

EDITORIAL: DOING THE RIGHT THING

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Because of *TEMPO*'s quarterly schedule these editorials tend to avoid anything too topical but, regrettably, it seems likely that when this issue is published the world will still be dealing with the effects – medical, social and economic – of the Covid-19 pandemic. For musicians, as for everyone else, the pandemic has been a catastrophe: so many marvellous performers and composers struck down by the virus; all those cancelled concerts, festivals and premieres; the devastating financial impact of all those lost fees. So how should we recover? How will we be beginning to recover when this issue arrives on people's screens or through their letter-boxes?

The lockdown period quickly demonstrated how resourceful the musical community can be. Entire festival programmes migrated from the halls for which they were planned to an array of more or less suitable on-line platforms. But the cost was considerable, not only in the amount of time that the makers of new music had to devote to coordinating all the different elements of the new works that they were trying to salvage, but also in aesthetic terms. A work conceived for live musicians to rehearse together, then perform to a room full of people, is impoverished when the same material is multitracked and then presented on-line. The latter represents a triumph of human ingenuity, but it is little more than a shadow of what might have been.

For this listener at least, the post-pandemic world must be one in which we celebrate liveness, not just the way music sounds in a real, rather than virtual space but all the attendant social interactions, between musicians, between musicians and audiences, and between audience members. Perhaps we may even become more critical of what is presented: is it really worthy of all the suffering and loss?

The post-pandemic world will also be one in which everyone who understands that art is always the most vivid record of human achievement must be vigilant and active. We need to be vigilant because the lockdown experience has confirmed that people with vocations are very easily exploited. In the UK it was some of the least well-paid people, the workers in care homes, the nurses in hospitals, who suffered the worst trauma, watching so many of the people whom they were looking after die. The UK has had a shockingly high death toll during the pandemic, not because of the quality of care available but because the government was incompetent. But the government also knew that people in the caring professions will always do their job, because it is the life to which they are devoted.

It has become easy to assume that, like care professionals, musicians will work for next to nothing. If they played for free during the pandemic why can't that continue? We need to be active in fighting for a new economic settlement for the arts, one that reflects the centrality of theatre, music, and all the other art-forms that depend on people coming together in large cooperative gatherings, because the lockdown has demonstrated that a society without these

gatherings barely exists. We have sustained ourselves with re-runs, box sets, classic recordings, but at some point those cupboards will be bare. In countries that have always recognised the true cultural value of the arts this may not be a problem, but there are so many – Australia, the UK, the USA, to think only of anglophone territories – where philistine politicians consistently and wilfully neglect their duty to do the right thing. We need to hold them to account, and to do this we need to assert that what we do is important and should be properly rewarded.

This is, of course, more easily written than achieved. In the UK, for example, the problem is compounded by our cultural institutions' tendency to collude with the economics of austerity that have been the norm for a decade. At its simplest this can be seen in the payment of the musicians who perform at the handful of new music festivals scattered across the country and the calendar. None of these festivals offers generous fees – this is Britain, after all – but some do at least offer fees that represent a reasonable return for the work undertaken; others don't, however, and then settle their bills so late that payment can seem like a form of passive contempt.

The title of this editorial had already been chosen before the pandemic took hold and gave it a new significance, but there is some connection between what I was going to write about and what I have written so far. In particular, the death of the great Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki has been a reminder of how decisive the relationship between aesthetic decisions and the *Zeitgeist* of a specific historical moment can be. As Alexander Woodman's interview with Penderecki – the last that he gave before his death on 29 March 2020 – makes clear, Penderecki had such an exact understanding of how the climate in late-50s Poland had changed that he was able to submit three works to the 1959 National Competition for Young Composers, each to a different category within the competition, and win first prize with all three works.

In a similar way Simon Reynell's record label Another Timbre has enjoyed a success that demonstrates that he, like Penderecki, knows how to do the right thing. Reynell is the subject of this issue's profile and gives an interview in which he explains how his choice of music to record is based on first principles, putting his money where his ears take him. Michael Palmese's article on Anthony Gnazzo, on the other hand, traces the career of a fascinating but little-known composer whose obscurity, one might argue, was the result of always being a couple of steps away from doing the right thing.

Joanna Ward's article on diversity in tertiary education offers yet another perspective on cultural strategy and is a response to the articles about gender representation in new music in Australia that were published in *TEMPO* 292. Again, the question is one of how to do the right thing: Ward advocates new ways of thinking about musical practice in general, opening up a vision of a genuinely representative music-making that transcends pragmatic solutions like quotas. The clear skies and cleaner air of the world in lockdown have reinforced a wider sense that the old, pre-pandemic world was unsustainable. We need to remember this and remember too that our art must also be both sustaining and sustainable.