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feels, 'some revelation is at hand'. But it doesn't happen, and after 45 minutes I find myself reluctantly foreshadowing my final impression: that on the evidence of this piece, Zender simply doesn't have the musical imagination or dramatic flair needed to sustain two-and-a-quarter hours of contemporary opera. The Simeon/Flaubert scenes are one-dimensionally static, and the Dublin/Joyce scenes almost equally relentlessly active – even the supposedly lurid brothel scene finds me straying into the vale of Morpheus, mainly because the cumulative effect of so many convulsive, almost asthmatic gestures becomes so excruciatingly dull and undifferentiated. Particularly disastrous (and unnecessary) is the decision to let the entire opera run without an interval; there are two obvious places which could mark the endings of theoretical Acts 1 and 2, and far from gaining substance from its externally imposed 'unity', the opera simply suffers, along with its modestly-sized audience.

Florence, 2 – 6 September

Not a festival as such; for me, more a chance to catch the end of a rapidly fading summer and sip a last martini in the Piazza della Repubblica. But a characteristically chaotically organised series of new-music seminars does include what is billed as an 'Incontro con Sylvano Bussotti'. In the event, it's a 'meeting' *in absentia*: the 'piccolo maestro' doesn't appear. Instead, pianist Mauro Castellani gives a worthy but prosaic introduction to *Pour Clavier* (1962) and follows it with a worthy but prosaic performance for a slightly mystified audience which asks some singularly obtuse questions afterwards (such, in art, is democracy . . .). The main memory of the evening is of (presumably) a Party Official in the front row, who keeps glancing round during the performance: is this to impose a model of 'correct behaviour' or to see whether everyone else feels as uncomfortable as he does? At the grand neo-romantic outburst on p.19, he turns round again, this time with a beam of satisfaction: 'Ah yes, that's Bussotti!'. Yet it's fascinating to hear the pieces one grew up with in the sixties at such a distance. *Pour Clavier* is a strange piece (almost a masterpiece), its aesthetic torn, page by page, between Boulez and Cage. The real difficulty (not surmounted by Castellani) lies in giving coherence to the mainly chordal middle section – in ensuring that it doesn't sound like *Winter Music* with a student practising Boulez in the next room (or *vice versa*).

The full 'over-the-top' Bussotti phenomenon had been in attendance (along with the composer) at a concert a few days earlier in a (deconsecrated?) church located within a few metres of the Ponte Vecchio. Given his well-publicised erotic proclivities, it's little wonder that a soirée with the implausible title of 'La Donna nella musica da scena di Sylvano Bussotti' (The woman in the stage music of S.B.) attracts a big audience. Predictably, I suppose, Bussotti's vision of 'La Donna' seems to derive from a mixture of contact with ageing opera stars and Italian soap opera (with an archetypal Mum lurking in the background). The marvellous actress-singer Gabriella Bartolomei (whose very name evokes the world of the Borgias and the Medici) was the protagonist – tall, ravaged, pale, with scarlet dress and lipstick to match. Excerpts from *La rarità Potente*, *Giulia Round Giulia* (after Strindberg) and *Winnie, lo sguardo* (after Beckett) are, despite the collaboration of players like the cellist Libero Lanzilotta and the clarinettist Ciro Scarponi, vehicles for her

talents, and for an evening of 'theatre under the shadow of Bussotti' (as an Italian review put it), rather than conventional 'music-theatre'.

Amsterdam, 8 – 13 September

The festival is called *Gaudeamus* (Let us rejoice). But rejoice about what? Of the original good intentions, what's left? In brief, the intentions, and not much else. Through a mixture of old habit and new economic hardship, the players are mainly too old, or too young. And listening to the jury selections, it's often hard to avoid the impression that Messrs. Per Nørgård, Franco Donatoni and Ton de Leeuw made their choices with a blindfold; or that, following an old academic tradition, they threw the scores on the ground and picked up the lightest ones . . .

