
Letters to the Editor

From Guy Capuzzo

Antony Bye's discussion of Elliott Carter's *Gra* ('Carter's "Classic" Modernism', *Tempo* 189 (June 1994) raises interesting issues, two of which I wish to comment on.

The first issue concerns Bye's analytic remarks on the piece. Bald statements such as '[S]ince *Gra* is not distinguished by thematic recurrences, pc-set recurrences are not reinforced by foreground restatements distinguished by shape' (p.4), do not hold up to scrutiny when we focus on the melodic contours – and their transformations – heard throughout the piece.

Compare for instance the first six notes of m.14, <A5, E5, D#5, D5, F#5, A#5>, with <D5, F#5, A#5, D#6, E5, A4> of mm.32-33 (middle C = C4). These realizations of the unique all-trichord hexachord, [012478], one of Carter's favoured set-classes, are identical in pitch-class content, and share four pitches (D5, D#5, E5, A#5). The <D5, F#5, A#5> which ends the first hexachord begins the second, and the contours of the two hexachords are the inverse of one another: <421035> inverts to <134520> (lowest pitch = 0, highest pitch = 5). Further, the '3 notes up, 3 notes down' profile swapped between the two contours is easy to hear, and plays an important motivic role in the piece. Similar instances involving the interaction of contour and pitch-class content abound throughout the work. As the ever-burgeoning literature on contour demonstrates, the notion of 'recurrence' and 'shape' (Bye's terms) advanced here is consonant with a good amount of this century's concert music.

The second issue concerns the end to which Bye puts his analytic means. Bye intends to demonstrate that Carter's 'fundamental musical processes' (p.2) in *Gra* and other recent works are not 'classical'. But Bye's consideration of what 'classical' is, and the criteria he uses to argue his point, are stifling. His views on the opening measures of *Gra* are representative. Bye finds the first three presentation of set-class [0146], which exhaust the three possible partitions of this set-class into two pairs of notes – interval-classes 3 + 6 in m.1, then interval-classes 5 + 4, followed by 1 + 2 – 'an agent of disruption – hardly a "classical" strategy' (pp.4-5). Yet these opening measures are fully emblematic of a vital strain of

musical life in the classical period – the ideal of variety within unity. Compositions and treatises of the 1750s by C.P.E. Bach, Riepel, and Kirnberger, as well as by Mattheson in 1725 and 1739, document the role of permutation (ars combinatoria) in 18th-century theory and practice; contemporary writers including Nola Reed Knouse, Joel Lester, and Leonard Ratner assess its significance.

Permutation and all-partition presentation maximize the generation of varied material from a single source. By presenting [0146] in all of its dyadic partitions, Carter provides the listener not with disruption, but rather with melodic variety within harmonic unity – a fitting emblem for much of Carter's recent oeuvre. David Schiff is one of many musicians who has commented on Carter's usage of [0146] and [012478] in just this way, characterizing the latter as 'always the same and yet always changing, maximally varied yet also maximally coherent'. Schiff's description is perfectly consonant with the use of both [012478] and [0146] in *Gra*.

[012478] is the only hexachord which contains all twelve trichords as subsets, and the [0146]/[0137] pair are the only tetrachords which contain each of the six interval-classes as subsets. Carter's compositional realizations of these unique set-classes create a variety within unity which is aurally immediate, just the reverse of Bye's disturbing descriptions of *Gra* as a composition unified only at a 'background, subliminal level' (p.4), whose 'scarcity' of thematic correspondences 'emphasizes the overall sense of randomness' (p.3), whose frequent use of [012478]'s tetrachordal subsets 'decreases coherence sharply' (p.4).

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From Robert Matthew-Walker

Mark Doran's impressively convincing musical solution to the hitherto unsolved puzzle of Vaughan Williams's Ninth Symphony and the *St Matthew Passion* in *Tempo* 202 has prompted me to raise another point in connexion with this neglected masterpiece.

This concerns the Symphony's première under

Sargent, on 2 April 1958, which – when it is ever referred to nowadays – seems to be condemned as having been a poor performance under a conductor who evidently did not understand the work.

However, the BBC possesses a recording of the broadcast of this première, which has been re-broadcast in the past 18 months. This re-hearing of a performance which has come to be dismissed suggests that, at very least, the first three movements in this première were exceptionally well interpreted by Sargent: only in the last movement, surely taken too quickly, would one agree with those who condemned him. I was present at this première, and have retained my original impression that in this work RVW was moving into a new creative phase which he sadly

did not live to pursue in successive works – although it would be fascinating to hear the Cello Concerto, which was completed by him in draft.

