturbing moment of all in *Britten's Children*. The end, as Bridcut tells us, was 'sudden'. He describes how, at a key point in a 1956 Parisian performance of *The Turn of the Screw* (Miles's 'Malo' aria), 'David's voice broke – just like that. A mortified Britten brought the orchestra off, waved his baton at David in a fury, and put it down on his music stand as the curtain was lowered.' Hemmings was strong-armed off the stage, and never saw or heard from Britten again. 'When I asked', says Bridcut, 'whether this father-figure whom he so adored had said anything to him, he surprised me – and I think himself – by the answer that sprang to his lips: "No. No, he didn't. That was a bit sad, I have to say, but from that moment forward, I was sort of history. Sad, isn't it? The idyll was all over".'

'Sad', one may conclude, is putting it mildly. No happier is the lack of evidence to suggest that any of Britten's adoring retinue did much to help smooth such abrupt transitions or in any other way console Britten's 'ex's'. Perhaps that was too much to ask. Yet there is something unsettling about the way so many of the people quoted in this book – including some of the brutally dropped favourites themselves – continue to speak of Britten in such rose-tinted, hagiographic language when it is clear that the man was both damaged and damaging. Michael Berkeley – Britten's godson - recalls being invited to write a song cycle for Pears and Ossian Ellis to play at Aldeburgh. Ellis tells the young Berkeley that he is delighted with the songs, and then – nothing. Absolute silence from the Red House, leaving Berkeley 'utterly devastated' at being 'completely cut off', by Pears as much as by Britten himself. Years later, fellow composer Nicholas Maw offers an explanation. Berkeley's mistake was to set poems by Thomas Hardy: 'There you are, you can't set one of Ben's favourite poets – moreover one that he's set himself.' When the Aldeburgh Festival marked the 1957 bicentenary of William Blake by inviting young composers to set one of his poems to music, the sheer bile of Britten's written critical comments is frankly shocking. 'Pretentious nonsense… quite hopeless and naïve… vile vocal writing … illiterate and babyish', and so on. A submission by the Moscow prize-winning pianist John Ogdon is described –

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risibly – as having 'no idea of piano'. Why all this absurd defensive spleen? According to Basil Coleman it was simply that 'Ben had to win'.

Yet still the praise continues to flow, some of it bewildering. Hemmings protests that 'you couldn't have had a better father, or a better friend'. Basil Douglas's secretary, Maureen Graham, insists that 'Ben loved and understood children – all children, girls as well as boys'. As they used to say in A-level exam questions: 'discuss'. It reminds this writer of some of the mystifying things written about Wagner by his Bayreuth acolytes: for instance the Jewish conductor Herman Levi's pious denials to his rabbi father that his idol was in any way anti-Semitic – this after Wagner had apparently submitted him to a spectacular variety of racist taunts. Do we do a great artist more of a disservice by admitting his personal faults, or by denying them? Whatever, the element of denial in many of the accounts of Britten the man quoted in *Britten's Children* runs like a constantly recurring countersubject through the polyphony of voices.

What is Bridcut's own conclusion? His high estimation of Britten as composer in general is hard to argue with. He includes some convincing musical character witnesses (including the composer Robert Saxton, himself a former Britten protégé) when it comes to discussing the works themselves. But, whether guardedly or cleverly, Bridcut leaves the major conclusions about Britten himself to the readers, which only serves to make *Britten's Children* more thought-provoking. Perhaps the opinions of a psychologist or two might have thrown light here or there, but that very omission does have the advantage of setting the reader free to speculate. All of this is presented in an unostentatiously pleasing, intelligent and very readable style, though there are occasional unfortunate phrases: the point at which Pears and Britten first became lovers at Grand Rapids, Michigan, is described as 'a seminal moment' – no *double entendre* apparently intended. But then this is a book full of ambiguities and double meanings, just like the music itself. Bridcut's portrait in *Britten's Children* is perplexing, disturbing, but in the end intensely fascinating.