Though the opening concert turns out, retrospectively, to be one of the best, it highlights some basic problems. Whatever one thinks of Richard Barrett's *Coigitum* of 1983-5 (and I confess to strong feelings for and against), it is an impossible piece to present in a confined space like that of the Ijsbreker. Nothing balances: the singer is mainly inaudible, and once the percussionist cuts loose so is everything else. In principle the performance is good, yet it's only Michael Finnissy's piano playing that really stands out, notably in the ultra-athletic final cadenza.

As for Chris Dench's *Recueillement* for seven players (1985), the final rehearsal (with the Xenakis Ensemble) takes place without the clarinettist, which may explain why, in the actual performance, that player enters several bars early at one point and persists in error for some time afterwards, apparently without the conductor having noticed. In conversation, Dench concedes some weaknesses in the piece and foreshadows a revision, but is that any reason to perform it so shoddily?

Ron Ford's *Four Songs on texts of Dylan Thomas* for soprano and piano (1985) typifies the problems of the 'New Simplicity' faction: the composer's sincerity is unquestionable, but the desire to write melodies and strong rhythms really isn't, as of *anno* 1986, that innovative, and one needs invention as well as sincerity: it's no good imagining that all you have to do is adopt a praiseworthy stance, and the music will take care of itself. The same objection could be made to Mauro Cardi's *Filigrana* for string quartet: an impeccable act of allegiance to the Donatoni school, but where's the piece? The real success and disappointment of the evening is Kaija Saariaho's *Lichtbogen* for chamber ensemble and live electronics. For my taste, Saariaho is not only the most impressive of European women composers, but one of the very few really impressive young composers anywhere, and of either sex. Her orchestral work *Verblendung* was an outstanding piece; *Lichtbogen* shows remarkable technical expertise, but seems to embrace certain decorative/cosmetic elements which leave one wondering what the piece is really about: its substance or its surface. Still, hers above all is a name to watch.

The next evening, the same situation is presented in aggravated form. Flautist Harry Starreveld gives a nice account of Paolo Pizzetti's Sciarrinoesque *Lombra dell'angelo*, but a student string trio is left to wrestle with the only other interesting work of the evening, Michael Jarrell's *In te, animus meus, tempora metior* and clearly falls far short of what is necessary. Given that the composer has interrupted his honeymoon for this performance, it's not surprising that he's upset . . .

Unsusuk Chin's *Canzone II* for piano starts well, but lapses into sub-Ligeti, while the nadir of the concert (perhaps of the whole festival) is provided by Robert Nasveld's imbecilic *Imaginations II*, a red-Indian melodrama (accompanied by the composer) in which the protagonist (a singer) finishes by stabbing himself.

On the 10th, Rob Zuidam's *Ground* for piano indicates some craft and talent, as does Toshio Hosokawa's *Dan-so* for piano trio. The next day, an essentially harmless lunchtime recital is succeeded by an evening concert which is a *mise-au-point* of Gaudeamus's current problems. As a quasi-adopted Australian, I suppose I have to concede a personal interest here: three of the composers are Australians, and two are personal friends. Each composer (Gerard Brophy, Riccardo Formosa, Jim Franklin) has a work performed by the Gaudeamus String Quartet (Formosa's is actually a piano quartet), and each of them has his work *butchered* by a group of alleged new-music specialists: rhythms may have been approximately accurate, but pitches and dynamics seem to have been subjected to chance operations. A good quartet by Mario Garuti – *E l'altro* – suffers the same fate; he at least is able to prove his case by producing a recording with the Arditti Quartet at a seminar the next day, whereas the others (two of whom are embarrassedly present) have no choice but to tolerate and then disclaim a travesty. If this was an uncharacteristically bad day for the Gaudeamus Quartet (which has been in existence for nearly 30 years), it simply owes the composers an apology. If it was typical of its current approach to the performance of new music, it should be disbanded forthwith.

The generally low level of performance at Gaudeamus is something the organisers – whose goodwill is not in doubt – need to ponder terribly carefully. It is clear that limited funding makes their position difficult and that they are simply not in a position to engage as many high-quality performers as they would like. Still, the poor performances encountered all too often at the 1986 festival serve no-one's interests: not the composers', not the performers', not the organisers' and most certainly not the public's. If lack of finance makes the maintenance of a decent basic standard impossible, it would be best for the Gaudeamus festival to bow out gracefully while its reputation is still intact. (It's probably significant that even the Xenakis Ensemble played much better in Strasbourg – where the composer was present – than at the Ijsbreker.)

