
BOOK REVIEWS

The Life of Messiaen by Christopher Dingle. Cambridge University Press, \$29.99 / £15.99 (paper); \$79.00 / £45.00 (hardcover).

Messiaen's Contemplations of Covenant and Incarnation: Musical Symbols of Faith in the Two Great Piano Cycles of the 1940s by Siglind Bruhn. Pendragon Press, \$36.00 / £22.50 (paperback).

Olivier Messiaen's System of Signs: Notes towards Understanding his Music by Andrew Shenton. Ashgate Publishing, \$99.95 / £55.00 (hardcover).

Just in time for this year's Messiaen Centennial, publishers are issuing a second generation of Messiaen scholarship. Moving beyond explanations of 'non-retrogradable rhythms' and descriptive accounts of the works that dominated Messiaen studies through the 1990s, much scholarship in this decade seeks to make sense of the music's rich range of meanings. As Siglind Bruhn puts it, 'By far the most important aspect of this language is the fact that each component functions, beyond its purely musical coherence, as a spiritual symbol' (42).

These spiritual symbols are best interpreted within the context of Messiaen's life. The first full-length biography of Messiaen in any language, Christopher Dingle's *The Life of Messiaen* is therefore indispensable. It is also a triumph. Dingle is indebted to Peter Hill and Nigel Simeone's *Messiaen* (2005), which is less a standard, interpretive biography than a life in documents in the manner of Samuel Schoenbaum's *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life* (1975) or Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft's *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* (1978). The newest addition to Cambridge's Musical Lives series, *The Life of Messiaen* is also the most generous, having nearly a quarter more pages than most volumes in the series, a third more halftones, and 500 footnotes. As with all books in the series, it lacks musical examples. But it has an excellent index and includes little-known sources such as articles written in the 1930s from *The Times*, old BBC broadcasts, and hard-to-find anecdotes from Jean Langlais and André Jolivet.

Skillfully balancing social context, career, personal life, and works, Dingle seems to agree with Richard Ellmann that an artist's life becomes a source for the art. He notes that for both Messiaen

the child and Messiaen the parent, the World Wars produced a physically absent father and mentally absent mother and he emphasizes how Messiaen's life 'was dominated by the creative influence of women' (2). Describing a piece written after his mother's death, for example, he says that 'the *Préludes* are permeated by a profound sense of melancholy, a remarkable trait coming from a composer who subsequently became renowned for his ecstatic outpourings of joy' (23). And after discussing Messiaen's father's second marriage and the birth of his half-brother 21 years his junior, he suggests, 'With so much of his domestic life preoccupied with pregnancies ... it is natural that Messiaen's musical thoughts in the mid-1930s should turn to the birth of Christ with *La Nativité du Seigneur*' (53). Readers seeking to understand the music through the musician will be gratified.

Dingle discusses Messiaen's music sensitively and knowledgeably, describing *Chronochromie* as a 'continuously changing web of sounding-colours', explaining that 'the simultaneous experience of movement and stillness' in *Le Banquet céleste* represents 'the ability of God to exist outside time yet to act within it' (22), and comparing the end of *Des Canyons aux étoiles...* to the end of Ravel's *Ma Mère l'oye*: an observation made especially meaningful because Messiaen had recently been studying Ravel's score.

Writing with confidence and charm, Dingle calls *La Ville d'en-haut* 'a distinctly monumental miniature – a monumentalette, perhaps' (231) and jokes that 'Cocteau's *Le Coq et l'arlequin*, with its flippant remarks decrying nature, condemning Wagner and deriding *Pelléas et Mélisande*, could have been written specifically to taunt Messiaen' (11). He synthesizes the first chapter's subjects of his mother's death, his organ piece *Le Banquet céleste*, and his budding career as a church organist with a resonant pun: 'If he possessed his mother's reputed premonitory gifts, he would know that, believer or not, the years to come would often be extremely tough. In 1931, though, the immediate priority was to earn his daily bread'. (28)

Dingle juxtaposes the big picture with the small anecdote. He opens with an obviously first-hand account of the geography around Grenoble, Messiaen's place of birth. A few pages later he describes how, as a boy, Messiaen may have dodged prostitutes on his walk to church.

He briefly attends to the economic depression in 1930s France and notes the irony of how Messiaen, the former nonconformist, entered the Académie des Beaux-Arts in the late 1960s at the time when the current nonconformists were protesting the establishment. He also tells amusing stories. Locked in a room in Fontainebleau to compose in utter isolation during the 1931 Prix de Rome competition, the hapless Messiaen worked for hours without food because he could not open his own suitcase.

Among his original contributions, Dingle fills in Messiaen's earliest years in the small town of Ambert (west of Lyon). And based on the dates of the Darmstadt Summer Courses in 1949, he demonstrates that 'Mode de valeurs et d'intensités' was written before – not after – *Cantéyodjayâ*. The redating affects the history of postwar serialism, casting 'Mode de valeurs' more clearly as a study and crediting *Cantéyodjayâ* as the piece that first integrates the experimental technique into Messiaen's eclectic musical palette.

Dingle's biography focuses little on Messiaen's theology and legacy. It offers no summary statement about the man or his music and passes over such substantial works as the *Messe de la Pentecôte*. It lacks in-depth discussion of his employment by the Vichy government, his public altercation with René Leibowitz, and his activities at Darmstadt; nor does it acknowledge the contingency of its own biographical project. These limitations do not detract, however, from Dingle's elegant and informed portrait of the artist.

Biographies provide context for interpretive studies such as those by Siglind Bruhn and Andrew Shenton – context that provides the soil in which interpretive saplings grow into plausible trees. Bruhn plants her ideas deeply into musical and textual signs, sometimes harvesting premature conclusions about Messiaen's theology. Shenton, on the other hand, tills the soil far and wide, asking as many questions as he offers conclusions.

Messiaen's Contemplations of Covenant and Incarnation, the first book of a trilogy on Messiaen, draws heavily from Bruhn's previous publications on the *Vingt Regards*. The first part introduces the politics of Catholicism in early 20th-century France (20 pages) and the elements of Messiaen's technique (30 pages). Her demonstration that Hadewijch, Ruusbroec, and Thomas à Kempis were important to the *Renouveau Catholique* contributes handsomely to our understanding of Messiaen's background, and her broad explanation of Messiaen's musical language is one of the best introductions available. The second part (60 pages) analyzes *Visions de l'amen*, a work for two pianos, and the third (150 pages) analyzes *Vingt*

Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus, perhaps the greatest monument of the 20th-century piano repertory.

