

many contemporary techniques. Similarly, the role that jazz has played in the development of mutes and articulation is outlined. This historical and stylistic assimilation is another expansion that serves the text well.

The repertoire examples are well chosen; figurehead composers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Stockhausen, Xenakis, Globokar, Dusapin, and others) appear alongside emerging composers such as Timothy McCormack and Paul Hübner, again giving an impression of a widely varied repertoire that is in flux. These examples expand upon the text at the right moments, providing key illustrations of the resulting sound and concrete notations. Svoboda and Roth are not afraid to point to notation issues, which is effective and informative. For example, Nicolaus A. Huber's graphic notation of the plunger mute's movements cannot be interpreted literally since the relation between the physical movement and the sound modulation is not linear (p. 91), Luciano Berio's requirement to produce an [o] vowel with the tongue can actually only be performed with a mute (p. 99), and there is an unfortunate omission of a bracket in Iannis Xenakis's *Keren* (p. 110). Similarly, the situation in the Berio *Sequenza*, where female trombonists must find a solution to sing the pitches outside the female vocal range is described in juxtaposition with McCormack's relative pitch indications to allow performers to sing within their range. These reminders of the imperfections of notation illustrate the ongoing and elusive search for 'best practice' and, without getting weighed down by a detailed discussion of notation, point to compromises and practical issues. Extracts from the commissioned etudes are also included in the illustrative examples, and this provides an interesting glimpse of each composer engaging in the task of expanding a particular technique, in terms of notation, sound or physical limits (e.g., Walter's pulsating combinations of multiphonics, p. 112, and Roth's ethereal highlighting of individual partials in muted tremoli, p. 87). Also very enjoyable are the extracts where Svoboda invents short exercises or improvises on a technique, for example the fragile exercise in fading the voice in and out of a tone (p. 104), the highly controlled parallel glissandi lip multiphonics (p. 111) and the charming improvisations on the techniques from Cage's *Solo for sliding trombone* (p. 130). All of these examples, often at the limits of technical possibility, serve to open the reader's imagination and suggest future experiments to composers and performers.

The multiphonics chapter describes an area where much research is ongoing; in particular,

the etude by Walter, *Composite sound glides*, expands the current boundaries by establishing lip multiphonics which are stable at half-valve position. The techniques, their notation and practice methods are well described, and there is a sense of excitement at new possibilities, especially in combination with the audio examples. I was aware that a physical description of what is happening in the instrument is missing from the text, and this is simply because research in physics is yet to catch up with these developments. I would have liked Svoboda and Roth to have mentioned this specifically and called for collaborative work and attention from physicists, as has been done in previous books (Bruno Bartolozzi's call for physical collaboration in *New Sounds for Woodwind*,⁴ for example, surely laid the path for the discourse that resulted in the first physical explanation of woodwind multiphonics in 1976).⁵ I would also have liked the contents of the chapter 'Special sound effects' to have been reallocated into other sections. Many books end with a chapter on 'miscellaneous/special/extended techniques' and I find that the terminology and the very notion of special effects seems to contradict the continuity and historical line of development that is so important to developing playing techniques, which is something that has, in general, been so well handled in this book.

In summary, this is a clear and informative book, that is rich with music examples and ambitious and wide-reaching in its scope. It establishes a trajectory for future research and should become a model for future practice.

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Christian Wolff, *Occasional Pieces: Writings and Interviews, 1952–2013*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. £26.49

Christian Wolff's place in the story of American experimental music seems secure, but it rests rather flimsily on a handful of isolated images: the school-age composer as 'Orpheus in tennis sneakers', in Morton Feldman's phrase, the youngest member by far of the Cage-centred 'New York School' of the 1950s; the demanding

⁴ Bruno, Bartolozzi, *New Sounds for Woodwind*, trans. Reginald Smith Brindle, 1st edn (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 6.

⁵ Arthur Benade, *Fundamentals of Musical Acoustics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 559–67.

experiments of open works from the 1960s and 1970s like *For 1, 2, or 3 People*, *Burdocks* and *Edges*; the many years spent as a classics professor at Dartmouth College; the turn to works that were overtly political in both text and (often diatonic, protest-song-based) music.

Occasional Pieces fleshes out the standard impression of Wolff's long career via interviews, brief texts on various musical topics, a handful of longer essays, and a striking and pointed Foreword by George Lewis that takes the text and the historiography from which it emerges to task for their failure to account for a wider – largely African-American – musical context. It is a record of Wolff's gradual emergence from Cage's shadow, a reflection on the importance of a group of colleagues whose names recur continually throughout (Feldman, Brown, Cardew, Tudor, Rzewski ...), and, most interestingly, a prolonged public grappling with a profound, half-concealed ambivalence. (It bears mentioning, also, that more than half the texts included here have appeared previously, in a collection called *Cues: Writings and Conversations* published by MusikTexte.)

