

# contact

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Music. This close juxtaposition of Schnebel and the ISCM gave much food for thought, for while the work of the former can seem to hover uncomfortably between attitudes of the experimental and of the avantgarde, between process and object, between involvement and observation, these performances at least expressed with some force the dilemma of the contemporary artist (or human being, for that matter). The polished presentations of the ISCM's 'musical objects', on the other hand, put up a formal facade penetrable only by the most obvious or the strongest compositional thought.

Schnebel's *Maulwerke* ('Mouth Pieces') is an extended composition for "organs of articulation and apparatus for the reproduction of sounds and images". It is a complex work in five sections with many levels of interaction, and uses three groups of vocalists amplified and distributed through a sound system and three projection-screens placed above the groups. The choice of the vocal ensembles is interesting, bringing a new recognition of the value of 'training'. The first is a group of three professional solo singers; the second, a quartet of trained choral singers; the third, five male 'experimental' vocalists, presumably untrained in the conventional sense. On the centre screen is projected film of the mouth and body activities of the five young men, usually in close-up, often amusingly counterpointed with their live movements and sounds. On each side are two smaller screens for the projection of slides: words, phrases and score-graphics which comment on or abstract from the sound activity.

The method of composition here is more a means of directing the performer's attention to the physical processes of producing sound from the human vocal organs and of shaping these collective processes into a form communicable to an audience. Different sections therefore correspond to the different organs: lungs and diaphragm, larynx, the vocal cavity, the movements of the tongue and lips are all separately 'studied' and the results 'communicated'. The work thus has a clear didactic function: what is presented at any performance is a certain stage of the on-going process of learning for composer and performer alike and the beginnings of this process for the audience.

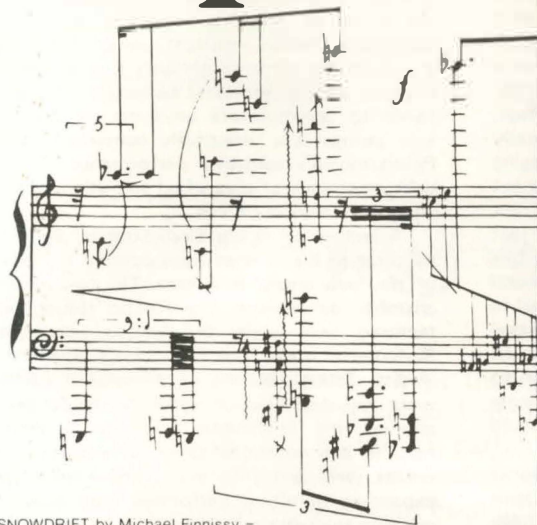
This broadly 'educational' solution to the distance between composer and performer is more obviously confirmed in Schnebel's *Schulmusik*, a collection of pieces for various ensembles performed

FESTIVAL D'AUTOMNE, PARIS/ISCM FESTIVAL 1975

RICHARD ORTON

The Festival d'Automne in Paris, spanning three months in all, contained a high concentration of events towards the end of October with three concerts of works by Dieter Schnebel immediately preceding those of the International Society for Contemporary

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with evident enjoyment by young performers from Munich and Grunstadt in the third of these concerts. The second concert consisted of a number of shorter works including the better-known *Fur Stimmen* (. . . *missa est*) and transcriptions for a spatially-dispersed vocal ensemble of the 'Contrapunctus I' from Bach's *The Art of Fugue*. But for me it is above all *Maulwerke* which suggests for the future a fruitful research collaboration between composer and performer.

The French ISCM committee's policy of four times pairing an orchestral or instrumental concert in the early evening with an electro-acoustic concert late at night might have seemed on the face of it a good idea. In practice I would have said not so, for while the orchestral and instrumental concerts always began punctually, the electro-acoustic ones never did, owing to the over-running of the earlier programmes, and after two hours listening to live musicians it is not easy to settle down to listen to loud-speakers. Not surprisingly, then, the great majority of the audience left immediately after the first concert each evening. The solution? Perhaps more combined programmes and concerts earlier in the day. At any rate, the effect here was to discriminate against the electro-acoustic composers, whose work was by no means generally of a lower standard than that of the composers of the orchestral and instrumental pieces. A curious censorship, too, in not allowing any work of the Groupe de Recherches Musicales to appear in the programmes. One would have thought this an ideal opportunity to display a representative sample of its work.

Of the 41 works I heard during this festival, I would single out very few for particular mention. The Dutch composer Ton Bruynel's *Phases* for orchestra and tape was deeply impressive: washes and waves of continuous sound which, with the composer at the potentiometers, was overbalanced in favour of the tape.<sup>1</sup> The American Robert Morris's tape *Thunders of Spring over Distant Mountains* exhibited a sure technique over too long a period of time in a work very reminiscent of *Telemusik*. Fernando Grillo, from Italy, took a rather previous neo-dada stance in his own performances of his two solo works, *Paperoles* and *Etolie*, for double bass and cello respectively: one sound or 'theatre-event' at a time, slowly and carefully prepared, with plenty of silence in between. The British composer Michael Finnissy's *Wild Flowers* for two pianos gave a splendid impression of energy and taut organisation, and his title could as easily have referred to the Labeque sisters who performed the work. The American John McGuire's *Frieze* for four pianos presented a wall of continuous patterns, the construction of which was perhaps too obvious: it was not the only work which needed a less formal presentation than it received here.

But the most exciting piece in the festival was undoubtedly the Frenchman Gerard Grisey's *Vagues, Chemins, le Souffle*, completed in 1971 when the composer was 25. It is a substantial work for two orchestras and two conductors in which space plays a prime role: the orchestras should be deployed in the form of a huge 'S' with a conductor in each hollow and the audience surrounding the orchestras. In the performance in the Theatre de la Ville, this deployment was not possible, so we heard a 'non-spatialised' version with the two orchestras side by side on stage, roughly in the form of a large lower-case 'm'. Following naturally from this interest in space is an interest in timbre and the changing timbres that result when a pitch is transferred from one instrument to another in a different location. So it becomes necessary for the composer to speak of a 'choreography' of sounds, despite the fact that no-one moves. It is altogether easier, of course, to achieve this spatial movement in electro-acoustic music, but in this case timbral changes resulting directly from spatial changes are minimal. What in part gives Grisey's work its strength is the variety of timbral subtlety which naturally follows the composer's decision to use the auditory space in this way. At the same time, I have no wish to deprecate the many other compositional elements of this intricate work, which is one of the few in the ISCM Festival that I should like to hear again.

Apart from the Finnissy already mentioned, the British works in the festival — Barry Guy's *D*, Bernard Rands' *Aum* and Denis Smalley's *Slopes* — did not quite achieve the impact they have made at performances in this country. But there can overall have been few complaints about the quality of performances; the general standard was high, with particularly impressive conducting from Michel Tabachnik.

NOTES:

<sup>1</sup>See the preceding review for further discussion of this piece (Ed.)