Rather than discuss the seven movements of the *Visions de l'amen* in order, Bruhn groups them in pairs that, she argues, reveal the work's symmetrical structural and theological message: 1–7, 2–6, 3–5, 4. The symmetrical pairs surrounding the central movement (4) all concern the relationship of creation to God, while the central 'Amen du Désir', she says, reveals the structural and theological focus of the music: 'For Messiaen, all the *Amen* resounding through the world are reflected in the image of humankind's longing for God's love'. (126)

Bruhn argues that the enigmatic structure of the *Vingt Regards's* 20 movements derives from Dom Columba Marmion's *Le Christ dans ses mystères*, a devotional book that Messiaen acknowledged as one of his sources. Marmion's book not only has 20 chapters, but like Messiaen's work, its first five parts comprise an extended introduction. In the *Vingt Regards*, Bruhn calls these movements an 'exposition'. Movements 6 and 20 form a 'framing synthesis' for the rest of the cycle, while the odd-numbered movements between numbers 7 and 19 serve as 'development' that explores the human response to 'basic mysteries of faith' represented in the introductory movements. Bruhn calls the even-numbered movements 8 to 18 'contrasts'.

Given the shocking variety and power of the music, Bruhn's summary of Messiaen's Christian theology is surprisingly anodyne:

Messiaen's overall message in this cycle: God's love prompts Him to give humankind the gift of His Son's Incarnation; on occasion of the birth of the child at Bethlehem, God experiences a rapturous joy; and humankind, strengthened by this act of grace as well as by their shared wonderment, grows and is spiritually transformed in its love of God. (276)

Her task, she says, is to 'decode' the music, 'to identify musical elements as carriers of extramusical signification so that one can then examine how they are used [to] create encrypted meaning in different contexts' (10). She says that E major signifies human praise and F-sharp major means divine love, an expanding figure represents 'spiritual transformation', rhythmic ostinatos symbolize timelessness, and Messiaen's trademark 'addition of a dot' conveys the 'divine concern for even the smallest of creatures'. She contends that Messiaen's mode 2 symbolizes God's love in the *Vingt Regards*, mode 4 is the Child at Bethlehem, mode 6 is the Word Incarnate, and mode 7 is the unity of humanity and divinity as well as the Theme of the Star and the Cross.

Such equations of signifier to signified are fas-

cinating, but not always convincing. Although she frequently hedges her claims with an appropriate 'one could speculate that' or 'seems to serve as a symbol for', her conclusions often result from eisegesis (reading into a text) rather than exegesis (reading out) and therefore could benefit from a hermeneutics that reaches beyond the notes.

Editorial problems weaken the book. Detailed descriptions precede rather than follow her claims, making their purpose clear only in retrospect. She mistakenly says that Messiaen's mode 2 'was then called the "octatonic" scale' (though the term was coined in 1963), and that *minor* triads can be built on *each* pitch of the mode (though she must mean either *diminished* triads or every *second* pitch). She also repeats a mistake made in Robert Sherlaw Johnson's *Messiaen*; the correct note values for *deçi-tâla* no. 38b are 2–1–1–2–1–1. Despite these slips, Bruhn is adept at identifying possible misprints. Pianists will wish to consult her pages 149 n. 1, 234 n. 17, and 252 n. 33 for problems in the score of *Vingt Regards*.

While Bruhn focuses on analysis and theology, Andrew Shenton's circumspect *Olivier Messiaen's System of Signs* broadens the scope to include many fields of study. The first chapters present the basic tenets of Catholicism, Catholicism in Messiaen's milieu, Messiaen's prose commentaries and musical techniques, and the 'Cas Messiaen'. Chapter 3 situates the *langage communicable* (his idiosyncratic musical alphabet, grammar, and accompanying leitmotifs) within a fascinating history of musical cryptography. Chapter 4 parses the *langage communicable's* phonology, morphology, and syntax, and finds moments in the *Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte-Trinité* where Messiaen breaks his own rules, showing he values music over grammar. Shenton addresses language acquisition, perception, and cognition in the fifth chapter. He also considers recordings as texts, studies the *langage communicable* in all three works where Messiaen applied it, and lucidly discusses how organ registration changes the aural content of the notated *langage*. In chapter 6, he contextualizes the *langage* in relation to Thomas Aquinas, Messiaen's superscriptions, the Rosetta Stone, the supposed speech of angels, and Trinitarian theology; he also provides a detailed chart analyzing the components of the whole *Méditations*, though he analyzes the theology only of the third movement. Finally, Shenton discusses how the concepts of intentional fallacy, semantics, and 'mentalese' make the *langage* meaningful. Along the way, Shenton introduces ideas from, among others, Leonard Bernstein, John Blacking, Yves Congar, Umberto Eco, Steven Feld, Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Charles Sanders Peirce, Steven Pinker, Lewis Rowell,

George Steiner, Joseph Swain, and especially Eero Tarasti.

That all of this transpires in 170 pages does not, regrettably, allow for in-depth discussion. Nor does it permit him to broaden his context to historical circumstances relevant to Messiaen's various languages, such as the postmodern fascination with language in the arts from the 1950s to 1980s.

But the book is packed with creative and critical thinking. He lists 19 theological topics that Messiaen addressed in his works, from 'human love' to 'stars', and offers a seven-part periodization of Messiaen's career, which he divides largely by decade. He correlates the pitches in a leitmotif called the 'Father of the Stars' to a Pythagorean scale that relates the note-names to the planets and shows how the leitmotifs for the 'Father' and the 'Son' relate to the *langage's* verbs 'to be' and 'to have'. He notes that the far slower pace of the *langage* relative to a spoken language 'may explain why Messiaen used so many shorter note values for his alphabet: it is possible that he was aware of the problem of comprehending a phrase prolonged to this extent' (127). He has modest success in searching for hidden uses of the language, places where Messiaen may have used it without indicating he did so, and interprets this moment theologically. He also proposes that performances of the *Méditations* project the names of the leitmotifs and other signs on a screen, like operatic supertitles, so that listeners can better connect to the music. He concludes by stating that 'the *langage* is simply an additional element in his collection of languages, which combine to define his message, facilitate dialogue with his listeners and mediate our relationship with God'. (170)

Shenton's main contribution lies less in his conclusions than in his problematizing Messiaen's 'sign system', especially the *langage communicable*. He wonders, for example,

To what degree the sign system in Messiaen's music helps or hinders access to the transcendent, and how much of that system is, ultimately, irrelevant to an experience of transcendence, whether by Catholic, non-Catholic or non-believer alike, and may therefore be dispensed with? (5)

Why is this notion of [rhythmic] characterization not developed further by Messiaen? (54)

Is the symbol [of the Hindu rhythm] only valid if Messiaen states it? (57)

Not all such questions receive answers, but they serve the introductory purpose announced in the book's subtitle: 'Notes toward Understanding his Music'.