My original impressions of this Symphony have been borne out over the years, and it was refreshing to be reminded of the first time I heard it, under Sargent – whose talk on the Symphony in the BBC's *Music Magazine* the preceding Sunday, i.e. before the work was heard, spoke of it as being 'great music'. Perhaps it was the work's first reviewers, rather than the conductor, who failed to grasp the Symphony's originality and importance.

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News Section

Composers

JOHN ADAMS. *Century Rolls* (European première)—18 April/Amsterdam, Concertgebouw/Emanuel Ax (pno), Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra c. composer.

THOMAS ADÉS. ...*But All Shall Be Well* (German première)—17 January/Berlin-Dahlem/Radio SO Berlin c. Stefan Asbury. *Concerto Conciso* (German première)—16 February/Frankfurt/Ensemble Modern c. composer; (US première)—26 April/New York/NYPO c. composer. *Catch* (US première)—16 February/New York/NY Music Ensemble c. Chris Fincki.

JULIAN ANDERSON. *The Crazy Moon* (German première)—17 January/Berlin-Dahlem/Radio SO Berlin c. Stefan Asbury.

SIMON BAINBRIDGE. *3 Pieces for Orchestra* (première)—7 February/Bristol/Brunel Ensemble c. Christophe Austin.

GERALD BARRY. *Hard D* (US première)—8 April/John Hopkins University/Peabody Wind Ensemble.

GEORGE BENJAMIN. *Viola, viola* (Italian première)—4 April/Milan. *Sometime Voices* (French première)—28 April/Paris, Théâtre des Champs Elysées/Hallé Orchestra and Chorus c. Kent Nagano.

HARRISON BIRTWISTLE. *Harrison's Clocks* (première—19 April/Manchester, Bridgewater Hall, ISCM World Music Days/Joanna McGregor (pno).

GEOFFREY BURGON. *Fantasia on R.E.X.* (première—14 February/Santa Barbara, California/Santa Barbara SO.

DIANA BURRELL. *Christo Paremus Cantica* (première)—2 May/London, Holy Trinity, Sloane Street/Allegri Singers c. Michael Nicholas. *Bronze* (première)—20 June/Bristol/Brunel Ensemble c. Christopher Austin. Burrell is composing a song-cycle on Danish texts for soprano, cor anglais and orchestra and a work for the New Zealand String Quartet.

ELLIOTT CARTER. *Symphonia* (première of complete trilogy)—25 April/Manchester. ISCM New Music Days/BBC Symphony Orchestra c. Oliver Knussen. *Luimen* (première—31 March/Amsterdam, Paradiso/Nieuw Ensemble c. Ed Spanjaard. Carter, who celebrates his 90th birthday this year, is writing a Piano Quintet for Ursula Oppens and the Arditti Quartet, and has begun a one-act comic opera, *What Next?*, to a libretto by Paul Griffiths, for Daniel Barenboim and the Komische Oper, Berlin.

RICHARD CAUSTON. *A Shaft of Sunlight Reaches Mansion House Station* (première)—26 February/London, Imperial College/Sinfonia 21 c. Martyn Brabbins.

JAMES DILLON. *Book of Elements* (UK première)—1 June/London, Queen Elizabeth Hall/Roger Woodward.

FRANCO DONATONI. *Holly* (première)—11 February/Manson Ensemble c. Simone Fontanelli. *In Cauda III* (UK première)—13 February/Royal Academy of Music SO c. Simon Romanos. Both in London, at RAM.

GOTTFRIED VON EINEM (d.1996). *Luzifers Lächeln* (première)—4 February/Vienna Kammeroper/prod. Koppinger, orchestra c. Peter Keuschning.

EDWARD ELGAR (d.1934)/ANTHONY PAYNE. *Symphony No.3* (public première)—15 February/London, Royal Festival Hall/BBC Symphony Orchestra c. Andrew Davis.

BRIAN FERNEYHOUGH. *Flurries* for six players (première)—10 February/San Diego/Sor Ensemble dir. Steve Schick. *Unsichtbare Farben* for solo violin (première)—Irvine Arditti (vln).

MICHAEL FINNISSY. *Recent Britain (A New Yahoosalem)* (première)—25 January/London, BBC Broadcasting House/Apartment House. *Alkan-Paganini: An Imaginary Portrait* (première)—9 May/Oxford Contemporary Music Festival/Nicholas Hodges (pno).