It is immediately clear how overwhelming an influence Cage was on Wolff's creative life. Indeed, Cage's presence in these pages can be almost suffocating. This is not surprising in the earliest entries, from the astonishingly precocious teenage and twenty-something Wolff, which describe compositional procedures borrowed either from Cage's work or from exercises the elder composer set his short-term student and which feature musical examples in Cage's distinctive handwriting and asides about 'when Cage sent me to Boulez in Paris'. But much later, too, Wolff seems to see himself partly as an amanuensis to Cage or his memory, and so Cage's name appears on countless pages here even where it is not particularly relevant. A brief text on Ives, for instance, includes the unnecessary sentence 'John Cage hardly ever mentioned Ives's work', and a liner note for an album by Evan Parker and Eddie Prévost parenthetically shoehorns in a remark by Cage about Satie. More subtly, most of the several memorial texts in this collection are distinctly Cageian in form, composed largely of sets of disconnected anecdotes that strongly recall the elder musician's 'Indeterminacy'. The inevitable memorial for Cage himself, when it appears, is all the more touching for the combination of warm affection and modest reticence that this approach entails.

Readers accustomed to the mythopoetic rhetoric of self-justification of many pathbreaking

composers of Wolff's generation – full of aesthetic inevitabilities, *Ways Forward for Music* – will find Wolff's language joltingly refreshing. Right away, on the first page of the author's preface: 'The driving force of the music of Cage, Feldman, and myself at the time was an effort to reconstitute what one might think of as music. Why? Well, because we wanted to'. The tone of these texts is, like Wolff himself, modest, self-effacing, and full of moments of unexpected brilliance; there is an atmosphere of discovery, of credit shared with a cast of esteemed colleagues without a hint of portentousness or presumption. There is no particular concern with history, and relatively little with being first, as Wolff and his circle often in fact were, to any particular influential concept. Very few of his contemporaries are subjected to any degree of pointed criticism, and when they are, it is because they in turn are unjustly derogatory towards others.

The signal event of Wolff's aesthetic evolution, and the occasion of his most profound separation from Cage, was his adoption of explicit political materials: texts first (as in the oft-cited *Accompaniments*, from 1972), then melodies. These writings alight often upon this subject, and when they do they are suffused with a faint sadness arising from the constantly hedged, constantly undermined, constantly provisional arguments that Wolff musters for the efficacy of his brand of political music. (These arguments are also the site of the only woolly, unclear prose in what is generally a luminously transparent writing style; the atypical hesitance of thinking is palpable.) It is the most persistent theme of this book, the sole subject of several articles and a recurring topic in the interviews; it is what everyone wants to talk about; but the rhetoric is always resigned: 'it's more a question of general orientation, which at *some* level has some effect'; 'it's a small thing, it's not going to change the world, but it's different, it just creates, or might create'; 'You do what you can. ... there's going to be some connection somewhere, however obscure'; 'The interesting thing about political music is that its political character comes and goes. ... So things change, and that's interesting'.

The more purely musical consequences of this change of rhetorical emphasis are also greeted equivocally: compare the 24-year-old experimentalist's glee at the thought of annoying an audience ('As for the quality of irritation ... one might say that it is at least preferable to soothing, edifying, exalting, and similar qualities') with the comment made 18 years later about *Accompaniments* in a conversation with Walter Zimmermann: 'if one

did the whole text, just that part alone would take half an hour. ... the effect of the text would be lost, because people would be irritated by the length of it'. 'Edifying' and 'exalting', earlier dismissed (presumably) as the unworthy desires of a (bourgeois?) 'normal audience', have silently regained the upper hand. Is it too much to imagine a bit of wistfulness, if not resentment, hovering around the latter remark?

In the end, Wolff recognises the most fundamental characteristic of his decades of compositional work, politically oriented or otherwise: its focus on performers as people and on their interaction as material. He writes often about the unique rhythmic possibilities that emerge when, for example, one performer is waiting to be cued by an event from another that may come at any time, or not at all. A quintessentially Wolffian music can be found in the microscopic durational and articulatory worlds of hesitation, intense listening, and spontaneous navigation of complex and often mutually contradictory rules for action: 'this thing', as he says in the lengthy

interview with Cole Gagne that forms the centre of gravity of this collection, 'of being just slightly off a fixed point'.

Despite its inevitable repetitiveness and the inclusion of quite a few insubstantial texts, this collection is full of unexpected insights, telling anecdotes, and a general sense of warmth, generosity, humility and wonder. One forgives Wolff his inability, or unwillingness, to formulate a persuasive defence of his idea of political music; his openness with that very struggle is just another instance of his endearing self-effacement. In the end, it is not Wolff but George Lewis who, in his Foreword, most succinctly captures the ultimate aims of this music, in which political and aesthetic senses are joined: 'that things could be different than they are, and that it is up to both musicians and listeners to create the conditions for change'.

Evan Johnson

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