Like Bruhn's book, Shenton's is rich with tables

and musical examples; its bibliography includes little-known interviews of Messiaen and little-known writings by scholars such as Jacques Chailley. Its index is detailed but not exhaustive; its proofreading is almost immaculate.

By the 25th anniversary of Messiaen's death in 2017, musicians and scholars will still be picking through the abundant fruits of these three labors. Meanwhile, we can hope an interpretive strategy blossoms that combines the strengths of these works: context, conclusions, and critical thinking. Only then will Messiaen's language receive the translation it deserves.

Robert Fallon

Messiaen Studies edited by Robert Scholl. Cambridge University Press, £50.00 / \$90.00.

Olivier Messiaen: A Research and Information Guide by Vincent P. Benitez. Routledge Music Bibliographies, \$95.00.

What is the purpose of Messiaen studies? Any sane musicologist (and quite a few that are not) would recognize *a priori* the benefit of studying any composer or body of works, but specialists of any discipline will periodically try to assess the nature and scope of the more important questions being explored and yet to be explored. It is puzzling, then, to be presented with an edited collection entitled *Messiaen Studies* that contains no introductory essay or preface; no attempt to set out the rationale for the volume, no flagging-up of the emerging themes, and no enticing hints at delights to come in the ensuing chapters. For those with a reasonable acquaintance with the subject, it is clear from a perusal of the contents that the essays are arranged in broadly chronological fashion, but the (more specific) question remains: what is the purpose of this collection of *Messiaen Studies*?

Rather than an introduction, the reader is thrown straight in at the deep end with the first chapter. Fortunately Nigel Simeone is immediately on hand to keep head above water with a detailed, but typically absorbing and readable examination of a single year in Messiaen's life, 1942. After painting the background with a brief survey of 1941, Simeone charts the notable events of 1942, fleshing out the bald facts as relayed in Messiaen's pocket diary with contextual information and some fascinating contemporaneous accounts and reviews of various musical events. This is then supplemented with a transcript of Messiaen's diary for the year; the first time that

this kind of information has been provided in such extensive detail. As ever, Simeone's encyclopaedic knowledge and infectious enthusiasm can be felt throughout, making this chapter quite a coup for the collection. At the other end of the book, Arnold Whittall provides a masterly overview of Messiaen's position in 20th-century music, examining and testing earlier contextualizations of the composer, considering *en route* (to name a few) Stravinsky, Boulez, Takemitsu, Tippett and Carter.

Between these two sturdy outer pillars come nine essays that approach the composer from a variety of perspectives, ranging from Paul McNulty's efficient survey of the aesthetic background to Messiaen's move towards quasi-serial techniques, to Sander van Maas's superlative exposition of the concept of *éblouissement*. The latter weaves an intricate theological and philosophical web, drawing upon the composer's mélange of love, music and religion and equating the difficulties he raises with those posed by the concept of the sublime, before exploring the 'basic distinction between ordinary and extraordinary aural experiences' that Messiaen periodically cultivates. Crucially, Maas explores a theologian cited warmly several times by Messiaen, though only in passing: Hans Urs von Balthasar. Similar ground is touched upon at some points by Robert Sholl's own chapter on the surrealist poetics of *Harawi*, though it is Breton rather than theology that provides the focus.

It would be unthinkable to have a collection of essays on Messiaen without some consideration of the birds, and Jeremy Thurlow's 'Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux*: a musical dumbshow?' is a thought-provoking consideration of the composer's narrative approach in these nature portraits. Using Carolyn Abbate as a starting point, Thurlow explores the ways in which the pieces of the *Catalogue* conform in some ways to the conventions of programme music – relying on the listener filling in the moments between more or less explicit pieces of musical signifiers – while simultaneously creating 'as many obstacles as footholds for the listener's narrative instinct'. Thurlow makes the point well that the listening experience of the *Catalogue* is more complex than suggested by Messiaen's prefaces, noting the hierarchical or associative relationships between background and foreground material. Surprisingly, he does not quite grapple with the representational tension found on just about every page of the work between transcriptions of things heard (usually birds) and things seen, the former being based in some way on actual sounds, the latter on musical metaphors. Nonetheless, Thurlow's absorbing

essay will be essential reading for all those attracted to this endless fascinating masterpiece.

Allen Forte is typically illuminating in applying a pitch-class approach to individual birds from the *Catalogue*. He scrutinizes one utterance from the title bird of each piece of the *Catalogue* (not, as implied in the preamble, all of the 78 featured birds), resulting in 13 analytical fragments. In a sense, while typically revealing all sorts of unsuspected interconnexions, this chapter is really a toe dipped into the water of a potentially much vaster lake-sized project, should someone wish to take up the challenge. Forte opens the door, but it is a pity that he does not make a case study of an entire piece, or even a longer segment, so that we can see the extent to which such details permeate the whole.

Amy Bauer's chapter on 'The impossible charm of Messiaen's *Chronochromie*' involves number-crunching of a different kind, picking a fairly deft path through the deliberate complexities of permutational features found in *Chronochromie*, especially the 'Strophe' movements. Crucially Bauer attempts to place the direct theoretical approach, familiar in concept at least from numerous earlier sources, within a broader discussion regarding Messiaen's philosophical impetus for using such devices. Stefan Keym outlines Messiaen's use of mosaic forms in various works from *Couleurs de la cité céleste* to *Saint François d'Assise*. While the diagrams and commentaries of the music are engrossing, the points made in his introductory material are the most valuable. Keym nails the twin fallacies that form was Messiaen's weakest link and that organically-based formal thinking is the only approach with historical legitimacy. Andrew Shenton surveys the issues surrounding the performance of Messiaen, covering some of the well-established aspects of performance studies in the light of the idiosyncrasies of his organ recordings. There are some useful points made, though as with Allen Forte a deeper case study or some more explicit examples would have been welcome.

One of the undoubted highlights of the collection is Robert Fallon's 'Two paths to paradise: reform in Messiaen's *Saint François d'Assise*', which places Messiaen's opera in the specific context of the *ressourcement* of the Catholic church in France during the 20th century. He examines *Saint François* within the context of writers as diverse as Roustit, Chaix-Ruy, Balthasar and Guardini, while also looking at relatively recent musical equivalents (from Massenet to Stravinsky) and precedents.

It is a pity that the numerous insights of the essays are marred by some poor proof-reading and

various errors, some of them raising the eyebrows. For instance, given that both Scholl and Shenton are organists, how is it that the latter's chapter states that Messiaen's recording of the *Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité* was made for EMI, rather than Erato, and compounds the errors by giving the date of remastering for compact disc 'by EMI' as 1993 rather than 1988? Those wanting to take any of this material further might be frustrated by the lack of a combined bibliography. They may also be surprised at the absence of biographical notes on the contributors, or, for that matter, any of the usual expressions of gratitude for their hard work. Thankfully, the value of their essays is self-evident and this volume of *Messiaen Studies* certainly enriches the field.

