

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

from COLIN MATTHEWS

I have no great desire to quarrel with Mr. Benoliel's far from random selection of contemporary composers whose music 'combines the highest standards of inspiration and technique' (TEMPO 120), since it is clearly intended to be provocative and little more. I will even ignore his gratuitous insult to Messiaen and Dallapiccola, who, one gathers, may be allowed to join the gang if they try hard enough. But when it becomes apparent that Mr. Benoliel's motive in assembling this uncompromising group of dour and sober composers is to provide a foil for the unstructured and sentimental prettiness of the music of Mike Oldfield, then the only possible reaction is one of near-hysterical disbelief. To allow such pointless and ill-judged formulations to be put into print is to devalue the pages of TEMPO.

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from OLIVER KNUSSEN

It is all very well to use a serious journal to air one's personal prejudices and bugaboos, and for that matter to include the odd 'joke' item, but Mr. Benoliel's piece in TEMPO 120—on music which is to me at least of rather questionable substance—goes a little far on the first count and is, presumably, 'serious'. His first two sentences contain the most extraordinary sweeping statement about music I can remember reading in a long time.

I do not deny Mr. Benoliel his reverence for late Brian, Pettersson and Gerhard, nor for Wolpe and Spinner, all of whom are worthy figures individually, but to lump them together looks unfortunately like a gratuitous collection of 'misfits', redolent of a rather negative species of elitism, and does the composers concerned no service. And when he throws in (as if catering for the plebs) just 'the finest works' of Messiaen and Dallapiccola as being on a similar lofty plane to what one supposes to be the entire *oeuvres* of the other composers, one's blood begins to boil. Aren't some critical standards being curiously mixed here?

So far Mr. Benoliel's views could be construed as non-exclusive, but when he goes on to say that 'compared to the rest of contemporary music (. . .) Oldfield's music, through its genuine emotional significance, comes closer to the works of these men', isn't he dismissing rather a lot of masterpieces? At the risk of seeming equally silly, would it be too prejudiced to suggest that at the very least Britten's *Curlew River* or *Death in Venice*, Carter's Concerto for Orchestra, Maxwell Davies's *Worldes Blis*, Ligeti's *Lontano*, Maw's *Scenes and Arias*, Session's *Lilacs*, Shostakovich's 14th Symphony, Stravinsky's *Variations* and *Requiem Canticles* or even (perish the thought) *Pli Selon Pli* and *Momente* (all completed during the past fifteen years) might possibly display in their various ways the combination of 'the highest standards of inspiration and technique' and, for that matter, spiritual commitment? Not to mention the remaining output of these composers.

Mike Oldfield must really be something else!!

Of course the most unfortunate upshot of all this is that one's faith in what Mr. Benoliel has to say about his chosen subject is seriously undermined from the outset, and thus he doesn't fulfil what one supposes was his brief to interest the open-minded or sceptical in the question. Perhaps an article entitled something like 'My favourite contemporary composer' would have been a more convincing place to unveil his hierarchy of creators, and might not have been devoid of interest to some.

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