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**ISCM WORLD MUSIC DAYS, STOCKHOLM AND  
HELSINKI**  
MAY 9-14, 1978

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The second part of the 1978 ISCM Festival, organised jointly by the Swedish and Finnish sections, took place between May 9 and 14 in Helsinki. There is a strange dislocation of the calendar in that part of the world: a combination of Arctic winds and summer light blended well

with six days of contemporary music in its own seasonal limbo. The concerts had their moments of bleakness, but also high points of charm and interest. There was certainly no all-embracing sense of purpose or identity in the programme, unlike the ISCM festivals of the 50s and 60s which seemed at times to be expressing a common theology. Instead there was an intriguing variety of style and approach, of invention and anachronism, a quiet retreat into the ear and intuition, and an almost liberating uncertainty.

In this situation common threads of quite a different kind emerge. One of these trends, for example, was what one might call a 'back to roots' movement: composers seeking resources deep in their own culture or experience. A memorable work of this type was *Hirmos* by the Greek composer Michael Adamis. The resource in this case was Byzantine music. The text is drawn from John Damascene, and the pitch system is derived from the tetrachords and microtonal formulae of the Byzantine tradition. Adamis's powerful melodic invention, expressed in simple monophony and then woven into clusters of close polyphony, is a rare example of a genuinely contemporary inspiration within an ancient form. Jacob Gilboa's *Bedu* on the other hand, was an attempt to frame and express a very personal musical experience. The origin of the work was Gilboa's memory of hearing the lonely and haunting call of the Bedouin across the Jordan valley. The call itself, with its sinuous line and microtonal inflexions, transcribes beautifully for unison strings, but the interruption of expressionist piano writing is a rude linguistic shock. Similarly organum embellishment of the melody and the literal quotation of Bedouin drum rhythms seem to shoot off into space either side of the experience the composer wishes to communicate. Nevertheless this is in many ways a courageous and deeply-felt work.

Hifumi Shimoyama's *Breath* for soprano, percussion and piano was also founded on mixed metaphors. The marriage of traditional Japanese music and the European avantgarde is now a familiar one, but once again the expressionist rhetoric of the instrumental writing seemed to detract from the fascinating linguistic elements, delicate nasal quality and grace of the vocal line. The Canadian composer Donald Steven's *Images* for electric flute, electric piano, electric bass and percussion represented a return to roots of a different kind. Steven's first musical experience was in the field of popular music, and this set of seven miniatures is reminiscent of the sonority and structure of more abstract tendencies in rock music of the late 60s. It is as if the often formless and cheap-sounding surface of this music were tightened up and injected with a clearer and fresher timbre. Only the fifth section disappointed, with a seemingly gratuitous pointillism. Rudolf Maros's *Sirato* was an exercise in eloquence and simplicity. One imagines that Kodály and Bartók had the last word for some time to come in the use of Hungarian folk material in contemporary music. Maros's work, however, convincingly transposes the idea one step further into the context of a more contemporary language, and is a gentle assertion that there is still more to say.

Classicism is a recurrent theme in the 20th century. It is surprising, however, to find a composer like the Frenchman François-Bernard Mâche abandoning the rich imagery and vitality of his tape works (the earlier pieces are now classics in their own right) for an austere and 'absolute' instrumental form. His Octet, Op. 35 is an impressive work, but it is creatively rather bleak, over-distilled, born of a self-conscious restraint rather than the usual exuberance of Mâche's earlier output. The rhythmic structure is mid-way between the motoric repetitions of the composer's later instrumental works and a classical symmetry. The pitch structure is disconcerting: traditionally shaped polyphonic lines are cast adrift on a sea of microtonality. The result is aural dislexia: side-stepping movement reads as Wagner, suspensions and sequences as out-of-tune Corelli. The work remains, however, a linguistically interesting and quite intriguing milestone in the work of this important and underrated composer.

Another surprising stylistic turn was evident in Zygmunt Krauze's Piano Concerto. Up to the composition of this work, Krauze's technique has been dominated by the so-called 'unistic' philosophy, or principle of no dramatic contrast; folk music has also played an important role for him in the articulation of this principle. The Piano Concerto, however, gives the impression of being a purely intuitive

and spontaneous exploration of a number of ideas which the composer found aurally interesting, cast in a form which has a certain kinship with the Romantic concerto. The piano writing has some links with the 19th century: the opening material seems almost like an extension of Chopinesque ornamentation, driven forward with marcato articulation and a new dynamic pianism.

The Krauze work formed part of one of the two orchestral concerts in Helsinki. It was noticeable that more radical approaches to the orchestra were in general less successful than more traditionally scored works. The Iranian composer Iraj Schimi's *Topo Ostinato* began promisingly with incisive brass writing and developed into an hilarious game of passing percussion instruments around the orchestra. But somehow the sense of the theatrical timing was missing. The uncompromising nature of the material and the composer's modest objective of leading the ear with visual stimuli were lost in a failure to engage the listener along the simplest dimensions of time and action. Dieter Kaufmann's *Concerto 7* is a strong work for violin and orchestra. It must be by far the most romantic-sounding of this Austrian composer's output, but the solo part contains real Bartókian fire and the orchestral writing, which is formed from a series of mobiles, has a good full sound, clarity and surprise.

