

Editorial

Nottingham, 1 May 2004: the Kamkars, a group of Kurdish musicians from Iran, close a concert with a flamboyant instrumental encore based upon a song performed earlier in the evening.

Azerbaijan, some time in the 1950s: recognizably the same melody is heard performed by a local town band.

Testament to an unbroken chain of oral transmission over a period of half a century? Not impossible. But in fact the Nottingham concert suggested a more convoluted route. The Azerbaijani musicians were caught by the recording equipment of an ethnomusicologist, and the song transferred to a 78 rpm record; released from the specific circumstances of their performance, these sounds became available for new contexts and new interpretations. In Milan for instance, where the singer Cathy Berberian acquired a copy of the record and – without understanding a word of the song text – proposed the song's inclusion in the set of invented and arranged *Folk Songs* being compiled by her (soon-to-be-ex-) husband Luciano Berio. Berio later described his transcriptions as 'analyses of folk songs', and claimed that it was not his intention 'to preserve their authenticity'.¹ In the case of this particular song however, the 'analysis' was conducted in the first instance not by Berio, but by his student (and Berberian's part-time recital accompanist), the young Dutch composer Louis Andriessen, who spent a few days transcribing it from the recording.² The text, meanwhile, was transliterated by Berberian, syllable by syllable.

The product of this thoroughly collaborative exercise was, of course, made complete by Berberian's own inimitable performances; but it was also acquired by Berio's publisher, Universal Edition, whose typeset score abstracted away from the particularities of Berberian's conception and opened by the possibility of reinterpretations by other singers. The notation made possible more unexpected variants too – paradoxically perhaps, given our tendency to view musical notation as the single most significant factor in shoring up the institution of the unchanging musical work. At the Nottingham concert – for it was 'Berio's' *Folk Songs* that formed the first part of the programme – the sudden unavailability of the London Sinfonietta's harpist necessitated the drafting in of a local pianist to realise the part on a concert grand, a solution made possible by a notational system that presupposes no prior aural exposure. And thus to the Kamkars, whose finale's most immediate point of reference was clearly *Folk Songs*, with which they had already shared seven performances in a countrywide tour.

In her absorbing contribution to this issue of *tcm*, Georgina Born argues that such 'relayed creativity', in which music is 'distributed across space, time and persons', forming 'an object of recurrent decomposition, composition and re-composition by a series of creative agents'

1 Luciano Berio, *Two Interviews*, with Rossana Dalmonte and Bálint András Varga, translated and edited by David Osmond-Smith (New York: Boyars, 1985), p. 148.

2 Maja Trochimczyk, ed., *The Music of Louis Andriessen* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 17.

(p. 26), is not peculiar to consciously referential reworkings of the sort described here, but is in fact intrinsic to all musical practice. Born's article, an expanded version of the keynote address she gave at the Third Biennial International Conference of Twentieth-Century Music at Nottingham in July 2003, intersects with the motivating concerns of *tcm* in suggestive, sometimes provocative ways. Her approach is resourcefully cross-disciplinary, moving through examples drawn from philosophy, sociology and in particular the anthropology of Alfred Gell. She also ranges across a broad spread of musical repertoires. Her warm appraisal of jazz and, in particular, developments in digital music composition springs from the perception that these recognize rather than attempt to disavow the 'multiply-mediated' and ever-provisional nature of musical creativity. A less positive appraisal of the avant-gardism represented by Boulez's IRCAM offers thought-provoking refinement of the position taken in her monograph *Rationalizing Culture* (1995), and implicitly issues a counter-challenge to Björn Heile's vigorous dissection of musical modernism's critics (including Born herself) in the preceding issue of *tcm*.

Born's discussion finds resonances too in the other contributions to the present issue. Daniel Grimley's incisive article also addresses electronic music – specifically, two recent projects by Icelandic musician Björk – and proposes a rather different understanding of the ontology of electronic soundscapes, one stimulated by the insights of film studies and postmodern cultural theory. Both Grimley and Ruth Longobardi give consideration to one of Born's central themes, the dynamics of collaborative creative agency – specifically, in Grimley's article, that of Björk and the filmmaker Lars von Trier in the film *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), and in Longobardi's, that of Benjamin Britten, his librettist Myfanwy Piper, and the novelist Thomas Mann, whose novella *Death in Venice* was Piper and Britten's primary source for their 1973 opera of the same name. Longobardi uses the concept of multivalency to explore and interpret moments of apparent conflict between music, text and action in Britten's opera. She also examines ways in which Britten's music can be heard to undermine the otherwise seemingly inevitable disintegration of his homosexual central character.

Acknowledgement of the queer implications of repertoire choice, as well as the consequences of the exclusion of music created by women, finds a place in Wright's exploration of the London Sinfonietta over nearly forty years of performing and enabling musical works in the high modernist tradition. Drawing on the work of Habermas and Blanning, Wright examines the London Sinfonietta as a performance-centred art world. His account signifies a recognition, also urged by Born, of the part played by performance institutions in shaping musical creativity.

Leta Miller, finally, examines a composer largely neglected by musicology, the distinctive American maverick Lou Harrison, whose own compositional practice is characterised, as Miller suggests, by revision, alteration and self-borrowing. This presents a situation analogous to Born's account of digital music, in which 'there is no original and no copy, only rapidly proliferating, variant versions' (p. 28) – only in Harrison's case the creative relay is conducted intropsectively as much as socially. If this element of solipsism keeps Harrison tethered to the persistent notion of 'the musical "I"', preventing complete subsumption to the 'weaving and spinning of musico-social relatedness' delineated by Born (p. 30), Miller's

account nevertheless serves as a reminder that the distribution of creativity, and an ontology privileging provisionality, have been part and parcel of the work of musicians of all kinds in the twentieth century.

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