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Composer Monographs in German

Musik-Konzepte: Die Reihe über Komponisten, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik)

1/2 *Claude Debussy* (December 1977)

4 *Alban Berg: Kammermusik I* (April 1978)

Sonderband *John Cage* (April 1978)

6 *Edgard Varèse: Rückblick auf die Zukunft* (November 1978)

7 *Leoš Janáček* (January 1979)

9 *Alban Berg: Kammermusik II* (July 1979)

11 *Erik Satie* (January 1980)

16 *Dieter Schnebel* (September 1980)

Sonderband *Arnold Schönberg* (November 1980)

19 *Karlheinz Stockhausen . . . wie die Zeit verging . . .* (May 1981)

20 *Luigi Nono* (July 1981)

22 *Béla Bartók* (November 1981)

Musik-Konzepte is a series of studies on single composers, ranging from Bach to Bartók and Verdi to Varèse. Under the editorship of Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, each issue (six are scheduled to appear annually) consists of essays by specialists who have recent discoveries or analysis to make known, together with texts by the subject of the volume himself where relevant. It appears, from the rather odd collection of composers to whom the first 24 issues have been devoted, that the exposure of new material is the chief *raison d'être* of the series; given this emphasis on the archival approach, it is most heartening to find that more than half the volumes that have so far appeared take 20th-century composers as their subjects.

The texts are entirely in German, sometimes of a highly convoluted and difficult kind; in cases where material has been translated into German from previously published English versions, readers may be best advised to seek out the original publications. There are, however, great advantages in having collected together in single-composer volumes the best and most detailed of recent research. No issue is without special interest: the Debussy number pays welcome attention to the unfinished opera *La chute de la maison Usher* and the little-known ballet *Khamma*; that on Cage contains valuable photographic documentation; Cage himself is a principal contributor on Satie; and the Varèse volume contains a most useful collection of the composer's writings. No reviewer could hope to do justice to such a wide range of excellent material, so I shall concentrate here on the numbers that deal with Nono and Berg, which I found particularly fascinating.

Most of the contributors to the Nono issue (no.20) try to come to terms with the string quartet *Fragmente—Stille, an Diotima*, which so surprised the audience when it was given its first performance in Bonn in 1980. Hubert Stuppner ('Luigi Nono oder Die Manifestation des Absoluten als Reaktion einer gesellschaftlich betroffenen Ichs', p.83) attempts to trace a connected line through Nono's output that will account for the composer's several changes of direction: in the total serialism of Nono's early Darmstadt period, in the total Marxism of his second,

political phase, and in the no less radical withdrawal of the late seventies, which he describes as 'narcissistic', Stuppner sees a development which has at last reached its ultimate goal. For 15 years, from *Intolleranza* (1960) to *Al gran sole carico d'amore* (1975), anger and indignation were the dominant characteristics of Nono's music: he seems to have felt incapable of thinking of beauty in the face of all the suffering and injustice with which he found himself surrounded. But in *Al gran sole* he quoted, significantly, the statement of Che Guevara that there is no contradiction between beauty and revolution, and his very next work, *Sofferte onde serene* (1976) for piano and tape, bears out Guevara's words. For Stuppner, however, the change in Nono, far from being deliberate, was brought about by his failure to communicate with the masses; what looks like resignation is, in reality, a home-coming. Years of frustration have come to an end and old longings are at last being fulfilled; Stuppner speaks of 'a sleepy world, in which the composer indulges in complacent loneliness'.

Dieter Schnebel's reaction is just the reverse ('Gruss an Luigi Nono', p.80). Having been converted instantaneously by Nono's early serial music, he was very much disappointed by the later, politically committed compositions; the quartet is, for him, the work of a great composer who, though no longer young, has once more chosen a new direction.

This new direction is also the subject chosen by Luigi Pestalozza ('Ausgangspunkt Nono (nach dem "Quartett")', p.3), who traces its causes back to their early beginnings, when spiritual introspection, and the concepts of the fragment, disintegration, and the 'moment' were already present. He too sees the 'overwhelming commitment' of the later years as something that has now been superseded, and in confirmation of this he quotes from an interview that Nono gave to the Italian Communist paper *Unità* in May 1981; in speaking of the first performance at the Maggio Fiorentino of *Das atmende Klarsein* (1980-81; for bass flute, 18 solo voices, and live electronics) Nono made it clear that he himself considered his past a closed chapter.