Stephen Johnson

Irving Fine: An American Composer in His Time by Phillip Ramey. Pendragon Press, $32.00.

Music Downtown: Writings from the Village Voice by Kyle Gann. The University of California Press, hardcover $50.00/£32.50, paperback $19.95/£12.95.

The big project for the generation of American composers who came of age at about the time of the First World War – primarily the five composers described by Virgil Thomson as a 'commando unit', namely Copland, Thomson, Sessions, Harris, and Piston – was the establishment of a fully grown-up indigenous American music. There had been American music of interest and quality before then, of course, going back as far as William Billings and Justin Morgan and including Louis Moreau Gottchalk, Stephen Foster, and Scott Joplin, as well as the generation's immediate predecessors, John Knowles Paine, Horatio Parker, George Whitefield Chadwick, and Charles Martin Loeffler, but none of it had cut much of a profile on the world stage or gained much respect or recognition. The 'Copland generation' tirelessly devoted themselves to making sure that American music 'took off', as Thomson put it, and they succeeded handsomely.

The next generation, coming to maturity just at the end of the Second World War, inherited a secure situation where American music was an acknowledged and respected presence in the larger musical world, but they faced two major problems. The first, a practical one, was how they were to support themselves. The earlier generation had made livings largely as free-lancers, on a combination of patronage, teaching, lecturing, writing, and even, occasionally, from composition; but even before the war Piston at Harvard and Sessions at Princeton and then at the University of California at Berkeley, had opted for permanent academic positions. In the wake of the war, it being clear that former modes of support were ceasing to be viable, composers looked more and more to university teaching as a means of securing their livelihoods. The second problem, an aesthetic one, was that of the emergence of 'the twelve-tone system' as a major and practically universal preoccupation of composers of the day. The causes of the rise of 12-tone and serial compositional methodology are even today not agreed upon, nor are they at all clearly understood; but it is plain that, for one reason or another, almost everybody thought that, like them or not, they had to be reckoned with and seriously engaged. These two issues, the movement of what Milton Babbitt referred to as 'cultivated music' into academia, and the domination in that music of a 12-tone, modernist aesthetic, were the major concerns of American composers from the end of the Second World War until well after the end of the American Vietnam War. These two books are concerned with the before and after, respectively, of that moment in American musical history.

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Irving Fine's life was situated at the exact center of those issues. A student of Piston at Harvard, a protégé of Stravinsky, and an associate of Copland at Tanglewood, he was one of the most prominent of the American neo-classic composers, for whom the engagement with 12-tone composition became a major, extremely personal, and sometimes traumatic concern. As the founder of the music department at Brandeis University, Fine was one of the persons who set in place the pattern of American academic music in the 1950s, 60s, and forward.

Fine was born in East Boston in 1914; both of his parents were the children of Latvian Jewish immigrants. He was one of the two students from Winthrop High School who applied for admission to Harvard; the other student, whose grades were less good and who was not Jewish, was admitted and Fine was not. After a fifth year of 'postgraduate' study of German at the Boston Boys' Latin School (where he met Leonard Bernstein, who became a life-long friend) he reapplied to Harvard and was admitted in 1933. Although his family expected him to pursue pre-medical studies, Fine insisted early on that music was his only life. He graduated from Harvard in 1937, having studied composition with Piston, orchestration with Edward Burlingame Hill, choral conducting with Archibald T. Davison, and counterpoint with A. Tillman Merritt, and having been an active member of and accompanist for the Harvard Glee Club, which was then generally considered to be one of the finest choral ensembles in the United States. During his undergraduate years Fine met two of the people who would be his closest friends and musical allies for the rest of his life, Harold Shapero and Arthur Berger.

Fine enrolled as a graduate student at Harvard in 1937 in order to continue composition studies with Piston. When Nadia Boulanger came to Cambridge in 1939 as visiting Professor at Radcliffe College, Fine began to study with her, and he received a grant to study with her in France the next year. The beginning of the European war, however, cut these studies short. He returned to Cambridge and was offered part time teaching work at Harvard. He was also delegated to be a sort of minder for Stravinsky, who was at Harvard as the Charles Eliot Norton professor of poetics, and to do the initial English translation of Stravinsky's lectures, which became *The Poetics of Music*. His friendship with Stravinsky, started then, continued through his life. In 1940 Fine was invited to join the Harvard faculty as a teaching fellow, and in 1942 was named instructor, a post he held until 1948.