The same could be said of a rather different tome, Vincent Benitez's *Olivier Messiaen: A Research and Information Guide*, which, despite a few caveats, is a labour of love that will prove to be an invaluable resource for Messiaen scholars. Drawing upon several years of patient digging, ferretting and searching, this book gives about as comprehensive a bibliography of the literature on Messiaen as it is possible to imagine. Concentrating upon items in English, French and German (though notable items in other languages also feature), Benitez provides a systematic listing detailing well over 900 resources, not including the list of musical works and selected discography. His starting-point, naturally, is the primary sources (from various library and archive collections, via interviews, lectures, commentaries, articles, reviews, prefaces and, lest we forget, treatises). After this he considers by turns biographical and stylistic examinations of the composer, topical studies, and explorations of specific works, while the section detailing accounts of Messiaen in sources devoted to other subjects is especially useful. Benitez provides descriptions for many items, including virtually all of the substantive ones, making numerous insightful comments, and not being afraid to point out shortcomings.

In terms of coverage, the main chapters of *Olivier Messiaen: A Research and Information Guide* are an undoubted success. Inevitably, despite Benitez's Herculean efforts, this is the kind of project that is, in one sense, out of date even before it is published; new books and articles are appearing all the time, and there is a drip-feed of lost or forgotten writings, and even works, by Messiaen. Nonetheless, Benitez has provided a firm platform of the situation up to 2007 on which future scholars can build. It has to be admitted, though, that some will encounter frustrations, for the index and cross-referencing have their limitations. To take a simple example, someone wishing

to review the literature on *Sept Haïkai* would find, in the section on them, Chinyerem Maduakolam Nduka Ohia's 1989 PhD study of the work. The entry does not have a 'see also' list, but a look in the index of works finds another ten items that deal with *Sept Haïkai*. So far, so good, except that these additional references include neither Michèle Reverdy's *L'œuvre pour orchestre d'Olivier Messiaen* (Paris: Leduc, 1978), nor Malcolm Troup's chapter from *The Messiaen Companion* on 'Orchestral works of the 1950s and 1960s'. It may be true that neither Reverdy or Troup is replete with revelations about the *Haïkai*, but they would still be counted among the essential reading for anyone studying them. It could be argued that these are more general books that would be read in any case, but the lack of cross-referencing is endemic. Benitez, quite reasonably, places Joseph Harris's 2004 PhD dissertation *Music Colorée: Synesthetic Correspondence in the Works of Olivier Messiaen* within the 'Analytical and Theoretical Studies of Messiaen's Music'. However, anyone studying *Éclairs sur l'au-delà ...* really should be alerted to the fact that a significant portion of Harris's study is devoted to an examination of the opening movement of the work, 'Apparition du Christ glorieux'. The index of names also omits some key figures, notably Mozart, Wagner, Debussy and Ravel, even though Stravinsky and Bartók do get entries. Surely it would also have been helpful to have a 'topics' index to help those examining, for instance, rhythm, colour or plainchant.

If the bulk of the book is superlative on content but presents challenges in terms of navigation, some of the latter chapters are more problematic in terms of substance. It is quite reasonable that listings of reviews of works and sources should be 'selected', but the rationale for inclusion is not entirely clear. Whereas entries for reviews in journals and newspapers of most Messiaen works are of first or early performances, the only entries for *Des canyons aux étoiles...* are from 1999. As for the discography, while it may be an appendix, it is hard to explain the numerous omissions of first or notable recordings. Anyone perusing this would remain unaware of Messiaen's performances of the *Quatre Études de rythme*, the *Quartet for the end of Time*, *Harawi*, *Poèmes pour Mi* or, staggeringly, either of his commercial recordings with Yvonne Loriod of *Visions de l'Amen*, or her recordings from the 1940s and 1950s. Nor is there any sign of Desormière's accounts of *Les Offrandes oubliées* (1942) or *Trois petites Liturgies* (1945), Rosbaud's 1951 *Turangalila*, the recording of the première of *Oiseaux exotiques* under Rudolf Albert, or Dorati's classic version of *La Transfiguration*. All of these are listed in earlier discographies, and they should

be the starting point of any discography, select or otherwise. While mentioning caveats, although it may seem trifling, Messiaen was insistent that the points of ellipsis were essential parts of titles such as *Des canyons aux étoiles...* or *Éclairs sur l'au-delà ...*, so their absence throughout, including in the list of works, is, to put it mildly, unfortunate.

Benitez's book is a treasure trove of information in which even the specialist will discover citations for previously unsuspected resources; in that respect it fulfils the 'research and information' aspect of its title. It is the 'guide' aspect in which it falls short, for it could do a much better job at helping readers to discover the things they do not know that they do not know. For those who have travelled much of this territory already, it is fun to dip into just about any page, but the newcomer to Messiaen scholarship may end up like Donald Rumsfeld, ruefully pondering unknown unknowns, and few would wish that on anybody.

Christopher Dingle

Essays and Diversions II by Robin Holloway. Continuum, £40.00.

Staking Out the Territory: and Other Writings on Music by Hugh Wood, edited by Christopher Wintle. Plumbago, £15.99.

Thank God, Beethoven can compose – but, I admit, that is all he is able to do in this world.

(Beethoven to Ferdinand Ries, December 1822)

Poor Beethoven! What a sorry figure he cuts beside his 20th- and 21st-century *confrères*: the writers and thinkers, the theorists and systematizers, the essayists and columnists, above all the Personalities who step before the footlights to answer the overwhelming question 'what is it like to be a composer?' 'Composers themselves', Robin Holloway asserts somewhere in this latest set of essays, 'are usually their own best interpreters even when ostensibly lacking words'. Sidestepping that awkward 'ostensibly', one turns to Hugh Wood, for whom 'The Composer Speaks' is 'as great a moment as "Groucho sings"'. Similar, too, in other ways: you hope that this is not what he does best.' Possibly it sometimes is. But whatever the case, the modern composer continues to speak, and talk, and write; and not always about his own music, but about everyone else's; and not even exclusively about music. In fact both Holloway in his (now) two volumes of *Essays and Diversions*, and Wood in *Staking Out the Territory* avoid their own music almost completely. Wood, it's true, spends some time investigating that over-

whelming question, notably in his title essay. With Holloway the issue of being a composer is merely circumstantial; it gets him to far-flung places, brings him into contact with other composers, other musicians, gets him commissions. Perhaps it validates his more heterodox opinions, but he certainly never makes any such claim. As for staking out the territory, that would in his case take more stakes than you could get from a Sibelian forest in a month of Chopin.