Strasbourg, 16 – 27 September

If Gaudeamus now seems to be in decline, Strasbourg's Festival International des musiques d'aujourd'hui must be the success story of the eighties. How the festival has progressed since its municipally controversial advent in 1983! Who would have guessed that what started out as little more than an exchange programme with Rome would turn into one of the biggest new-music festivals in Europe? Yet compared to Amsterdam or Paris, or even London, the surroundings seem so implausible: a provincial town, whose most striking feature is its plethora of cinemas and maternity shops (is there, perhaps, some kind of back-row causality that links the two?). In fact, the Strasbourg festival is an extraordinary document of what sheer dedication and persistence can achieve, unprotected by the shelter of tradition and major institutions. In effect, outside 'festival time' there only

seems to be a staff of about two people, who devote themselves to the planning of the festival and to ensuring that, in the run-up period, the citizens of Strasbourg are so aware of it that, almost literally, every second shop has a poster for it and that the concerts themselves are, for the most part, full. There's a lesson there for anyone who cares to learn it.

Staying for almost two full weeks (longer than at any other festival), I still manage to miss a performance of *Pli selon pli* at the start, and another Boulez concert (*Figures-Doubles-Prismes, Notations, Rituel*) at the end, along with a Hugues Dufourt extravaganza and many other more peripheral items. Even so, there is more than enough to glut oneself on. And a certain *grande bouffe* mentality is, admittedly, part of the French new-music scene: my first Strasbourg exposure is to a 'Night of Quartets' which begins at seven o'clock and ends well after midnight. Three separate quartets (the Arditti, Berne and Rosamonde, the latter a young group of former Paris Conservatoire students) play ten works: a panorama ranging from Bartók (1934) to Georges Aperghis (1986).

Frankly, the Ardittis win by a mile, even from a visual standpoint. They're a strange mixture. Irvine Arditti, the smallest and much the most assertive – always nervous, fidgety, attention-seeking – looks a bit like Tom Stoppard, but with a more 'sportif' jaw. The new recruit, David Alberman, looks almost disconcertingly fresh-faced next to the other seasoned pros – very 'serious', whereas Levine Andrade smiles benignly over the top of his viola, and Rohan de Saram, whose huge hands seem incapable of landing on the wrong millimetre of the strings, appears more 'artistic' and harrassed. And how well they play! In Amsterdam, a couple of young composers had discreetly suggested that they don't *always* play in tune, and it's true that Arditti sometimes plays virtuoso figurations in a *rasend schnell* manner that tends to obliterate a bit too much of the pitch content. But all the same! . . .

Most of the repertoire is familiar. Crumb's *Black Angels* (Berne) is under-amplified and a bit undercharacterised too, which tends to emphasise rather than suppress the somewhat gimmicky nature of the music. The Lutosławski String Quartet performance (Rosamonde) mirrors the work itself by starting tentatively and gradually gaining in assurance. As for the novelty of the evening, Aperghis's *Ten Pieces*, may our paths never cross again, Ardittis or not. Apparently, as with Janáček, it's an 'intimate diary'. So he leads a dreary life! O.K., *tant pis, je suis desolé* . . . but why should I suffer? And for 50 minutes! In the interests of objectivity, I should record that the piece's reception verges on the rapturous. But prejudices apart, I really do believe that there's more music in the two minutes of Brian Ferneyhough's *Adagissimo* (Ardittis again) than in Aperghis's 50. Or in the 25 or so of Giacinto Scelsi's Second Quartet (Berne): I still feel that the Scelsi phenomenon is somewhat exaggerated; and where others hear a genius 'discovering the inner nature of sound', I frankly don't hear much more than some inorganic dithering on single notes, with little trace of cause and effect. Berio's *Sincronie* (Arditti) – arguably his most anonymous piece – sounds quite absorbing after Scelsi, and the Arditti's reading of Ligeti's Second Quartet somewhere around midnight is equally impressive.