Anti-Semitism was a feature of Harvard, as it was in the rest of the United States, in those days. All of the Ivy-league colleges had quotas on the number of Jewish students they would admit, and many organizations in those schools were closed to Jews. Fine experienced anti-Semitism of one sort or the other over the duration of his association with Harvard. The first instance of this was when he was elected vice-president of the Harvard Glee Club. Although not directly affiliated with the university, the elite Harvard Club of Boston had a policy that officers of any Harvard organization were automatically invited to become members; Fine was informed in his interview for membership that they did not accept 'his kind'.

Later, when he was on the faculty at Harvard, he was nominated for membership in the Harvard Musical Association, which was a private club unaffiliated with the university, but maintaining a close relationship with the music department; he was blackballed because he was Jewish. When Fine was not accepted for membership in the HMA, all of the members of the Harvard music faculty, except Tillman Merritt, resigned from the club in protest. Merritt and Randall Thompson, two of the most powerful senior faculty members of the music department, were openly anti-Semitic, and although there was a good deal of friction between Fine and Merritt, then chairman of the faculty, regarding the proper role of performance in the department and no great affection between the two of them in any case, Fine's Jewishness was almost certainly a factor in his being denied tenure at Harvard in 1948, if not the cause. Failure to receive tenure ended his teaching career at the university and he was bitter about it for the rest of his life.

Brandeis University was founded in Waltham, Massachusetts, in 1948 in order to provide a university education of the highest quality for Jewish students who were kept out of the Ivy League universities due to quotas. Brandeis was conceived of as secular and, therefore, nondenominational institution, and did not have a 'Christian quota'; nonetheless, for the first few years of its existence the majority of its students and faculty were Jewish. In 1950 Fine became the second member of the faculty of the music department and was entrusted with the task of building the department. In developing the department he recruited his friends Berger and Shapero – and, on a limited basis, Bernstein, whose presence in the department, however slight, greatly facilitated fundraising. Fine and Bernstein organized four ambitious and

brilliantly executed Festivals of Creative Arts between 1952 and 1957, which garnered great acclaim and brought attention to the fledgling university. That notoriety, and the great distinction of the members of the faculty soon made the music department at Brandeis one of the most important in the United States. Fine's responsibilities came to include the directorship of the whole School of Creative Arts, including the theater and fine arts departments, as well as music.

Fine and Copland met in 1943 when the older man was filling in for Walter Piston at Harvard, and they became fast friends. In 1946, at Copland's instigation, Koussevitzky hired Fine to teach at Tanglewood, the summer school for advanced musical studies which was operated by the Boston Symphony. Fine was an important presence at Tanglewood until 1957, when issues primarily concerning the amount of his compensation, but possible also slightly soured relations with Copland and Bernstein (and souring feelings about them), led to his resignation. In his last year at Tanglewood he became especially close to Milton Babbitt, who was teaching composition there that year; they spent most of their spare time together discussing theories of tonal analysis and of 12-tone composition.

Fine only began to compose when he was an undergraduate at Harvard. His work was always careful and deliberate, and he remained throughout his life somewhat intimidated by his precocious, productive, and, to his mind, more talented friends Bernstein, Foss and (most especially) Shapero. His earliest pieces, such as *The Alice In Wonderland Choruses, The Hour Glass, Music for Piano*, and the *Partita* for wind quintet (which remains his best known and most popular work), are clearly works of a follower of Boulanger, Stravinsky, and Copland. Although they are beautiful, charming, skillfully wrought, and absolutely on the level of the work of any of his colleagues, Fine felt that they were lightweight, and came to find neo-classical style limited and limiting. His inclinations took him both backward, toward romantic music, and forward toward the brave new world opened by 12-tone composition. His struggle to break through into a more personal, and what he considered a more important, style dominated the rest of his life. The *Serious Song* for string orchestra, the *Notturno* for harp and strings, and the *Fantasia* for string trio are steps in his progress.