Whether or not the composer tells us straightforwardly about himself (and not many do), his prose may reveal almost as much as his music about his inner life. Holloway once wrote a carol for the King's Nine Lessons that was four times as long as he was asked for – and his prose writings, too, sometimes suggest a reluctance to prune, as well as, I daresay, an unwillingness to discard. *Essays and Diversions II* is barely two-thirds the length of its predecessor, *On Music: Essays and Diversions*, but it already shows signs of strain in the reprinting of material of which it would be kindest to say that it was worth printing once and no more. The travel pieces, especially, are of the kind that make lively enough newspaper copy but vanish without trace between hard covers. One or two of the longer pieces might equally have profited from the strong editorial hand that is lacking

as a whole (none is credited or in evidence, and Holloway has made his own index, with results that are sometimes more 'amusing' – his expression – than useful). In one particular instance, a long article prompted by Richard Steinitz's book on Ligeti, Holloway expresses bafflement that the *London Review of Books*, who commissioned it, declined to publish it, though the reason will be obvious to any reader who expects book reviews to review books, and in at least tolerably transparent prose. Another long review article precedes a no doubt justified demolition of the *Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music* with Holloway's own overview of the century, replete with the lists and litanies to which he rather often resorts but which one has to admit make fairly arduous reading. Unlike the travel articles, these are wild growths that simply needed the attentions of a good gardener. Fortunately they are by no means the whole picture.

Reading Holloway is at all times a somewhat restless experience; his prose is dense with images and idiosyncratic usages, some of which work better than others. He writes as one might suspect he composes, with a measure of contempt for the normal restraints and disciplines of 'good writing'. He is fond of the slightly peculiar demotic neologisms and onomatopoeias of the Senior

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Combination Room: words like ‘twaddlesome’ and ‘pellucidity’, and chummy assonances like ‘feckless recklessness’, ‘frisky frisbees’, and ‘fizzes’ and ‘pizzas’ (which you can write but not say), lend his English a certain sophomoric gaiety that can become quite exhausting.

But beyond these surface obstacles, he remains one of the most penetrating, wide-ranging and illuminating of writers on music. Like most good composers, in my experience, he talks about music with an immediacy hardly ever found in those whose job it is to scrape the flesh off the bones with ever more sharply honed analytical knives. Perhaps because he has suffered analytical criticism of his own work, he has little patience with the theoretical disquisitions of the university campus or the trade press. Instead he writes from the score, and above all from the ear. The sense of direct contact with the thing itself, with the music as sound, is palpable, whether he is on about music he knows intimately or, as is often the case here, music he has only just encountered. One of the best sections of *Essays and Diversions II* is a series of long record reviews of (mainly) operas and film scores by composers of the lost generation of German and Austrian post-Romantic music, composers like Schreker, Schulhoff, Korngold, and Max von Schillings, who found themselves stranded between the wars by the relentless progress of Modernism and either sank into various types of oblivion or escaped into the commercial sector. Taken together these essays, informed but not cluttered by background reading and by that strange sub-culture of failed Romanticism which many will recognize as the real Cambridge History of 20th-Century Music, provide a brilliant study of an important and to some extent reviving phase of music history that has largely escaped the attentions of the official chroniclers. Not that Holloway is trying to set these figures up as an alternative mainstream; he is as alert to their limitations as to their unrecognized virtues. But he is interested enough in (for example) Schreker to formulate a sympathetic understanding of why such a brilliant and devastatingly expert composer nevertheless falls short of imperishable greatness; why such an eclectic mix of sources – Weber, Wagner, Mahler, Puccini, Janáček, Debussy, Strauss, *inter alia*: an authentic Holloway catalogue – never quite dissolves into an individual voice.

The most valuable and absorbing part of the book, nevertheless, is a collection of long essays on individual composers, essays of contextualised criticism that can be read with profit in the way that one might read Edmund Wilson on the symbolists or Isaiah Berlin on Russian thinkers.

The very best of these – a chapter written for *The Elgar Companion* on Elgar’s choral works before *Gerontius*, and a detailed study of Debussy’s piano *Études* written for the programme-book of a Turin festival (the year of which, characteristically, Holloway has forgotten) – involve a degree of close reading that sends one hurrying back to the music, only too conscious of how much one has previously missed. On Messiaen (an essay that first appeared in *Tempo*), Holloway is particularly good in recognizing the music’s exceptional stature and importance while at the same time identifying those elements that are alas repellent to many modern-music groupies – including the present writer and, incidentally, Stravinsky (though he didn’t write the malicious critique Holloway quotes in his name from *Themes and Conclusions*).

Elsewhere there are short, often illuminating, pieces on almost every composer you can think of, and a few you can’t. Always there are distinct viewpoints. Holloway dislikes Shostakovich, is troubled by Prokofiev, overrates Glinka’s orchestral music, underrates Schumann’s, discovers Bizet’s *Jolie fille de Perth* (in terms that make me long to do the same) and Chausson’s *Roi Arthus*, deflates Berlioz (perhaps rightly, but studiously ignoring the *Symphonie fantastique*), more or less dismisses Reger, except for the Clarinet Quintet: ‘Brahms left out in the sun’. This enthusiasm mixed with distaste for the wayward and off-piste is infectious and invigorating, and helps the reader overlook the tangled metaphors, dodgy grammar and general editorial vagueness which mar the book on every other page.

Staking Out the Territory is in almost every way a different kind of product: ‘almost’ because it shares with Holloway the dilemma of how to bulk out a whole volume from sometimes ephemeral materials. Wood’s best essays are among the finest and most humane writings on music you could wish to read. But like his own music they are in too short supply, and Christopher Wintle, the book’s editor, has had to include a good many slight pieces – mainly programme notes – that are excellent in themselves but do not by any stretch belong between hard covers. There are admittedly puzzling aspects to all this. What, for instance, ever happened to the marvellous introductory talks Wood gave for the BBC Roundhouse concerts in the mid-1970s? So far as I know, they have never appeared in print, but they revealed more of Wood’s musical intelligence and wit than it would be reasonable to expect of a formal programme note. Moreover, Wintle makes frequent reference to (and quotes from) other reviews which might, on the face of it, have found a place in this collection. Were there copyright problems, or did the

author simply not want them reprinted? We never find out.

