

---

## Letters to the Editor

---

From Paul Griffiths

Nicolas Hodges's admirable and courageous essay on Bill Hopkins in *Tempo 186* must surely now meet with action, to answer the implicit and explicit pleas he makes to performers and publishers. Such a presentation cannot be ignored. The music cannot be ignored.

What Mr Hodges calls his 'preliminary approach' is, of course, preliminary only in being unprecedented. Those of us who have known the music for many years must feel, at this breaking of the silence, both gratitude and admonition. For the moment, straight in response to Mr Hodges's work, I would want to add only that I wonder about his optimistic view of the last few years. The orchestration of Debussy's *Lindaraja* must have been done before the move to Birmingham, since I remember Bill showing it to me when I first visited him on the Isle of Man, early in 1975. So *En attendant* was the only musical project he accomplished subsequently, and that 'strange piece', as Mr Hodges justly calls it, dated back to a project of 1971. It perhaps should also be said, lest the political concerns of the Chopwell period seem wholly aberrant, that Nono was one of the composers in whom Hopkins found some trace or semblance of himself.

In that respect, your editorial remark about Hopkins's 'penetrating and sympathetic insights into composers as different from himself as Bax, Fauré, Stravinsky and Shostakovich', though true in its judgement, may need some qualification. Hopkins had little time – at least, as I understood him – for any view of music in terms of schools and trends, and could find himself close on deep levels of creative urgency to composers 'different from himself' in matters of style and practice. One could add other and equally surprising names to your list (surprising, that is, to any usual view of musical history), including those of Honegger, Dukas, Franck, Schumann and Birtwistle. Then there is the fact that Hopkins's most ambitious work of criticism, intended as a model of phenomenological analysis, was devoted to a Schubert song. (His interest in Thelonious Monk perhaps fits an easier pattern of his musical mind.) Also – and while acknowledging that his criticism was, as Mr Hodges states, 'essentially a bread-winning activity' – I think it would have

been morally impossible for him to have published, and maybe even to have found, 'penetrating and sympathetic insights' into music that had no relevance to his own. His music was to be all of him. And therefore any piece of criticism – perhaps even translation, and certainly any letter – came from its world.

I think there is evidence of that in the paragraphs on the Barraqué Sonata you reprint. Hopkins wrote, as he composed, *ex cathedra*, with an authority whose guarantors were his truthfulness and his removal of all mental scenery from the stage. There were no positions to be defended, no traditions to be honoured, no dreams or desires to be expressed, only facts to be stated.

Your comment about how he might have reacted to the other contents of *Tempo 186* is also – to use one of his favourite words – suggestive (I think the innuendo of conceiving the brain as a sexual organ was intended). One time when I visited him in Birmingham, he remarked positively on a Ferneyhough piece he had heard on the radio: it was just a brief comment, but he never said anything idly. If, then, there was some upturn in his creative fortunes in Newcastle, as Mr Hodges indicates (and nobody has studied the material more thoroughly) – if, that is, there was that 'fresh burst of energy' during the last eighteen months of Hopkins's life – then the stimulus may have come not only from financial security, new surroundings and revived identification with the working-class north (the reasons Mr Hodges very plausibly puts forward), but also from these unexpected signs that, after all, the muse had not gone permanently silent.

*The Old Bakery*  
*Lower Heyford*  
*OX6 3NS*

---

(Nicolas Hodges would welcome any communication from those who met or knew Bill Hopkins, however briefly, and from anyone with materials relating to him and his work (especially letters). A collection of interviews and other materials is being assembled for deposit at the Cambridge University Library. Please contact Nicolas Hodges c/o *Tempo* at our editorial address, 295 Regent Street, London W1R 8JH. – Ed.)