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A considerable breakthrough was his String Quartet of 1952, his first avowedly 12-tone work, which was widely performed, recorded, and generally recognized as an important piece.

Through the 1950s Fine alternated works which were reaching for a new, more serious style, and his earlier neo-classicism; his more ambitious pieces, however, were in a more 'progressive' style, while the works which harken back to neo-classicism were lighter in substance and, although as skilful as ever, seem somewhat half-hearted in intention. His quest for the attainment of music which would be sufficiently 'progressive' and 'important' was the source of much anguish for him, and led him to begin a long and serious course of psycho-analysis. His colleague and closest friend and confidant, Harold Shapero, to whom Fine showed all his work as he was writing it, and to whom he spoke daily, was highly skeptical about Fine's analysis. When Shapero discovered that he himself was the subject of much of Fine's work with his analyst, who seemed to be steering Fine toward regarding Shapero as a major obstacle to his compositional progress, the analysis became the cause of a serious strain in their relationship, culminating in an acrimonious confrontation which turned out to be their last meeting. This is chillingly related by Shapero in Philip Ramey's biography.

With his Symphony of 1962 Fine arrived at a style and produced a work which he, as well as all his friends and commentators, felt was a synthesis of his strongest stylistic inclinations: tonal romanticism, Stravinskian neo-classicism, and Schoenbergian rhetoric. The Symphony was played by the Boston Symphony in Symphony Hall in March of 1962 and at Tanglewood in the following August. It was generally recognized as a major work of maturity, originality, and substance and was a triumph for Fine. Shortly before the Tanglewood performance Charles Munch, who had conducted the Symphony's first performance and was scheduled to do so again, suffered a angina attack and was ordered by his physicians to rest. He asked Fine to substitute for him. Although Fine was very apprehensive about conducting a major orchestra in his difficulty work on short notice, the performance was a great success.[1] Less than a week later, after a vacation in Canada, Fine suffered a heart attack; he was hospitalized in Boston where he died on 23 August 1962, from a second massive heart attack.

Fine's death at the age of 48, when he was just attaining maturity as a composer, was a personal tragedy as well as a great loss for American Music. His progress as a composer and his work as an educator exemplify the issues and developments of American classical and academic music at that time. Fine's struggles to come to terms with the methods and tonal language of serial modernism was one he shared with many others composers. He seems to have survived the challenge, but several of his friends, notably Shapero, ran aground on it. Exactly what caused this crisis – why so many composers felt that they had to write in a style which they found not just unappealing, but frankly repellent – is not completely clear. Present historiography is as likely to be intended to further an agenda of (negative) judgement on all of the music produced, and its underlying aesthetic assumptions, as it is to offer any enlightenment about situation.[2] The conception of the situation of 'cultivated music' in just about every respect and of music in higher education in America in the 1950s through the 1970s, especially the institution of a PhD for composition, was framed as much by the music department at Brandeis, led by Fine, as it was in any other university music department, including that of Princeton University. At the time of Fine's death it was generally felt that most, if not all, of the music which could be seriously regarded would probably be 12-tone and certainly be modernist, in a musical language heavily featuring dissonance; that the language used to discuss that music and earlier music would be of an intensely philosophical and self-consciously, almost painfully, specific quality[3]; that it would be composed by composer-scholars under the protection of the university; and that the attendant intellectual prestige of music's new position in the academy would justify new modes of training and evaluating composers.

Fine's widow, Verna, was throughout the rest of her life tireless in her belief in and guardianship and promotion of her husband's music, making sure that practically all of it has remained in print and available and that it has been recorded. One of her last acts was the commissioning of a biography from Philip Ramey. Ramey's biography is as complete in its information as one could wish, and on that level it is interesting and

[1] The recording of the performance, which has been commercially released and is still available (Phoenix B000063VF9), has come to be considered definitive.