The chief disappointment of Ensemble Modern's concert with Heinz Holliger is the last-minute ditching of Donatoni's new *Sestetto*. Carter's *Triple Duo* is played

efficiently but without much character, and Holliger whips through parts of Helmut Lachenmann's *Mouvement* (– *vor der Erstarrung*) (1984) simply too fast for clean articulation. His own *Übungen zu Scardanelli* (1978-85) (three of the eight studies were played) predictably receives more affectionate treatment, though the music is overly 'conceptual' (i.e. one-dimensional) for my taste. The third piece, 'Ad Marginem', with its spectral high and low tape drones, holds my attention for longest.

As in Florence, it's Bussotti who is in danger of stealing the show: this time with his opera-ballet *Le Racine*, based on Racine's *Phèdre*. It's super-tacky, but enormously stylish. A massive set depicts the decaying interior of a Riviera palace, its stained woodwork lit by the dull glow reflected from darkening mirrors. The palace houses a sort of gay harem, with an all-male ballet company practising backstage, a predatory trio of ballet-master, company owner and librettist (Racine) prowling up front and the statutory Wicked Woman – a ravaged tragedienne who once triumphed as Phèdre – who will be held responsible for the suicide of the ballet's resident Adonis (Hippolyte) and expiate her 'crime' in death. The libretto redispenses the words of Racine's play in a manner too labyrinthine to describe here. As for the music, there are four principal voices (Irene Jarsky and Jacques Bona deserve particular mention), deploying, as ever, a sort of Boulez-*con-amore* style which has its origins in *Le soleil des eaux* and *Le visage nuptial*. But Bussotti really does know his way round the human voice: every time there's a held note within the general acrobatics, it's in a good register and sounds well. Apart from a small pit ensemble, which provides intermezzi and a final 'lamento', the instrumental music consists of an Ur-Bussotti piano part, flamboyantly delivered onstage by Jay Gottlieb (as the ballet's composer-in-residence). The Strasbourg audience seems mystified, but I was sufficiently entranced to go back for a second performance.

Another highlight is the Xenakis Ensemble concert, with a broader range of repertoire than at Gaudeamus, a better venue and a higher standard of performance – possibly because the composer is there. As in Amsterdam, the harpsichordist Elisabeth Chojnacka plays *À l'île de Gorée*: a work which, considering its dedication to black freedom fighters of the past and present, comes disconcertingly close at times to Poulenc's *Concert champêtre*. A solo piece, *Naama*, is more characteristic of Xenakis's recent brutalist manner (as was *Thalleim* in Amsterdam) without quite achieving the intransigent stature of the earlier harpsichord work *Khoai*. Benny Sluchin's première of the trombone piece *Keren* (pleasant, but no show-stopper) is notable for a novel approach to inserting mutes without stopping playing – the mutes are set up on a sort of 'mute-tree', and the trombonist gently 'impales' his instrument on each mute in turn. But it's an old Xenakis classic, *Eonta*, brilliantly played by Georges Pludermacher, that stays in the memory. After 22 years it still sounds marvellous, and once the grand quasi-cadenza at the opening is out of the way, it is astonishing just how memorable much of the detail is. It makes you wonder if it isn't time for Xenakis to spend a bit more time with his old IBM 7090.

Two orchestral concerts are frankly disappointing. L'Orchestre de Strasbourg doesn't display anything like the finesse of sound or intonation needed to do justice to Ligeti's *Lontano*, and though it just about copes with Berg's *Altenberglieder* (which Jeanne Pilaud

sings rather well), the *Three Pieces for Orchestra* are technically out of its depth. Henri Dutilleux's *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement* (1977) comes so close at times to clichés of sci-fi film music that one wonders when the bug-eyed monster is due to come vaulting through the ceiling of the concert hall. A few days later, the entire Orchestre National de France descends to play an utterly unappetising programme (suitably ill-attended) of Gerhard (the Fourth Symphony) Bernd Alois Zimmermann's early and unremarkable Violin Concerto and Dufourt's *Surgir* (1984). The latter is utterly misnamed: far from surging, it would be hard to imagine anything more flabby (and it comes after an equally ineffectual vocal piece, *La mort de Procris*, a few days earlier). The source of some reputations really is a mystery to me . . .