Wood's music has one big thing in common with Holloway's. It has no truck with *chic* avant-garde tendencies, is unconcerned with stylistic fashion, but seeks the beautiful and coherent along lines marked out by tradition. In detail, though, their work differs greatly. Holloway's is generous, effusive, eclectic, uneconomical, above all prolific in quality and quantity, where Wood's is stylistically and technically integrated, finished, easy-sounding but small in quantity. *Staking Out the Territory* opens with a series of essays on the difficulty of composing music, a topic never touched on by Holloway. Wood is self-deprecating to a fault, emphasizing his inadequacy for what, to him, is a supreme technical challenge: writing music, 'a Sisyphean task, time-consuming, arduous, unproductive and rather maddening'. But he speaks about all this with apparent reluctance. 'I can't understand', he remarks, 'this contemporary passion for having composers talk about their work'. At the same time he is hard on others who do the talking for him. 'Any musical hack', he alleges, a shade cruelly, 'is a higher order of human being than any publisher or critic'.

From these somewhat anxious assertions, one might picture Hugh Wood as an edgy, dissatisfied, rather uncomfortable individual. In fact those who know him know him as someone whose sense of the requirements of living generates an extraordinarily broad, cultivated, open-hearted attitude to the things around him. He can talk as well about poetry or painting as about music, and it is typical of him that he should describe his creative aspirations in visual terms. He is contemplating the paintings of William Scott (a series of whose 'Rough Circles' adorn the book's central block):

as I look at these rough, magic not-quite circles, I long to bring just that quality to my own work: to use a thicker brush, to make a bolder gesture, to play off rough against smooth, to leave rough edges and drips of paint. Can it be that I may be going down with a mild attack of the Birtwistles? I wish in a way that were possible: for he is the most painterly of our composers.

In a similar spirit, Wood can write 15 pages on Brahms without talking in any detail about his music. His starting point is a photograph of the composer, taken in 1891 on the Ringstrasse in Vienna, from which he elaborates an image of Brahms as counterpoise to everything in the 20th century that (as one begins to perceive) Wood himself finds most regrettable. There is Brahms a few years before his death, so near and yet so far from Freud, poison gas, Cubism, Lenin, the Jazz

Age, etc. etc.; Brahms the symphonist and writer of chamber music in the tradition of Beethoven, scholar and student of the past, Brahms the agnostic with a highly developed religious sense, unlike 'the cocksure, noisy, media-hungry atheists of our own day'. From this loving and beautifully drawn portrait emerges perhaps the clearest picture of what has made composition so hard for Wood himself in the dying decades of the 20th century and the dawning years of its successor. So much for the drips of paint.

Though I have long agreed with Hugh Wood that composers should not write or speak about their own music (away with composers' pre-concert talks!), these two volumes are a powerful defence of their writing about other people's. Ironically Wood, to my mind the more fluent, natural writer, is the one who writes least – barely enough, so far, to fill a book. Holloway, more idiosyncratic and careless (as well as a good deal more expensive), endlessly fertile, essentially unstoppable, already has two thick books of essays and promises a third. Both in their very different ways are required reading for anyone who believes that the creative mind, when it can tear itself away from its day job, will always be shining light into the corners of rooms we others have never entered.

Stephen Walsh

Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation by Frederic Rzewski, edited by Gisela Gronemeyer und Reinhard Oehlschlägel. Edition MusikTexte, €30.00.

'Nonsequiturs' must be one of the quirkiest ways to title a collection of writings and lectures – after all, one might assume that one selling-point of a book is that it is a stream of thoughts and arguments which are nicely linked together. There are two points which need to be put forward in a quick riposte to any such attack on this publication. First, if one were looking for a display of mainstream aesthetics, orthodox politics or conformist, modernist compositional ideas, one should not consider Frederic Rzewski's oeuvre (whether in musical notation or text-based). Second, the title of this compendium is derived from the title of a lecture which Rzewski gave in October 2006 at the Kansas City Arts Institute.

This is not the first bi-lingual book (German and English) devoted to one composer's writings to be issued by Edition MusikTexte, but unlike the collection of materials by Christian Wolff (1998), for example, this latest volume covers a substan-

tial number of lectures and writings which have not previously been published anywhere, or not printed in English: whereas 11 texts were previously only published in German, 20 further lectures and writings are presented in an easy-to-quote form here for the first time. In addition the printed programme-notes for 67 works (out of the more than 170 works in Rzewski's oeuvre) are a treasure-trove for anyone interested in accessing the richness of this composer's comments about his pieces. Furthermore, the fact that he has been a performer in one of the most interesting ensembles of new music in the 1960s, *Musica Elettronica Viva*, and a pianist who has been high in demand (also by composers of a more modernist ilk), is covered by some of Rzewski's letters included in this more than 550-page tome.

It is worthwhile considering the small section of this volume devoted to correspondence. Unfortunately – but understandably, for practical reasons – only letters *from* Rzewski to his friends (all fellow composers) are published. This section of letters – one each to Alvin Curran, Alvin Lucier, Cornelius Cardew, David Behrman, Richard Teitelbaum, and Christian Wolff – is headed 'On the Road. Letters 1967–1968', and one almost wants to mourn the lack of replies or comments, or to criticize the one-way communication. However, given that these letters were written 40 years ago, one should be happy to have them at all. Some of them deal with everyday impressions of life or problems, and might lead the superficial reader to condemn them as 'another example of composers writing about daily trivia', but actually it is worthwhile reading on. For example, the first letter to Curran (pp. 328–344) illustrates not only more mundane matters such as who should join *Musica Elettronica Viva* for a specific concert, but also goes into profound issues of aesthetics, sociology and politics. (For example, the concept of the solitary genius is criticized as an idea and myth of the 19th century; p. 332). The letter to Wolff (p. 362) is another example of demonstrating the aesthetic *Zeitgeist* amongst composers and performers of that time. It shows the protagonist's uncertainty about these relatively new forms of 'free improvisation'. This display of being unsure about the effects of this novel 'performance practice', especially whether and how it would change the status of the composer and performer, is important. It could mean that our historical perspective nowadays on this period, maybe wrongly perceived by some as a conscious and clear paradigm shift, was actually more a matter of gradually experiencing the feasibilities and maybe even practical constraints of a new situation, where the performance space was not only

incorporated, but where 'audience participation' and 'free movement' of sounds and players show the flux of political ideas from the 1968 streets into the concert hall, and out of it again.

In his more theoretical or formal texts, Rzewski provides an insight into what he thinks about improvisation, composition and interpretation – not only how these cross over in his own oeuvre, but also how these issues of music-making can be perceived in other composers' works. One could of course comment upon Rzewski's interesting observations of works by others and his stance towards composers such as John Cage and Christian Wolff. However, in doing so the reviewer would feel that he would need to evaluate a composer, performer and improviser assessing someone else – a task which seems not as interesting as letting the reader of this review approach these texts unbiased. Some passages of Rzewski's writings on artistic, political or performance issues in compositions by others, express his own views very intriguingly.