[2] Some very interesting reflections on this time are offered in Arthur Berger's book, *Reflections of an American Composer* (Berkeley: University of California Press. 2002). See especially the chapters entitled 'Serialism: The Composer as Theorist' (pp. 83–92) and 'PNM and the Ph. D.' (pp. 139–149).

[3] See Berger, pp. 85–86, where he discusses his thoughts about the use of 'simultaneity' as opposed to 'chord'.

admirable. Yet although it is subtitled 'An American Composer in His Time', it is, in fact, almost completely lacking any kind of greater context for Fine's live and work. There is very little, for instance, about the political or aesthetic conditions in America before the Second World War, or about the post-war rise of the university as a perceived haven for the composer. And although he speaks fairly early and fairly often about 12-tone music, Ramey offers very little discussion of its apparent allure for composers in the post-war period or about its reception, either positive or negative.

His general knowledge of the theoretical assumptions and compositional procedures of 12-tone music is not particularly profound. Among his analytical comments is the statement:

> Serialism, defined by Arnold Schoenberg, the system's inventor, is a 'method of composing with twelve notes which are related only to one another,' all the notes of the octave being treated as equal. It is a method that, in its most rigorously applied form, avoids tonality and had been originally developed as a criterion for atonal music. (p. 179)

Elsewhere, he asserts that a passage in Fine's Fantasia for String Trio

> violates strict method by the repetition of one note (G#), as the 'thirteenth' in the series, a subtle indication of the freedom in which the dodecaphonic system is to be treated (additionally, the twelfth tone appears only in a grace-note that leads to the repeated note).[4] (p.230).

In discussing the Symphony, he explains that

> The two tone-rows on which much, though not all, of the work is loosely based were cleverly designed to provide maximum contrast in the chords and melodic material they generate, (p. 285)

and he quotes the notes of the row; but he does not show how any of either of them is used to make chords, nor does he cite any melodies in the work.

The book is dutiful and somewhat plodding. It is rich in quotations from Fine's friends and family members, but it conveys very little sense of his personality. The effect is that of a memorial service which is being conducted by someone who never met the deceased but has talked to his acquaintances enough to offer a thin web of connexion between statements made by those who did.

[4] In fairness, it should be admitted that most of the practitioners at the time were not operating on a level especially more perceptive or sophisticated than Ramey's, which is one of the factors that makes the widespread use of 'the system' somewhat puzzling.

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By the end of the 1960's whatever world domination 12-tone music had attained was being eroded. Much current historiography regarding this period tells us that certain tyrants in positions of power in universities – writing music only for each other and only concerned with that 'music's' construction rather than what it might sound like; completely contemptuous of any kind of audience and, coincidentally, of all performers; embattled, and determined to maintain their prominence and superiority, which could only be demonstrated on paper anyway – subjected a whole generation of young composers to aesthetic terrorism, forcing them to compose an aggressively ugly and unpleasant music which they never liked or wanted to write, and suppressing any dissent at first with contempt and derision and then with denial of all jobs, grants, or commissions as well as funding for performances and recordings.

Whatever degree of accuracy there is to that narrative, it is definitely true that, over the course of the last third of the 20th century, an ever-increasing pluralism of styles put paid to the notion of only one kind of music which could be considered as privileged or predominant. Some number of these styles were espoused by composers who, as much as they were writing what they wanted to hear, were also reacting against what they saw as an intolerant and tyrannical imposition upon them of a style which they found at the best unappealing and at the worst something evil and dastardly.