Yet there are some highlights too. A Boulez mini-marathon with the Ensemble InterContemporain is one of them: a first part of his early music (*Sonatine, Douze Notations, Structures II*), a second consisting of a new work for clarinet and tape (*Dialogue de l'ombre double*) and the third suddenly swelling to quasi-orchestral proportions for a remarkably affectionate performance of *Cummings ist der Dichter* and a more prosaic one of *Eclat-Multiples*. (I really wonder about the usefulness of 'rediscovering' the early *Notations*; they're harmless enough, but vastly inferior to Boulez's subsequent piano works, and the composer's decision to inflate at least four of them into grossly overblown post-*Turangalîla* orchestration exercises strikes me as a terrible error of judgement.)

Boulez sits at the mixing desk with arms folded throughout the *Dialogue*, looking utterly miserable, and does his utmost at the end *not* to acknowledge the applause. And indeed, there *are* problems with the piece (which has since joined the pantheon of works 'withdrawn for revision'). Of course it is enormously 'accomplished': there's no doubt about Boulez's 'knowing how to do it' – but as for knowing *what* to do? If it's just a matter of writing about eighteen minutes of super-Berio for Berio's 60th birthday (there really should be a moratorium on these endless birthday tributes), then the piece is a great success. But though it gains in substance as it proceeds, at the end it's still only a 'nice piece'. What happened to the great composer? Almost needless to say, Alain Damiens plays brilliantly, even when contending with an over-amplified pre-recorded clarinet executing high-speed figure-eight loops around the auditorium. And indeed, the performance level throughout the concert is exemplary.

Finally, a few words about a fairly devastating experience: Zimmermann's *Requiem for a Young Poet*, imported at presumably vast expense from Cologne, with the Cologne Radio Choir and Orchestra directed by Gary Bertini and a huge multi-track tape set-up, all of which seems to function perfectly. There are some pieces one's almost afraid to hear again after a gap of several years, in case the original overwhelming impression just isn't there any more. Well, for me the impression *is* still there. The *Requiem* is an astonishing piece, sociologically as well as musically: a funeral rite for the sixties, a premonition of the Baader-Meinhof era, if you like; but above all, superb music, dense, claustrophobic and vastly sombre: a masterpiece. After that, it was time to leave Strasbourg.

* * *

A brief visit to London led to more contact with composers than with their works. One-week impres-

sions are, of necessity, superficial, but the 'scene' does seem to be steadily decaying. There's a fair amount of surface activity, to judge from forthcoming programmes, but very little reflection on content; parochialism seems to have taken over with a vengeance. Compared to a few years ago, people seem reluctant to say what they mean in public, unless it's of the most reactionary nature conceivable. And behind the scenes, they simply grow more divided and embittered. My only experience of 'live' music – 'alive' might be putting it too strongly – was the first half of Messiaen's cycle of organ pieces *Livre du Saint Sacrement*, composed in 1984 and given its British première by Jennifer Bate in Westminster Cathedral on October 7. I used to adore Messiaen's music (some of it I still do), but I find the recent work frankly distressing. To me, it sounds so old and sluggish – a faded recollection of glories long since past ('Les corps inglorieux' was a phrase that came to mind more than once during the new organ cycle). Apparently, such thoughts are not permissible in London these days.

Donaueschingen, 16 – 19 October

Since the première of Ferneyhough's *Carceri d'Invenzione* cycle at the Donaueschingen Musiktage was one of the main reasons for my being in Europe, I arrive a day early to attend some rehearsals. Fairly rapidly, three things emerge:

- i) that Roberto Fabbricani is an utterly astonishing flautist – probably the best new-music flautist in Europe today;
- ii) that conductor Arturo Tamayo really isn't the man for the job; he is obviously enthusiastic about the music, but his beat isn't precise enough (some musicians are already complaining) for these super-intricate pieces, and the constant need to call for 'Ruhe!' (Quiet!) suggests a certain lack of authority (though I understand the studio recording has gone well);
- iii) that the Ferneyhough had better be good, because the rest of the festival promises to be pretty dire (to judge, once again, from snippets of rehearsals, players' reports etc.).

