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Reviews and Reports

MILKO KELEMEN: OLIFANT for soloist (trombone, trombita, Bali-flutes, zurla, büchel, alphorn) and two chamber ensembles

Edition Peters No.8229, 1974 (£6.80)

MILKO KELEMEN: ABECEDARIUM for strings

Edition Peters No.8182, 1974 (£5.00)

GERHARD HOLZER: CONCERTO for trumpet and strings

Edition Peters No.8238, 1974 (£9.00)

JOSEPH SCHWANTNER: CONSORTIUM (I) for flute, clarinet, violin, viola and cello

Edition Peters No.66556, 1973 (£3.50)

KRZYSTOF MEYER: CONCERTO DA CAMERA Op.29 for oboe, percussion and strings

Edition Peters No.8325, 1974 (£8.50)

JOHN CASKEN

Anyone wishing to get to know the work of these largely unfamiliar composers will not be encouraged to do so by the extremely high cost of the scores. The only reasonably priced score (that of the Schwantner) is printed by Peters, New York, while the remaining ones are printed by Peters, Frankfurt. In terms of size, clarity of layout and presentation, Krzystof Meyer's *Concerto da Camera* is the only German-produced score which possibly warrants such a high cost. But consider that the manuscript itself was printed in Poland (the texture of the paper tells me this) and that the score would be sold there for perhaps one eighth of the price we are asked to pay. Holzer's *Concerto*, the most expensive score, is small and difficult to read (a reduction in size of the composer's own spiky manuscript). Throughout there is constant wastage of empty staves at the top and bottom of the page, and four out of the six pages of the second movement contain one staff only, for solo trumpet. A more intelligent layout and a little bit of imagination from Peters would have reduced such unnecessary wastage and, I hope, would have brought down the price. On the other hand, Kelemen's scores are at least legible (despite the pocket-sized score of *Olifant*), with sensible layouts and no wasted space.

Milko Kelemen, born in Yugoslavia in 1924, was a pupil of Messiaen and Milhaud, and after teaching in Zagreb and working on electronic music in Munich now lives in Berlin. *Olifant* was composed in 1970-71 for Vinko Globokar and, as we might expect, uses various virtuoso trombone techniques perfected by him. The use of other, less common wind instruments makes for a colourful composition, although it is difficult to tell how successful the juxtaposition of such diverse sounds as Bali-flutes and buchel are in performance. Sensibly, Kelemen makes provision for the use of substitute instruments should those specified not be available: Polish trombita can be replaced by horn, Bali-flutes by recorders, Swiss buchel by a muted trumpet (transposing the melodic line a fifth lower), the Turkish zurla by a trombone fitted with an oboe mouthpiece and the Swiss alphorn by a tuba. The two chamber ensembles (mostly wind) are placed on either side of the stage, and each has its own large percussion group (two + two players) including some less conventional instruments such as pasteboard rattle, super ball (!?), panderata brasilena and sanctus bells. On the whole the work relies heavily on sustained sounds initiated by the trombone which are transformed in some way, for example by wide vibrato, simultaneous singing and playing, rapid repetition, accel. or rit. and so on. The more fragmentary middle section — first for brass, then bells and then the Bali-flutes — provides a welcome change, and towards the end he makes interesting use of 4/4 unisons (crotchet = 144) which are gradually obscured by the returning sustained, sliding sounds of the opening.

Of *Abece-darium*, written in 1972, Kelemen says, 'Primarily it has been my aim to make such means [contemporary techniques and notation] intelligible to the younger generation of musicians and audiences, whilst retaining the artistic aspects involved'. The work consists of 26 parts (really 'moments') to each of which is designated a city or country whose first letters taken together correspond to the letters of the alphabet (the international spelling guide). The conductor states aloud the letters he wishes to play to make up whole sections (e.g. Amsterdam, Baltimore, Roma etc.), cutting from one letter to another and leaving letters out. Student string players should gain a lot from playing this work: it is not difficult and parts are particularly memorable. As a piece of functional educational music it is both interesting and creative.

Gerhard Holzer's four-movement *Concerto* is memorable if only for its unimaginative trumpet writing, its conventional rhythmic articulation, banal 'modern effects' and rather easy technical devices such as 'follow-my-leader' canons.

Joseph Schwantner's *Consortium (I)* was written in 1970 for Richard Pittman and the Boston Musica Viva. The score is bold and

large, but often difficult to read due to unnecessary cluttering with over-explained proportional divisions and the duplication in the score of the post-Pendereckian symbols which have already been explained in the preface. The beams are rather too thick and tend to draw one's attention away from the notes. Dotted lines may help to make the score more visually exciting but most of them really only get in the way. Schwantner makes use both of metred and proportional notation and occasionally combines them (e.g. at bar 84): 'play notes by eye according to the placement of the notes within the measure' (instruction to the strings). At the same time he asks flute and clarinet to play and count complex divisions of the bar, yet the differences between the two styles will in this case be inaudible. Bar 28 is notated exactly, but is virtually impossible to play without the performers rewriting their parts: both flute and clarinet are attached to the same beam and the whole 'bar' has the appearance of difficult, fast piano writing. And yet when the music moves away from the frantic cadenza-like writing, there are sensitive but far too infrequent moments of repose.

Krzystof Meyer was born in Cracow in 1943 and studied in the late 60s with Nadia Boulanger. The *Concerto da Camera*, Op.29 was written in 1972 for Lothar Faber and was awarded second prize at the 1972 Artur Malawski Competition in Cracow. Meyer calls this a chamber concerto but the forces employed are really quite large: a good-sized percussion section (four players) and 40 strings (20.8.8.4.). Unlike Schwantner's piece, Meyer's score is quite uncluttered: he almost goes to the opposite extreme, giving only a minimum of dynamic markings, but by so doing allows the music to play itself. Similarly, in the first part of the work, where the oboe has predominantly long notes and decorative flourishes, the strings and percussion are metred, whereas the oboe is asked to synchronise only at specific points. The shape of this work is unpretentious and clear: two sections, each with its own climax and separated by a cadenza for the oboe. The block sounds of the first section are changed in the second in favour of a much more varied texture, and here Meyer seems to have integrated the three forces rather well. The percussion climax at the end of the first section is possibly a little incongruous in the light of what has gone before: it is more outre and influenced perhaps by Serocki's treatment of percussion. The oboe writing explores the full range of the instrument (played normally without combined tones) and makes particularly effective use of two-part writing, where the two levels are clearly differentiated by large intervals, the lower level moving by leaps and the upper by step. This work, then, is a valuable addition to the list of contemporary compositions for oboe and orchestra, and, despite the taxing nature of much of the music, Meyer never allows himself to indulge in idiosyncratic obscurantism.