



EDITORIAL: UNCOVERING ONE'S TRACKS

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In the previous issue of *TEMPO* Lea Luka Sikau's article 'Rehearsing Time' considered the invisible labour that goes into the production of a new opera.¹ In this issue some of that labour is uncovered, by articles in which composers and performers explicitly discuss how and why they make their work.

But why do musicians want to explain their work – to uncover their tracks – when music is so good at explaining itself? In the profile of the composer and carillonist Julie Zhu, with which this issue closes, she describes the secret pleasure of the carillonist: 'walking out of the tower knowing that I just rained sound down on people, but no one knows it was me'. That can be the composer's pleasure, too, if they don't give a pre-concert talk, don't supply their photograph for the programme book, don't take a post-performance bow. Instead they could just mingle with their fellow listeners and find out what other people think they have heard.

Fortunately for the readers of this issue of *TEMPO* that degree of anonymity does not seem to be particularly appealing. Thomas Simaku writes about the series of solo instrumental *Soliloquies* that he has been composing since 1998, Niamh Dell writes about the way in which her understanding of her practice as an oboist has developed through the experience of performing new music, and a trans-continental collection of musicians share some thoughts on a project in which composers and performers from both Europe and Australia came together in Hamburg to work with digital scores. In a refreshingly candid interview with the poet Judith Bishop, Jane Stanley takes us into her composing environment, offering insights into an activity that happens in an interlocking network of spaces: imaginative, physical and social.

Explaining music can also involve more than just the creative activities of composing, rehearsing and performing. As with the hardware and software innovations that are necessary for the realisation of digital scores, it is sometimes important to develop new resources or to rethink how existing resources might be used. Joe Bates presents an article in which the quartertone, often dismissed by connoisseurs of tuning systems as the unwanted offspring of equal temperament, is reconsidered, perhaps even rescued, from its ugly-duckling status. Mark Fitzgerald discusses the extent to which Gerald Barry succeeded in remodelling his compositional techniques around the beginning of this century, as he moved on from the relatively compressed formal scheme of his chamber orchestra work *Wiener Blut* (2000) to *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (2002–2005), the grandest of his operas. My own article is rather more of a polemic, an attempt to think about what newness might mean in an age when we have come to

¹ Lea Luka Sikau, 'Rehearsing Time', *TEMPO*, 78, no. 308 (April 2024), pp. 46–55.

realise that centuries of spectacular innovation have taken humanity to the edge of existential catastrophe.

In the midst of these reflections on current practice are some memories of the composer, photographer and film-maker Phill Niblock, who died earlier this year. Niblock was probably best known for his *The Movement of People Working* project, a series of films which, with the most minimal of editorial intervention, showed people in the midst of their quotidian labours and which, when projected for audiences, were accompanied by densely overlaid, pulsating drones. Niblock rarely offered any sort of commentary on what he was doing; the work was enough.