If one wants to raise small points of criticism towards this volume, one really needs to search more pedantically for problems. First, in the already-mentioned letter to Wolff (p. 362), there is no need to get confused about the handwritten annotation in Greek at the bottom of this type-written letter. I had to rely on a friend for a translation of this, and can confirm that the Greek is not relevant to the rest of the letter. (It would have been good if the editors of the volume had provided this information: instead they leave it unmentioned in the German translation, and do not translate it on the facsimile page of the original letter.) Second, it would be extremely useful to have a selected bibliography; this is especially true for composers such as Rzewski, where 'further reading' is quite hard to find.

Finally, a couple of brief words about the structure of the volume. The subdivisions of a volume of writings will often be open to debate; for example, the heading 'Music, What for?' used for a couple of items, surely relates to most texts about composers and performers. Similarly, the second big section ('Improvisation and Composition') is of relevance to a lot of Rzewski's work and writings (even if it sometimes is only an undercurrent in his stream of thoughts). The next 30 pages are titled 'Oral History' and consist of one previously-unpublished interview with Vivian Perlis. Also, the section 'Music and Politics' (pp. 188–253) could include (or not) texts from other sections (notably 'On Ambivalence. The Effects of Music on Society', pp. 17–39, which actually appears under 'Music, What for?'). The rest of the volume, however, is simply compartmentalized

in terms of the main thrust or type of material: 'Musica Elettronica Viva', 'Early Compositions', 'Dictionary Articles', 'About Others' and the more than 100-pages-long 'Program Notes'. A list of works (always much appreciated with neglected composers such as Rzewski) and an index round up this very useful volume – useful not only for those interested in Rzewski, but also for those intrigued by important questions of performing and composing music in the second half of the 20th century. Seeing that there is a real lack of publications on Rzewski, this volume should encourage scholarship.

Clemens Gresser

Coltrane: The Story of a Sound by Ben Ratliff. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux. \$24.00.

The House That George Built: With a Little Help from Irving, Cole, and a Crew of About Fifty by Wilfrid Sheed. New York: Random House. \$29.95.

John Coltrane cast a long shadow over Jazz, both before his death in 1967 at the age of 40, and afterwards. His overpowering influence – both as a legendarily brilliant instrumental technician, who practiced more than anybody ever had and could play anything, and as a theory-mad composer and composing performer (earlier on, of the experimental 'Giant Steps' changes and later as the supreme master of a more static, less harmonically directed, modal free jazz) – was almost more paralyzing than beneficial to his successors. The intertwining of Coltrane's musical development with, on the one hand, growing black cultural consciousness and the politics of the American civil rights movement and, on the other, his personal righteousness (when an interviewer asked him in 1966 what he would like to be in ten years he replied 'I would like to be a saint.') made him, for many of the players who followed him, an even more imposing and inescapable musical personality than he would have been otherwise. Later on in Coltrane's career, comments such as Bill Mathieu's review of *Ascension*,¹ 'This is possibly the most powerful human sound ever recorded', were not uncommon.

The veneration of Coltrane and his music was not universal. Ralph Ellison complained of his 'badly executed velocity studies',² and Philip Larkin, in an article after his death written for London's *Daily Telegraph* (but rejected by the

paper), wrote 'I can't imagine how anyone can listen to a Coltrane record for pleasure', adding that '... he did not want to entertain his audience: he wanted to lecture them, even annoy them'.³ In his wake many had the feeling that Coltrane had led the development of jazz to a dead end and had caused everything to stall. Nonetheless, Ben Ratliff writes, 'his sound was like a dust cloud: it spread out through jazz and finely infiltrated it'. It even spread further than jazz: Steve Reich cites Coltrane's later music, showing 'that you could maintain a harmony for a very long time', and 'pointing out the possibility of harmonic stasis',⁴ as having been very influential on him; this influence was also felt strongly by LaMonte Young and Terry Riley.

It is, in fact, Coltrane's *sound*, not his life or even his work as such, that Ratliff's book is about. Ratliff defines sound as '... a mystic term of art: ... a full and sensible embodiment of his artistic personality, such that it can be heard, at best, in a single note'. The two halves of his book detail respectively the development of that sound during Coltrane's life, and its pervasive influence, both before and after his death. At one point early on in the second half Ratliff discusses at some length an early article devoted to Coltrane's music by Zita Carno.⁵ He describes the article (without exactly divulging any of its actual contents):

Carno isolated technical and structural particularities, down to comparatively small strokes, rather than taking the generalist critic's approach ... She explicated him individually, as well as analyzing how he functioned within bands ... She noticed his original 'pet phrases,' and transcribed several of them ... her transcription [of Coltrane's solo on 'Blue Train'] takes up the bottom half of two pages ..."

That is exactly the sort of thing one would hope to get from Ratliff's book, but he, in fact, offers 'the generalist critic's approach ... talking about musical qualities in human terms ...' with little specific musical detail, and with no musical examples at all. No doubt he was aiming for a more general audience that probably would find detailed specific musical analysis of the music not especially useful, if not downright offputting. But his impressionist, rather than analytic, writing about the music often seems general, if not vague, and

³ Philip Larkin, *All What Jazz: A Record Diary 1961-1971* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985), quoted in Ratliff, pp. 178-179.

⁴ Steve Reich in interview with Ratliff, quoted in Ratliff, p. 145.

⁵ Zita Carno, 'The Style of Coltrane,' in *The Jazz Review*, October and November 1959, quoted in Ratliff, pp. 126-7.

¹ Bill Mathieu, *Down Beat*, June 23, 1965, quoted in Ratliff, p. 169.

² Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray, *Trading Twelves: The Selected Letters of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), quoted in Ratliff, p. 158

unspecific. The book carefully places Coltrane's career in its historic context and thoroughly and intelligently traces the history and development of Coltrane's sound, following it further out into the world beyond his life. It is useful for its discussion of Coltrane's recordings and its detailing of their history for anyone who would want a guide to try exploring them for himself.