Somehow, Ferneyhough has managed to get the whole cycle finished in time (apparently it was touch and go with Arditti's violin solo – just as well that he's used to achieving the impossible at 24 hours' notice), and the composer walks around the hall with a bound copy of the whole cycle proudly tucked under his arm. Of course, not all the music is unfamiliar: *Superscriptio* for piccolo and *Carceri I* for sixteen instruments have had some exposure; *Carceri II* for flute and chamber orchestra had a fairly abortive airing in Italy and a rather better one (so I'm told) in London; and the *Etudes transcendentales* for mezzo-soprano, flute, oboe, cello and harpsichord, in various stages of completion, has been doing the rounds for a couple of years. But the *Intermedio* for solo violin, *Carceri III* for fifteen wind instruments and percussion, and *Mnemosyne* for bass flute and tape are new, and so is the presentation of these works as a cycle.

The audience reception at the première is respectful rather than rapturous: a *succès d'estime*. One can think of many reasons for this: the low-profile ending of the last piece, *Mnemosyne* (but then, the not-with-a-bang-but-a-whimper ending has been almost obligatory in Ferneyhough's work since *Funerailles II* – one knows the music will evaporate: the question is, *how?*); the sheer, unremitting density of the musical invention;

and its distance from all the neo-romantic, neo-simplistic fashions of the current German festival circuit. But there are other factors: the question of whether the work can really be perceived as a cycle, rather than a collection of seven fascinating but separate pieces (I still feel rather ambivalent about this); the audibility, in a concert-hall situation, of the enormously refined microtonal writing; and at bottom, maybe, the whole notion of a latter-day *musica reservata* whose technical resources demand that it be presented in a hall too large for its accurate perception. *Carceri I* and *III*, along with the solo pieces, make a direct dramatic impact but *Carceri II* and the *Etudes* – arguably the 'core pieces' of the cycle – demand slow absorption through repeated hearing; a luxury not available at festival premières.

As for the rest of the festival, perhaps the less said the better. The dismal state of 'young composition' in Germany is such that the organisers are now forced to return to the *failures* of previous years in order to satisfy the Teutonic demand for continuity. As in 1983, Manuel Hidalgo confirms that whereas real Lachenmann can be enthralling (as witness the new piano-and-orchestra piece, *Ausklang!*), *ersatz* Lachenmann is usually pretty dire. This time he has a seconder in Mayako Kubo, another Lachenmannite. The difference between Hidalgo's *Al componer* and Kubo's Piano Concerto is – in brutal précis – that Hidalgo seems to know what the Lachenmann aesthetic is about but lacks the acuity of hearing and timing to recapture and project it, whereas Kubo is able to mimic the surface of Lachenmann's work without ever penetrating to its content.

Even so, these are honorable failures. Others (all ensemble pieces) are less creditable: Emmanuel Nunes' *Wandlungen* applies 30-minutes' worth of bland craftsmanship to bland harmonic material; Johannes Kalitzke (*Jardins paradoxaux*) doesn't seem to have realised that dressing like Stockhausen, and behaving like him at rehearsals, is no substitute for *being* Stockhausen; Enrique Raxach – in *Calles y Suenos* – produces fifteen minutes of competent kitsch that could easily have found its way into episodes of *Hawaii Five-O*; Simon Holt's best moment in . . . *era madrugada* is a slightly clumsy variant of Gershwin's 'It ain't necessarily so'; and the ultimate low-point (leaving aside Patricia Jünger's 'Hörstück' *Sehr geehrter Herr – ein Requiem* (Dear Sir, a Requiem), whose Karl Sczuka Prize can only be regarded as the outcome of snivelling tokenism) is provided by Reinhard Febel's utterly inept Symphony for large orchestra. Febel, who is already in his mid-thirties, has been hailed as a major talent. On the evidence of the Symphony, a good friend might usefully send him an orchestration textbook for Christmas.

