
Editorial

One item in this issue fulfils a long-standing desire. Ever since the sudden death of Bill Hopkins, in 1981, at the age of 37, the editorship of *Tempo* has hoped to publish some outline and appreciation of his music. It reflects to some extent on the difficulty and elusiveness of the material that this should only now have become possible; certainly no-one before Nicolas Hodges has had the opportunity and tenacity, as both performer and researcher, to build up a coherent and comprehensive picture of one of the most self-demanding composers of recent times.

That the fruits of his research should appear in *Tempo* – to which Bill Hopkins was a valued contributor through the 1960s and 70s – is highly appropriate. Beyond the circle of Hopkins's friends and pupils it was indeed as a 'critic' that he was most widely known: a writer of rare cogency on a surprisingly wide range of music. Though his own compositional path and attitudes owed much to his teacher Jean Barraqué – for whom Hopkins was surely the most acute and dedicated advocate in this country – he revealed penetrating and sympathetic insights into composers as different from himself as Bax, Fauré, Stravinsky and Shostakovich; while his command of English prose is not to be found among his successors. When the present editor of *Tempo*, who knew him only slightly, was embarking on this curious career of writing about music, Bill Hopkins was among the very few models who set him a level of competence worth aspiring to. The fact that Hopkins's opinions seldom precisely coincided with my own was irrelevant to my esteem for the style and intellectual consistency with which he expressed them.

Six years ago, in another publication, I wrote of Hopkins: 'As the years lengthen, I think we shall feel his absence more, not less. He was plainly a real modernist – not from fashion or intellectual confusion or a desire to shock or impress, but by conviction and natural appetite. I try to picture him making the now almost obligatory "return to tonality", or writing a neo-academic symphony – and, blessedly, can't'. One would like to think that the current issue of *Tempo*, whose constituent articles are dedicated, if not to various strands of 'modernism' as such, then to approaches other than the 'abject relativism' he so deplored, might have elicited his approval, or at least afforded him a grim amusement.

Bill Hopkins's authentic voice, however, may be heard in the following extract from the 'Record Guide' he wrote for *Tempo* 95 (Winter 1970-71). Buried in small type at the back of the issue, triggered as it ostensibly was by the appearance of Claude Helffer's

Valois LP of the Sonata of Jean Barraqué, this eloquent statement of principle has probably remained little-known, save among the devotees of that equally elusive composer. While disclaiming, in the usual manner, any editorial responsibility for the opinions expressed, it seems to us that, 23 years on, these words cry out for repetition in a more prominent place.

In music facts, seen aright, are values. It is the very existence of great works which instructs our lives, and to dwell with the mediocre, the casual and the makeshift is to ignore or forget that existence. That music which bypasses neither the mind nor the body need only assert its factual presence to force us into the ruthless discrimination of a 'final analysis'; before mastery, the feeble and the flawed can turn only to those welfare-state critics who find them 'interesting', and to a public of infallible sentimentality. I have seen the most intelligent of critics resort to arguments of compassion in order to admit a reasonable quota of new members into the Pantheon: it is as if the presiding members were being bribed – sometimes apologetically, sometimes truculently – with a new sort of musical package, now including commentary on the composer's personal, political or historical situation. We may be sure they will know how to distinguish circumstantial from musical facts, and the former – the mundane contingencies of the human condition – will firmly be referred to another department.

The abject relativism which seems to threaten present-day music has caused some to cry despair, seeing on the one hand a multitude of neuroses, edicts and cynicisms centring on a lost 'communication', and on the other hand the erection of forlorn systems and theories with nothing to fertilize. Others, also presuming the absence of real masters, chance their hand at the canonization of pseudo-masters, a truly democratic lottery. It is not difficult for them to put their case, for – as Barraqué has observed – rarely has music been blessed with such a wealth of sheer talent; moreover, composing has become a profession, a 'competence', and the critic can rarely eschew the double standard implicit in his extra role in public relations. But for the critic intent on serving music there can be no excuse for essaying pronouncements on musical history

while not being in possession of all the facts. And, it must inevitably be asked, how many of those who have apparently written off Jean Barraqué have been in possession of the score – or even Yvonne Loriod's recording – of his Piano Sonata?