It's hard to know what to call the repertory which is the subject of Wilfred Sheed's book. They used to be called 'Broadway songs', which conveniently ignored the fact that a sizeable number of them (even by the their most celebrated practitioners) were written not for Broadway shows but for movies (and that one of the most successful and professionally revered of their composers, Harry Warren, never wrote for the stage at all, although he had posthumous Broadway success when one of his movies became a show); nowadays they are sometimes referred to collectively as the American Songbook. Sheed prefers 'jazz songs', or, should that not seem to be the right term, 'standards', and he writes about them with a beguiling and energetic Wodehousian style which might sometimes make me think I was reading the history of Broadway songs as told by Gussie Fink-Nottle. Very early on Sheed deals with the question which is perennial for all song composers going back at least to Monteverdi: words or music, which is more important? In this case he comes down squarely and emphatically on the side of the music ('There has never been a standard without a great tune – not even a *funny* standard ... although Cole could have dashed off another two hundred choruses of 'You're the Top', he couldn't have written a second tune to save his life ... This doesn't mean the right lyric can't make all the difference. A lyricist is a musician too, one who arranges tunes for the human voice so that you can "hear" them for the first time.').⁶ Starting with the two composers who he considers indispensable to the whole project, Berlin and Gershwin ('... You can subtract any other great name from the story, and it would be basically the same story. Without Gershwin, or his godfather, Irving Berlin, it would be unrecognizably different'), Sheed surveys the repertory through discussion of the lives of its composers, more or less chronologically, dealing with Broadway, then movies, and then later theater composers. These include Arlen, Carmichael, Ellington, Kern, Porter, Rodgers ('... Rodgers would come in two parts, Rodgers and Hart and

Rodgers and Hammerstein, one of whom you probably like much better than the other ...'), Warren, Van Husen, Loesser, Lane, and Coleman; only one of the major creators considered at length, Johnny Mercer, is a wordsmith. Although not given chapters to themselves, Vernon Duke, the composer, and Yip Harburg, the lyricist, also received a fair amount of attention; on the other hand Lorenz Hart is barely ever named and Jule Styne and Leonard Bernstein are, curiously, completely absent. Since he considers the period of these 'standards' to be from 1900 to 1950, his survey does not include Stephen Sondheim. Sheed describes his book as being a 'bull session', an informal discussion with 'overtones of the tall story and the overconfident assertion'. The highly entertaining breeziness of the proceedings almost completely disguises his careful placement of these songs in their sociological and societal context and the amount of musical knowledge, expertise, and understanding, not to mention sheer professional acumen, with which the book is packed.

Rodney Lister

Maurice Duruflé: The Man and his Music by James E Frazier. University of Rochester Press (Eastman Studies in Music Series), £35.00.

This substantial study is not the first to appear on the enigmatic French composer (1902–86), who wrote some memoirs in his lifetime. James Frazier has already contributed to an anthology of portraits assembled into a book by Ronald Ebrecht entitled *The Last Impressionist* (Scarecrow Press, 2002). What the current book does, though, is to try and place Duruflé's life and work into a more comprehensive context, albeit a Francophile one, and to evaluate the composer's life, his interaction with other musicians and his relationship with the Catholic Church and the wartime government of Vichy France.

This is no easy task. Duruflé was no 'celebrity' in his lifetime. He was clearly an awkward and diffident person, to whom composing came with great difficulty. In short, a perfectionist as a musician and exponent of an organ tradition. He spent his last 25 years fighting liturgical changes brought about by Vatican II which he saw as a threat to the musical traditions of the church, and then fighting ill-health brought about by the terrible road accident he and his wife suffered in 1975. There were (and are) so many of his students and adherents who revere his memory and legacy that an association was formed after his death, but the

⁶ Although Sheed doesn't mention it, it might be worth recalling that, in general, for these songs, the practice was for the music to be written before the words.

ALEXANDER KNAIFEL



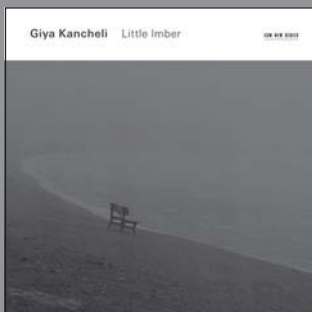
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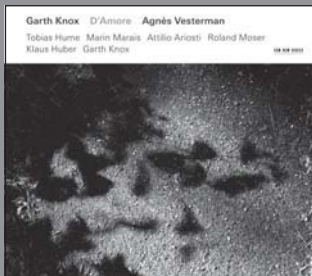
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association's lack of co-operation and input into this book (typically French, some may think) is to be regretted. There may never be another opportunity to celebrate a rare genius who has captured worldwide fame on the strength of barely a dozen compositions, of which the *Requiem* (1947) is now seen as ranking alongside Fauré's in stature. It is also perplexing, since the author has scrupulously avoided the usual tabloid errors and gaffes about the composer's personal life: the unsubstantiated innuendo or personality smear, or the suggestion of something improper without a shred of evidence.

But, although sympathetic, this is not a work of hagiography either. Mr Frazier looks at the composer's childhood and his unhappy times as a chorister at the 'maîtrise' (choir school) of Rouen Cathedral, and a shy youth's translation from a provincial background into the cosmopolitan Paris of the 1920s. Despite his brilliance as an organist, and though he gained a firm foothold at the Paris Conservatoire early on, Duruflé was right away at odds with the modernistic ethos of Stravinsky, Milhaud, Honegger and Les Six. His music was closer to Ravel and Vierne, both of whom died in 1937. His uncertain relationship with Charles Tournemire is also alluded to; but, like many other issues, left unresolved. The author offers us his personal thesis on Duruflé's role in the somewhat short-lived revival of Gregorian chant in the French church between about 1903 and the early 1960s, and concludes that its parallel with Duruflé's composing life was a happy coincidence from which music was the main beneficiary.

We are also told about the rarefied world of contested appointments to prestigious organists posts in France, with the inevitable accusations of 'match fixing', collusion and subterfuge (perhaps this is where Maigret should have been brought in). At all events Duruflé never landed top posts

at Notre Dame, nor Sainte Clothilde, but went to the lesser-known church of St Etienne du Mont where he remained for over 40 years, latterly jointly with his second wife Marie Madeleine, whom he (modestly but rightly by all accounts) regarded as a more brilliant player than himself. We read about the rebuilding of the organs there under his supervision. There is also discussion about the fact that the *Requiem* was commissioned by the Vichy regime, although completed and premièred well after the end of the War. The author asserts that Duruflé was not in any way thereby implicated by association in the regime's crimes.

Following the annulment of his first marriage, his remarriage in 1953 at the age of 51 to his organ student Marie Madeleine Chevalier (nearly 20 years his junior) led to a remarkable recitalist partnership and, with the advent of the LP era, some notable recordings, including the Poulenc Organ Concerto, which he had premièred in 1938. But Duruflé composed barely another three or four pieces, of which only the Mass *Cum Jubilo* (1966) was substantial. The 1960s were the golden age of foreign tours for the couple, especially to the USA, which helped Duruflé to escape from the unhappiness caused by the decline of church music in France after Vatican II. After a look at Duruflé's technique as an educator, the book concludes with a thumbnail character portrait and a brief account of the difficult period in the aftermath of the road accident.

There are some comprehensive tables, including much data on each work, organ specifications and discographies. In the end, however, the very considerable value of this book lies in its personal evaluation of the life and music of a man whose personality is likely to remain something of a mystery but whose music has already transcended his life.

Bret Johnson

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