Heinz-Klaus Metzger, whose 'Wendepunkt Quartett' (p.93) is the last item in this volume, also quotes Nono, but this time the composer makes no confession about a change of heart or direction. In a conversation with Metzger, Nono attributes what others regard as a personal and musical transformation to his intensive concern with Judaism, particularly that of Eastern Europe under Nazi rule. The 'fragments' of the title of the quartet are excerpts from verses by Hölderlin; though written in the score they are not to be heard but to be 'sung' by the players in their minds as they perform the music. This idea resembles the ancient Jewish tradition of practising sacred texts by humming them inaudibly to oneself, and it throws an interesting light on Nono's conception of the function of texts (Pestalozza examines this aspect of the work with great insight). *Fragmente* is marked by a number of extended silences—Nono tends to share Webern's attitude to silence and reject that of Cage, though Metzger claims that he is beginning to be able to reconcile the two. The pitches of the quartet are derived from the *scala enigmatica* of the first of Verdi's *Quattro pezzi sacre*, the *Ave Maria*, which Nono uses not only as compositional material but also as a model of thought, 'a paradigm of fragmentary thinking in time'.

Metzger, who, as the title of his essay indicates, regards *Fragmente* as something of a new starting-

point, tries to reconcile his own views with Nono's denial of a change of direction; he characterises Nono's recent development as a 'transformation into his own opposite while maintaining and even building up his identity'. Nono's turning away from powerful and occasionally violent music of a committedly collective character to an austere chamber work is, according to Metzger, evidence of a private as well as a political change: 'with all its subtlety [this piece] is, world-shattering'. But having expressed this opinion, Metzger allows Nono to contradict it. At a symposium on Schumann in December 1980 Nono declared: 'I have not changed. The delicate and private aspect has also its political and collective side. Therefore my string quartet is not the expression of a new, retrospective line of thought, but of the present stage in my experiments: my aim is to achieve the most rebellious pronouncement with the smallest means.'—an apposite comment for an occasion designed to investigate the work of the composer who 'turned his great sorrows into small songs'.

Musik-Konzepte no.4 was the first of two Alban Berg issues. Except for a bibliography and a discography by Rainer Riehn, the volume has only two contributors: Constantin Floros and George Perle. 'Das esoterische Programm der *Lyrischen Suite* von Alban Berg' by Constantin Floros is the reprint of an article that first appeared in the *Hamburger Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft* in 1975. The author explains how he came to suspect the existence of a programme governing the *Lyrical Suite*, and how his method of investigation led him to its uncovering. Berg, who had previously been regarded as a composer of 'absolute music', turns out to have based the *Lyrical Suite* on a detailed programme, and Floros suggests that from now on the work cannot be viewed other than in an autobiographical context.

'Das geheime Programm der *Lyrischen Suite*' by George Perle is a translation of an article published in 1977 in the newsletter of the International Alban Berg Society and in the *Musical Times*. In it Perle announces his find of a pocket score of the *Lyrical Suite* containing numerous annotations in the composer's own hand. The score was a secret present to Hanna Fuchs, sister of Franz Werfel and wife of a wealthy Prague industrialist; Berg's commentary not only reveals the work's programme but decodes a number of musical messages which declare his love for Hanna. Perle's discovery is obviously of primary importance and it has led to an entirely new approach to Berg's life and oeuvre.

Far from diminishing Floros's achievement in detection, Perle's revelation seems only to make it the more impressive. But Floros apparently did not see things in this light, and a bitter controversy ensued between the two scholars; this was pursued in the pages of a second *Musik-Konzepte* volume (no.9), in which Metzger and Riehn also included the evidence of an earlier witness, Theodor Adorno. It seems that Adorno knew from the very beginning about the programme of the *Lyrical Suite*, but considered himself bound to silence by his friendship and respect for Berg. At his death in 1969, however, there was found a collection of his writings from 1955 headed 'Notes about Alban Berg'. From these it is clear that even the annotated score of the *Lyrical Suite* does not tell the whole story, and that parts of the hidden meaning of the work may never be known. It is possible that some of the coded messages concern not only Hanna Fuchs but Helene Berg, there being some confusion owing to the identity of their initials.

In the same issue Metzger and Riehn reprint the text

of Berg's address to Schoenberg on the occasion of his 50th birthday. Berg greets his teacher with the prediction that through him the supremacy of German music will be guaranteed for the next 50 years—a rather mealy-mouthed compliment considering that Schoenberg himself, only two years earlier, had told Josef Rufer about 'a discovery that will assure the supremacy of German music for the next hundred years'.

Musik-Konzepte is not a series for the faint-hearted or slapdash. It is difficult to read, the subject matter is demanding, and the answers are never cut and dried. But to those who are prepared to make the effort of concentration and thought it will offer ample rewards in the way of insight and understanding.

Music Journal

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Essays

Richard Dyer, *Richard Dyer: A Study in the Cultural History of the Film Star*. London: Routledge, 1979. Pp. 200. £12.50.

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