Stuttgart, 1 – 4 November

The opening phase of the 'Music and Film' festival is an endless shaggy (Andalusian) dog story – that is, a sequence of reinterpretations of Dali/Buñuel's *Un chien andalou*. Personally, I think Buñuel got it right first time – a reconstruction of his original impromptu juxtaposition of *Tristan* and Argentinian tangos seems hard to beat. Certainly Josef Anton Riedl's all-purpose neo-fifties electronic score has absolutely nothing to add (and he always seems to write the same piece – would it make any difference if the commission was for *Bambi* or *120 Days of Sodom?*). Nor am I convinced by Wolfgang Rihm's *Bild* (1984), which the composer asks



FERNEYHOUGH

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Superscriptio	1981
Solo Piccolo	5½'
Study Score P-7289 . Performing Score P-7289a	
 <i>Carceri d'Invenzione I</i>	 1982
Chamber Orchestra (16 players)	12½'
Study Score P-7291 . Performing material on hire	
 <i>Intermedio alla ciaccona</i>	 1986
Solo Violin	c.7½'
Performing Score P-7346	
 <i>Carceri d'Invenzione II</i>	 1985
Solo Flute and Chamber Orchestra (20 players)	4'
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 <i>Etudes Transcendantales/Intermedio II</i>	 1982-85
Flute, Oboe, Soprano, Harpsichord, Violoncello	c.27'
Study Score P-7310 . Performing material on hire	
 <i>Carceri d'Invenzione III</i>	 1986
Fifteen Wind Instruments and Percussion (3 players)	10½'
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to have performed before or after the film, rather than during it. In an interview somewhere, Rihm said he didn't actually like the film. Fine – but then why accept the commission? Perhaps the one thing he has in common with Salvador Dalí is Breton's 'Avid à dollars'? Not surprisingly, it's Kagel who produces the best 'new' score (*Szenario*, written in 1982); whereas Buñuel provoked by naming the film after a quadruped which never appears, Kagel provokes by restoring him on the soundtrack – in fact the 'dog obbligati' are among the highpoints of the score.

Kagel presents a recording of the score, along with the film of his *MM 51*, at a lecture, and just as well, since the live performance that evening by the Saarbrücken Orchestra under Dennis Russell Davies is atrocious, with poor rhythm and excruciatingly bad intonation. In fact the whole concert (with film music by Michael Nyman, Virgil Thomson and Prokofiev) is profoundly unimpressive – only a solo piano performance of Satie's music for *Relâche*, combined with a showing of the film itself, gives any real pleasure.

Not everything is film music: one concert by young performers includes very decent performances of Lachenmann's *Klangschatten* and Holliger's *Dona nobis pacem* – (are the 'seventies revivals' coming already?), and a piano duo concert (Gunilde Cramer/Yukiko Sugawara) includes a Hidalgo work (*Les Pièces*) which shows him in a more favourable light than *Al componer*.

Metz, 20 – 23 November

Inauspicious beginnings: given the obscure venue – a side-street cinema – you'd think this was a concert the organisers of the 15th *Recontres internationales de musique contemporaine* wanted to hide. But in fact it's packed, with sweaty student bodies clogging the gangway. The music, though, is no great shakes: Aldo Brizzi's *Mi Ha-Sefer* for saxophone, percussion and tape has some terribly naive periodic rhythms and very banal percussion writing, while José Campana's *Insight* for the same forces, plus flute and bass, seems to be off on a cosmic trip à la Antonin Artaud. After the interval, some spotlights shine directly in my face; if this is meant to be a form of alienation, it succeeds brilliantly – I'm totally alienated. I hold out during Scelsi's pious pseudo-ethnological melodies (*Wo Ma*, with the bass Boris Carmeli), but faced with the prospect of Ivo Malec's 30-minute crash course in tinnitus acquisition (*Attacca* for solo percussion and tape), I head for the exit.

