

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

from ERIC WALTER WHITE

When I drafted my article on Britten and the Theatre for the December 1973 issue of *TEMPO*, I realised that much of what I wrote was approximate, and that more material was likely to emerge in the future. Indeed, since my article appeared, new information has come to light about *The Ascent of F.6* and *Am Stram Gram*, which I should like to bring to your readers' attention.

(1) *The Ascent of F.6*. The composer's ink manuscript score has survived and is in the possession of Boosey & Hawkes. This is identical with (B), the facsimile copy, as described in my article, except that it contains the missing no. VII, Gunn's Song, which is an eight-bar setting in recitative style of 'Some have tennis elbow and some have housemaid's knee' (Act II Sc 3). This means that the chorus 'Let the eye of the traveller consider this country and weep' (Act II Sc 5) from the (A) score was probably discarded at an early stage and did not belong to the final version. One other point about the instrumentation—a ukulele is prescribed in Gunn's first song (no. III).

(2) *Am Stram Gram*. When Britten's setting of the song in André Roussin's *Am Stram Gram* was reproduced, it was thought that in the absence of any specific attribution the words might have been a French nursery-rhyme jingle. It appears, however, that this lyric was written by Tony Mayer, the former cultural attaché at the French Embassy in London, and that the nursery-rhyme element is confined to the words '*Am stram gram, bourré bourré ratatram, am stram gram . . .*' I would like to make full, though belated, acknowledgement to M. Mayer.

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from MICHAEL GRAUBART

ROBIN MACONIE (*TEMPO* 107, December 1973) is—not surprisingly!—'needled' by the tantalizing glimpse, on a plate of Varèse's workbench at the time of his death, of a scrap of manuscript apparently bearing a numbered note-row. I, too, have for long been needled by a closely related matter (which, to my regret, I have not yet followed up with more extensive analyses): the opening of *Octandre*.

In my diagram, repetitions of notes heard already are in black and are connected by beams if they form exact, or nearly exact, row-segments. The two pairs of encircled notes are the melodically stressed ones; if the 'row' is numbered chromatically downwards from G $\flat$  (as in my diagram), these two pairs of stressed notes are symmetrical: 3 and 4, 10 and 9.

The structure combines classical motivic procedures with a quasi-serial use, first of the tetrachords of the descending chromatic scale (the third being incomplete and in retrograde); then of motifs containing intervals other than the semitone which have been separated out by means of different registers or (as with the first restatement of the initial tetrachord, which overlaps notes 11 and 10) by a reversal of direction; and finally of single intervals—notably the minor sixth (*b*), which appears twice; at the entry of the clarinet and at the end of the melody, and which inverts the major third which, melodically (F – A) and by implication harmonically (bass B – oboe D $\sharp$ ), is of central significance.

The gradual exploration of the chromatic space, interspersed with references back, is paralleled by a similar growth of actual and implied intervals. But the most remarkable feature is the anticipation of Princetonian ideas about 'set-closure': the missing G from the third tetrachord remains on the missing list until it arrives, in every way climactically, at the end of the melody, where its register ensures that one becomes aware of the further fact that (by reflection in the opening G $\flat$ ) it forms a complementary minor ninth to the striking initial gesture.

The relevance of these procedures—and actual notes—to the whole piece can be seen especially clearly at the beginnings and ends of the three movements.

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