In New York these conflicting aesthetic territories had a concrete geographical manifestation. The 'established', academic, 12-tone modernism (Babbitt, Carter, Davidovsky, Martino, Wuorinen, *et al*) was centered 'uptown', around Columbia University at 116th Street and the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center at 125th Street. The anti-elitist, free-wheeling counter-culturalism was located in Greenwich Village, the East Village (formerly the Lower East Side), and the regions South of Houston Street (a.k.a. Soho) – generally 'downtown'. The character and nature of uptown music remained fairly constant over the years, but the nature of downtown music tended to change with time, starting with the politically left-leaning Composers Collective of the 1930s, followed in the 50s by Cage and Feldman and others associated with the abstract expressionist painters and the beat poets, then the conceptualists and early minimalists of the 60s, the 'establishment'

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minimalists of the 70s and 80s, the totalism[5] of the late 80s, and a host of further styles and methods. There also developed a 'midtown' style (Corigliano, Bolcom, Harbison, Zwillich, Adams), represented by Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall, with a more 'mainstream', traditional orientation and aspiration than either of the other outlooks. Uptown and midtown music and musicians tended to operate in the traditional venues of schools and concert halls; downtown music was made and found in lofts, galleries, bars (and pseudo-bars), and other less formal places. Downtown music, in its contemporary sense, can probably be said to have started in 1960 when Yoko Ono, then a conceptual artist and pianist associated with the Fluxus movement, opened her loft to a 'concert series' organized by La Monte Young and Richard Maxfield.

One of the best known and most distinguished chroniclers of Downtown musical practitioners, philosophies, and activities is Kyle Gann, who has been a music critic for the *Village Voice* since 1986, and a faculty member of Bard College since 2002. Aside from his journalistic work, he has also published books on Nancarrow and American music in the 20th century. His latest book is a collection of writing from the *Village Voice*. Gann is a passionate advocate for all kinds of downtown music, and his writing is persuasive and compelling. He is a tireless advocate for those composers he admires, including Morton Feldman, Mikel Rouse, Robert Ashley, Eve Beglarian, Michael Gordon, David Garland, La Monte Young, Harry Partch, and John Cage. His analysis of many aspects of musical politics and issues of musical distribution can be insightful and canny, and is probably at its best in 'The Importance of Being Downtown', his introduction to this book.

[5] 'Totalism – named by some composer's girlfriend who has vanished into myth, but the name stuck – was a mostly New York movement of younger composers born in the 1950s [including Mikel Rouse, Lois V. Vierk, Michael Gordon, and Kyle Gann] … This was a style based in minimalism's limited pitch material, but using minimalist patterns as a springboard for considerable rhythmic and tempo complexity. The totalist composers ... envied the propulsive energy of rock and were also often trained in some aspect of non-Western music. Pounding rhythms, either in complex polyrhythms or changing tempo abruptly in a kind of gear-shifting effect, are a common totalist characteristic. Nine-against-eight is a particular favorite, achieved in ensemble performance by keeping an inaudible quartet-note beat going while half the ensemble plays dotted eighth notes and the other half triplet quarters; it can be amusing to watch a totalist ensemble nod their heads in unison to a beat no one is playing ...' Gann, *Music Downtown*, pp. 13–14.

Gann is an avid admirer of Virgil Thomson, who he describes (p. 200) as the 'best music critic in the English Language since Shaw – and better than Shaw if concision, career duration, and consequentiality of subject matter are you criteria'. And, like Thomson, he is both a composer and a man with an admitted agenda. His celebration and advocacy of downtown music makes you feel that you should immediately rush out and listen to whatever it is that he's writing about – even if you may fear, almost as strongly, that you might well hate it when you do. Just as he is passionate about the music he loves, however, Gann can be brutal and completely intemperate about music that he doesn't like. As one might expect, the chief objects of his scorn are Milton Babbitt and Elliot Carter, the chief avatars of Uptown Music. In his articles his contempt for these composers and their like is not so much stated specifically and substantially as it is displayed in ubiquitously dismissive side-comments:

> The Uptown solution is to become a mirror of the corporate technocrats, to refine composing into a smooth, rationalist, analyzable, and predictable activity. Milton Babbitt and Brian Ferneyhough have this down literally to a science, complete with contempt for the common herd. (p. 93)
>
> ...many 20th-century artists, internalizing the rationalist worldview, have obligingly created truly useless works. (The more rationalist worldview, the more superflous – anybody know a use for the Babbitt String Quartets?) (p. 105)
>
> What passes for rhythmic subtlety with Elliott Carter and his followers is a mishmash because their music never articulates the grid against which complexity can be perceived. (p. 128)
>
> I think the basis for the reputations of stuffed shirts like Elliott Carter and Mario Davidovsky is that Uptown critics follow their scores during concerts and find impressive devices, whereas if they relied on their ears they would draw a blank like everyone else. (p. 180)

Comments about mastery of or concern with 'pitch sets', 'pitch-set perfection', or even worse 'Babbitt pitch sets' are used emblematically to convict the object of Uptown sympathies. We are informed that 'Pitch-set consistency no more guarantees art than correct grammar does truth' (p. 138, in an article entitled 'The Great Divide: Uptown Composers are Stuck in the Past') – as though anybody believes that it does, other than the straw men set up by Gann. When he declares (p.121), 'At a conference two years ago, I overheard a professor who had just delivered a lecture on the structure of an Elliott Carter orchestral work admit to a colleague that while Carter's music analyzes beautifully on paper, you can't hear in the music the nice things you've analyzed',

one wants to point out that his anecdote might be more a statement about the stupidity and imperceptiveness of the analyst than the quality of Carter's music or his intentions – and that, for that matter, Carter himself might share Gann's irritation and disdain. Despite his repeated efforts, Gann does not clearly demonstrate how the fact that Uptown music is awful necessarily proves that Downtown music is great. In the midst of the ceaseless bashing of Uptown music, when one reads (p. 174) that 'Until we adopt an attitude that sees all creative modes as equally natural and fruitful, each with its place in the psychic spectrum, music will continue to be oppressively politicized', it is hard to take this seriously as a statement of what Gann really thinks.

The arrangement of the articles thematically – in groups dealing with interviews, music and/versus society, musical politics, aesthetics, reflections on books, figures, and events, concert reviews, and passings (consisting of eulogies of Feldman, Thomson, Julius Eastman, and Cage) – was perhaps a convenient way to organize the book, but means that there are sections where one encounters Gann's opinions on some topics with a certain inexorable regularity. It might be that a chronological ordering would have given more variety as well as a narrative quality that would have been informative and possibly less repetitive.

When Gann concentrates on music he loves and respects, though – when he explores the operas of Robert Ashley and Mikel Rouse, or discusses La Monte Young's *The Well-Tuned Piano* and The Forever Bad Band and the issues and mechanics of tuning that they address, or reviews Laurie Anderson's *Empty Spaces* or Eve Beglarian and Twisted Tu Tu, or speaks of the deceptive simplicity of David Garland's *Control Songs*, he makes one want to know and, more importantly, hear more. He is interesting and informative when he interviews Yoko Ono, surveying her career and discussing her work, and Philip Glass concerning his opera *The Voyage*. When it celebrates the music of Morton Feldman or the life and music of Julius Eastman, or marks the death of John Cage, Gann's writing is truly moving. *Music Downtown* radiates a sense of immediacy and urgency and passion which gives each of the articles the quality of a dispatch from the front. Gann is intelligent, insightful, argumentative, passionately opinionated, a skilful and compelling writer, and surely just about the best guide one could have in exploring all the regions of downtown music.

Rodney Lister

A Soviet Credo: Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony by Pauline Fairclough. Ashgate, £55.00.

SHOSTAKOVICH: Symphony No. 4, composer's arrangement for two pianos. Rustem Hayroudinoff, Colin Stone (pnos). Chandos CHAN 10296.

SHOSTAKOVICH: New Collected Works, Vol. 4. Symphony No. 4, orchestral score, edited by Manashir Yakubov. DSCH Publishers, 2003.

SHOSTAKOVICH: New Collected Works, Vol. 19. Symphony No. 4, composer's arrangement for two pianos, edited by Manashir Yakubov. DSCH Publishers, 2000.

