

## EDITORIAL: SOCIAL DISTANCES

On 5<sup>th</sup> November 2019 I went to a concert at Cafe OTO in London. The musicians were from the ensemble Apartment House and they were introduced by the composer Andy Ingamells. As he explained how he had come to create the piece that we were to hear, Apartment House began to play: the composer's introduction was part of the performance. Soon those of us in the audience discovered that we too could be participants, leaving our seats to intervene in the performance by gently touching the musicians' hands and arms as they played their instruments. I chose to stay put, watching and listening as the ensemble's space, already quite restricted, became intimate as well. The interaction between the musicians and their disruptive new companions was playful, disconcerting and, in every sense, touching. A few months later it would become impossible, as the new rules introduced to minimise the impact of the pandemic took hold.

Julian Kämper's article on Ingamells takes this piece, *Petting Zoo*, as a starting point for a study of the role of touch in the composer's work. But complicity is also a key feature of a body of work that depends on performers and audiences remembering why and how they are allowed to be in a concert hall. The frisson of transgression that is triggered in *Petting Zoo* by the audience's invasion of the stage and of the performers' personal space would disappear if we didn't know how we are supposed to behave. The social tensions that so many people have experienced throughout the pandemic have been caused by a confusion over what is acceptable: why is that jogger running so close to me, why aren't those people wearing masks, why is this small theatre audience socially distanced when I have just walked through a crowd of football fans in the street? In the classical concert hall our behaviour may be less consequential – clapping between the movements of a symphony is probably not going to put lives at risk – but we still feel more comfortable when we understand how we are supposed to behave.

Similar questions about what sort of audience personae are acceptable in a contemporary-music concert setting inform Charlie Sdraulig and Louis d'Heudières's fascinating article, 'Attending to Attending'. The composers they discuss are, like Ingamells, interested in encouraging different sorts of benevolent audience transgression and, above all, in enabling listeners to realise that they are already actors in a drama and 'to recognise', as Rancière suggests in *The Emancipated Spectator*, that there is a category of 'activity peculiar to the spectator'.<sup>1</sup> All this is predicated, however, on audience and spectators sharing the same physical space, a possibility that disappeared for those long stretches of the pandemic when live performances to live audiences were forbidden. Instead we had to content ourselves with an online experience in which performers and audiences were allowed to share nothing more than an internet connection and a screen.

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2011), p. 17.

Although it is too early to be sure of the repercussions of the year of living distantly, there has been some wonderfully imaginative work made in the space where there used to be concerts. For example, when it became clear that the 2020 Maerzmusik festival, normally held in Berlin, would have to happen virtually, the singer Juliet Fraser agreed with the festival that she would make a film rather than give an online performance. The result, 'Inside Out', is an unsparingly honest reflection of how it was to spend a year in a sort of suspended animation, and here we publish the text of the voiceover from the film. During lockdown Fraser moved back to her parents' home, where she had grown up, and found a new way of being there, of, as she puts it, going 'backwards into my own story'.

This sense of making new relationships with familiar spaces also informs Bobbie-Jane Gardner's article on 'hyper-localism' and Thomas Meadowcroft's interview with Matthew Shlomowitz, both of which focus on the interaction between people and places. In both cases particular locales provide the setting out of which music can evolve, although the two locales could hardly be more different, the suburbs of Birmingham and the Southern Highlands of Australia during the 'Black Summer' of the 2019–20 bush fires. The approaches to composition are similarly a response to place and circumstance: Gardner documents a series of projects in which local communities found ways to turn aspects of their everyday lives into pieces of music; Meadowcroft creates radiophonic works out of the sounds of people attempting to combat a catastrophic natural disaster.

A less straightforward account of a composer's response to time and place is presented in Stephanus Müller's article about the music of Michael Blake. Blake was profiled in *TEMPO* 299 and is a South African composer who has nevertheless spent many years away from the country of his birth, living in London until the end of the apartheid era, after which he returned home, but now based in France. Müller takes Blake's music for string quartet as a lens through which to view the composer's work more generally, and what emerges is a fascinating portrait of an artist for whom 'home' is, necessarily, a problematic concept. Blake's works often use elements of different Southern African musical traditions but do so within the wider context of the European art-music culture in which he was trained; consequently, to borrow Juliet Fraser's phrase, Blake's decision to go 'backwards into my own story' has socio-political as well as personal implications.

But perhaps nothing is straightforward? Perhaps my sense that 'real' is always preferable to 'virtual' says more about my age than anything else? Certainly Annemarie Peeters' article about Stefan Prins' lockdown reworking of a piece from 2007, *FITTINGinSIDE* [lockdown version], seems to suggest so. She describes how Prins made a revision for the Nadar ensemble that was first presented in June 2020 in a fully locked down version and then again a year later in less restricted circumstances and says of the latter experience that 'our heads, after more than a year of the pandemic, seem better armed against the constant zig-zag between here and elsewhere. More so, we are enjoying it to the fullest it seems.' Optimistically she suggests that 'the digital space' that, during lockdown, seemed only to offer 'a place for ritual mourning' has 'become a playground for adult children'. She also poses a question that reminds us that social distance is not just about hands, faces and spaces but is a fundamental quality of life today: 'what does it mean to be "somewhere"', she asks, 'when we can be in so many other places at the same time?'