Here, surely, is a fact that stands on its own in the history of new music. A work of vast – though not freakish – proportions, the Sonata grew out of that new vision of music shared by many of the young generation of the immediately post-war years. The work is (still) built on a single pitch series, whose 'straight' enunciation at the very end is one of the most extraordinary musical gestures I know: it is like a gentle removal of the sound without which there would be no Sonata, but it cannot remove the equally essential spirit which continues to populate the ensuing 'final' silence. The single movement is divided into two sections – basically fast and basically slow – each of which sets up complex interactions among its distinct microstructures. If such a binary form should happen to call to mind Scarlatti, the point of reference is not quite as gratuitous as it looks, for Barraqué has put immense pressure on sonata form – in order to extract to the full its irreducible essence of dualism. Themes are replaced as subject matter by groups of propositions – still 'themes', of course, but in a broader sense only; development is inextricable from exposition, for the musical argument is continuous, spanning all levels of contrast and opposition; recapitulation, of course, has long been a mere luxury in the modern sonata, but Barraqué makes sure that we remember all the force of his dualism, at the same time imprinting an imperturbable equilibrium on music that often yields to none in disruptive violence.

Barraqué's rhythms serve neither mathematical theory nor metrical regularity; in this they differ as much from the Messiaenic Boulez of total serialization as they do from the Webernian (even Stravinskian) Boulez of pulsed rhythmic cells. In fact, in Barraqué rhythm leads a rich yet fully coherent existence, at once sufficiently flexible and sufficiently plastic to add its vital weight to the articulation of the Sonata's thematic concerns of freedom and stringency. A consequence of this ametrical treatment is that the work's important silences become tense, motionless, rather than being implicitly pulsed absences of sound. This is just one example of Barraqué's unflinching skill in giving empirical presence to musical propositions that in lesser hands would remain theoretical. But

it also demonstrates that the means to do this depend on a certain purity of technique; for undoubtedly the musical points that the Sonata makes are such that they can only sustain their full meaning within the whole context that Barraqué creates for them.

With this assertion we are back with the critical issue. Sneering at the pure has become almost as popular as the grand old Stravinskian sport of snorting at the sincere. It is often impossible to believe the sneerers have any idea at all of who it is they revile. Granted, it is legitimate, if excessive, to be alarmed by that arid severity through which the insecure seek a personal style. It is sheer blindness to jib at the purity of utter conviction, the meaningful interrelatedness of each single musical decision, the singlemindedness of working constantly at the level where the whole is the only complete explanation of the part. Not that these qualities in themselves constitute mastery; they constitute the technique that is necessary for it, and – being the very mechanism of communication – render spurious all other efforts to communicate. To mistake this purity for 'good taste' is to miss the boat hopelessly – absurd to imagine such a composer gnawing his nails at the thought that works of his might be appropriated for Hollywood's more vulgar productions; and to assume that the same purity refers simply to 'style' is almost as wide of the mark. What it means is simply eloquence at its most truthful and efficacious: no witnesses are called, no charades acted out, no authorities invoked, and no restrictive assumptions made. Listening to such music we realise just how viciously technique has been apt to turn against itself in our time; the 'masters' of impurity have turned too late from its brilliant exploitation to repair the devastation done to their good faith, or, putting it bluntly, to their technique.

If there were such a creature as a pure critic, his duty would be to abjure humane judgment, to repeal all amnesties, and to fight tooth and nail for the perfectibility of the art of music. It may be as well in some ways that today's critic is on the whole more broadminded, giving due acknowledgment to all manner of services rendered in the name of music. But if he acquires Claude Helffer's recording of the Barraqué Sonata (on Valois, MB 952A), he will find it harder than ever to escape the fact that he is in the presence of the highest order of mastery [. . .]