Two Scandinavian works in the orchestral concerts showed the continuing influence of the Polish school in larger instrumental forms. The Dane Bent Lorentzen's *Tide* presented a drive towards a single climax, much in the manner of Lutosławski's second movements but with more detail and development within individual parts. The Norwegian Arne Nordheim's *Spur* for accordion and orchestra is based on a received vocabulary of clusters and sound blocks, but despite a rambling form, the work is consistently absorbing, and the writing for solo accordion, masterfully played by Mogens Ellegaard, is quite a revelation.

One of the most impressive large-scale works, however, was Joji Yuasa's *Time of Orchestral Time*, a sharp piece of orchestral scoring with an interesting transition from a stable, static architecture to a situation of flow and movement. This work seems to represent a significant change in this Japanese composer's technique. In contrast to the timbre-dominated world of earlier works like *Chronoplastic*, a far more harmonically-inclined ear was noticeable. Heinz Holliger's *Atembogen* was also a memorable high point. The sound material of the work contains a number of unusual devices, including 'white noise' effects of breathing and page turning, which take their place in a sound image of subtlety and imagination. The composition as a whole, however, remains somehow hidden and withdrawn. Understatement at times gives way to no statement. But perhaps this is what Holliger wanted.

The weakness in some of the more radical orchestral music reflected a general pattern: the more experimental works in this year's programmes tended to be disappointing. The 'Intermedia and Music Theatre' concert was a disturbing study in the isolated and egocentric world some new art has come to inhabit. *Penetrations VII* by the Argentinian Alcides Lanza, usually an interesting composer, suffered by attempting to tackle a problem beyond its own creative capacity. The work, which is for vocal solo and tape, is intended to reveal in an instant all the suffering of mankind. It begins well with an introduction which has certain magic. The culmination of the piece, however, is a bout of hysteria from the soloist, which seems a sadly primitive resolution of the central crisis, and this so many centuries after Sophocles.

The same concert featured Ulrike Trüstedt's *Synchrone Klänge aus dem Rauschen*, one of a series of works exploring technology in a way which seems to connect with this West German composer's background in fine art. This piece, which includes holograms and various sound-action systems, is really a demonstration rather than a composition, and herein lies a problem. Marshall McLuhan, writing in the 60s, was dangerously wrong: the medium is not the message. Trüstedt's work deserves attention because it is helping to communicate a number of possibilities, but it in no way shapes or even extends musical experience. This is the crux of a general misapprehension which inhibits work in this important and exciting field, and could easily lead to an early creative bankruptcy.

In contrast the chamber music concerts contained some

interesting material. Theo Loevendie's *Six Turkish Folk Poems* with its instrumental brilliance and lively harmonic ear, was clear confirmation of the important contribution this Dutch jazz musician has to make to new music. The American Marc-Antonio Consoli's *Music for Chambers* displaced instrumental groups in three different rooms. Despite the complexity of texture there was a clear impression of overall control of the experience, with a satisfying balance of blend and counterpoint between the ensembles. Jukka Tiensuu's *Sinistro* is modest in scale, being scored for a duet of accordion and guitar, but is impressive for its ascetic purity and the synthesis of intuitive and formal approaches to composition which this intelligent and inventive Finnish composer achieves. The chamber music concert given by the Stockholm Percussion Ensemble had a particularly strong programme, with works by Torstensson, Zbigniew Rudzinski, Matsunaga, Kobashi and Ptaszyńska; I saw the scores but was unable to hear the performances.

The British music in the programme was on the whole well received. Jennifer Fowler's *Voice of the Shades* is a work of lyrical and sustained simplicity. Each note is carefully felt and sensitively placed in an arch-shaped form which is both relaxed and spacious. Jonty Harrison's *Q for Five* is a tightly composed work which presents a single, clear musical image to the audience. It is a very accomplished exercise in the continuous development and reworking of a limited number of melodic and harmonic ideas and leaves a strong, unambiguous impression in the ear. It was a pity that administrative problems prevented Michael Finnissy's *Tsuru Kame* from being performed. It is an important statement from a composer who really understands music-theatre and would have helped to clarify the rather confused picture of this medium which the festival presented.

In the mirror on the wall, however, we look for what we want to see. If there is something we prefer not to see, we can always pretend it is not there, and the ISCM is rather like that. It is a reflection of contemporary music which may seem far from ideal and for some is unacceptable. But in the last analysis it represents a certain reality about new music, with its strengths and its frustrating weaknesses, which it is important to be able to assess and also necessary to acknowledge.