---

From John Mansfield Thomson

Gary Brain (*Tempo 185*) laments the fact that his own contributions to the contemporary scene, notably with 'Music Players 70', have been neglected in my *Oxford History of New Zealand Music* and implies that the author 'attempts to cover himself' in his introduction by mentioning the space limits imposed by the publisher. He fails to notice that in view of these restrictions I specifically state that 'subjects I have already written about elsewhere have, therefore, been dealt with more briefly'. In *Into a New Key*, my history of the Music Federation of New Zealand from 1950 to 1982, published in 1985, Mr Brain's herculean achievements feature on several occasions and include an evocative picture of him with his ear to the percussion. Would that he had been similarly attuned to the immediate task in hand.

To touch on some of the other points he mentions: every book has its gremlins and although William Southgate's career as a composer did not fully burgeon until after my book had gone to press through his Cello Concerto and a work for the New Zealand Chamber Orchestra, he should, of course, have appeared amongst the composers as well as conductors. I regret the accidental omission. Fortunately Mr Southgate is an active Christian and forgave me, not an avenging egotist. If my treatment of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra is 'casual', how does Mr Brain define 'meticulous'? He deplors my treatment of the role of the NZSO in promoting Jack Body's Sonic Circuses, yet these

find a mention on p.124, and on p.257 that of 1987 is described as 'an explosive affirmation of a multitude of talents'. But alas, the NZSO concert in the 1992 Circus was probably the most dispiriting collection of contemporary works I have ever heard. They almost brought the orchestra to a state of nervous prostration. The concept of concentrating some eight new pieces into one programme makes impossible demands on listeners as well as players.

Such a book as *The Oxford History of New Zealand Music* has to satisfy many masters, not least its commissioners, each of whom has his own views, and its publisher. The author of such a work has been compared to a lion-tamer being consumed at opposite ends by two of his charges. After Mr Brain's nibbles and those of his contemporaries in New Zealand and the author begins to look (and feel) like the living scarecrow *Worzel Gummidge*. In truth he never intended, nor wished, his book to attempt a chronicle of the performing scene after 1946 when it changed so rapidly after the end of World War II. He recognized the impossibility of such a survey even approaching the objectivity or perspectives of history. Such material is for Year Books or articles or the worthy commemorations of musical organizations. His own instincts were over-ruled with the predictable results unfurled in your pages to your no doubt mystified readers.

PO Box 28-063  
Kelburn  
Wellington, NZ

---

## News Section

---

### Composers

JOHN ADAMS. Chamber Symphony (French première)—6 December/Paris/Ensemble InterContemporain c. composer. Violin Concerto (première)—19 January 1994/St Paul, Missouri/Jorja Fleezanis (vn), Minnesota Orch. c. Edo de Waart.

LOUIS ANDRIESEN. *Overture to Rosa* (première)—5 October/Amsterdam, Paradiso/Netherlands Wind Ensemble c. Reinbert de Leeuw. *M is for Man, Music, Mozart* (première of staged version)—30 October/The Hague/Astrid Seriese, De Volharding dir. Paul Koek. *Registers* (UK première)—19 November/Huddersfield Festival/Anthony de Mare (pno). *Disco* for violin and piano (UK première)—20 November/Huddersfield Festival/Peter Sheppard (vln), Aaron Shorr (pno).

DOMINICK ARGENTO. *The Dream of Valentino* (première)—15 January 1994/Washington DC/Washington Opera c. Christopher Keene.

RICHARD BARRETT. *knospend-gespaltener* (première)—21 September/London, St Giles Church, Cripplegate/Andrew Sparling (cl).

RUPERT BAWDEN. *The Days of the Hawk*; 2 Choruses (premières)—20 October/London, BBC Maida Vale Studios/BBC Singers, BBC SO c. composer.

WILLIAM BOLCOM. *Lyric Concerto* for flute and orchestra (première)—27 October/Saint Louis/James Galway (fl), Saint Louis SO c. Leonard Slatkin. (European première)—7 November/Vienna; (UK première)—21 November/London, Royal Festival Hall/same performers.