Few orchestral works by famous composers must wait decades to be heard. In late 1936, Shostakovich was pressured to withdraw his Fourth Symphony less than a year after the vicious Stalin-created *Pravda* denunciations of his music. After its first performance, in Russia in 1961, the symphony was recorded there the next year (in who knows how few copies); the first in the west came from the USA in 1963.

When the Fourth Symphony was first heard in the west, at the Edinburgh Festival of 1962, Shostakovich's Second and Third were also virtually unknown. Once Morton Gould (of all people) recorded the earlier two and the opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* was reborn, we could enlarge our understanding of this composer in his twenties, in that crucial decade 1926–36. Now we may add to it with both the first recording of the Fourth Symphony in the composer's two-piano transcription and the two-piano score, which had been printed in Russia in very few copies in 1946. And a new book-length study from Ashgate.

Pauline Fairclough's PhD dissertation from 1995 adds to the still scarce body of knowledge about this composition. Best is her treatment of the music and its period from the perspectives of Adorno, Sollertinsky (especially his study of Mahler), and similar intellectuals. Bakhtin is mentioned, unfortunately without much application.

Concepts of estrangement and negation, drawn from some of these theorists, inform discussion of the symphony's dramaturgy in a valuable historical-aesthetic analysis. Strikingly, Fairclough makes the case for the Fourth not really violating precepts of Russian symphonism in the mid-1930s, and for the work's potential acceptance, even acclaim, if it had been performed as scheduled in December 1936. She is quite convincing.

The detailed analyses of the three movements, forming the bulk of the book, are less useful. While often insightful, they are too limited.

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Harmony and tonality often receive slim comments that slight what is happening. Much more welcome is the discussion of the influence of other works on this symphony. Included are many music examples from other composers, such as Mahler and Stravinsky. Still, the case that the Fourth is an anti-*Resurrection* symphony is not strong.

The mastery of Shostakovich's orchestral score is matched in his transcription, both on its own and as representative of the original. The two-piano version is as delirious and harrowing as the orchestral, which is unique among the symphonies not just for its size but for its musical risks combined with successes. The performance by Hayroudinoff and Stone is no run-through. It should convince anyone that this is a concert work on the level of Stravinsky's two-piano transcription of *The Rite of Spring*. The playing in the second and third movements especially is thrilling, almost flawless in ensemble and execution.

Some decisions are questionable; they always will be, given problematic or erroneous tempo indications in one score or another. The two codas in the third movement are an example. No orchestra takes the first as fast as the marked 100; timpanists couldn't buy insurance for brachial failure from the prescribed flailing. In this recording we get a tempo in the 70s, which sounds fast enough even if it isn't quite. The pianists then ignore the halving of the tempo at rehearsal 246. The result is odd if intriguing. It certainly mitigates the decay of the piano's long notes in the haunting conclusion.

Despite splendid playing, the first movement misses the savagery of the original. Those accents need to be vicious, and several passages more vigorous if not boisterous. The fugato is magnificent; the series of climaxes it initiates competes well with the assaults of a 128-piece orchestra.

The new collected edition of Shostakovich's works, planned for more than three times the number of volumes of the previous one, recently gave us both the orchestral score to this symphony and the two-piano transcription. Both are needed for the total written commentary on either.

Manashir Yakubov presents complementary brief histories of the work in both volumes, attempting rarely to resolve contradictions. A real bonus is the 17 pages of facsimile in vol. 4. They are transcribed (reasonably if not perfectly) over 45 pages. The remarks on them are meticulous and important, even if it remains unclear whether there are still more sketches or drafts.

The 'critical report', also in this volume, is much too short: a mere two pages, plus a whole page of the two-piano transcription to make one point. In both volumes a few errors remain unmentioned. Throughout, the English translations are mostly excellent, although some clinkers will puzzle many readers.

This symphony is both and end and a beginning: in some ways it *is* its composer's *Rite of Spring*. I am reminded of that old adage: the more we know, the more we know how little we know. Much research remains to be done on Shostakovich's Fourth, even as all these publications suggest its stature as one of the crucial works of young genius of the entire 20th century.

Paul Rapoport

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