The first major concert is the première of *Evas Zauber* (Eve's Magic), the latest instalment of *Montag* from Stockhausen's *Licht*. Well, what can one say? It's a piece one is likely to find either charming or abominable, depending on one's outlook. It seems that Stockhausen has taken over from his teacher Messiaen the role of combining naivety and sophistication to an almost inconceivable degree. The stage spectacle suggests an alliance between Hansel and Gretel and Disney's *Pinocchio*: I don't think I've ever seen a new-music theatre piece that was so 'wholesome'. The Parisians in the audience have some unkind words for Suzanne Stephens' diaphanous green garment, or rather, for what is revealed thereby; what strikes me is how much Ms Stephens' stage presence has improved since the *Harlekin* days (and her basset horn playing, too, is quite remarkable). Flautist Kathinka Pasveer performed with her usual startling brilliance. What of the music? Again, the mixture of naivety and sophistication – it's very skilfully written for the two principal instrumentalists (one can easily believe Stockhausen's

claim that he worked with each player for several hours a day over three months), but despite the intricacy with which the basic melodic formulae are elaborated, I really can't detect much substance in the results – who would have thought that serialism could become so pretty?

Xenakis's *Horos* (1986) is, for my taste, unacceptably crude in rhythm and opaque in sound, though it could be that the Radio Luxembourg Symphony orchestra under Michel Tabachnik doesn't do it full justice. At the same time, it lacks the sense of sheer excess that makes the new 'piano concerto' *Kegrops* so striking. Tabachnik also presented a one-hour 'excerpt' from his own *Le Pacte des Onze*, which curiously combines rather accurate reminiscences of Messiaen's *Liturgies* with a barrage of IRCAM electronics.

A rather sparsely attended concert by the Dutch Radio Choir and Orchestra under David Porcelijn starts with an early (1968) piece by Klaas de Vries for two pianos and orchestra (*Refrains*). It's instructive, because although very obviously influenced by late Stravinsky, it sounds so much better than the rest of the programme. In those days, even students were expected to select their notes carefully. Tomas Marco's *Pulsar*, on the contrary, exemplifies the current super-decline: about as dreary, unimaginative and orchestrally inept an exercise in periodic rhythms as one could ever hope to encounter. Ton de Leeuw's *Invocations* are undoubtedly sincere and competent, but most of the work really could have been written forty or more years ago, and would have belonged in the 'cautiously Stravinskian' camp even then. The procession of latter-day Symphony-of-Psalms seems to be growing endless – but is there any reason why belief should be a substitute for musical invention? The same thought comes to mind later, listening to some rather turgid psalm settings by Marek Kopelent (*Cantus supplex*); what a relief it is when Michaël Lévinas asks the members of Groupe Vocal de France to 'couple' vocally through the orifices of horn mouthpieces and, by the look of things, kazoos in *Les Reciproques*! At last, some good-humoured effrontery!

It's good to hear a live performance of Steve Reich's *The Desert Music*, but – heaven help us – isn't it Stravinsky's *Les Noces* all over again, with an unwelcome dollop of Walt Disney thrown in? What happened to the hard-edged composer of *Music for Eighteen Musicians* (a piece pallidly recalled in both *The Desert Music*, and in *New York Counterpoint* which precedes it on the Metz programme)?

Kagel's concert is a late-seventies/early-eighties retrospective, of mainly lightweight items (though I imagine Kagel takes *Fürst Igor Stravinsky*, excellently performed by Carmeli and the Cologne New Music Ensemble, more seriously than I can). *Klangwölfe*, for ultra-muted violin and piano, is a favourite of mine, and a new TV film of *Dressur* for three percussionists is also enjoyable. Kagel's address before the film is a reminder that there are still *some* articulate composers around.

The final concert, in the freezing environment of the church of the Abbaye des Prémontrés (it must belong to an order of ascetics) is notable mainly for saxophonist Daniel Kientzy's wild rendering of Volker Heyn's *Buon natale fratello Fritz* and George Benjamin's very accomplished account of his own quite unbelievably trite *Three Studies for Piano*, which most of the audience seems to adore. Wasn't it Noel Coward who said something about the awful potency of cheap music? Time to go home . . .