

Anniversaries Birthdays

Johann Philipp Krieger, 1649–1725
250th anniversary of death, 7th February

Kurt Weill, 1900–1950
75th anniversary of birth, 2nd March

Winfried Zillig, 1905–1963
70th anniversary of birth, 1st April

Hermann Reutter, born 1900
75th birthday, 17th June

Giselher Klebe, born 1925
50th birthday, 28th June

Karl Amadeus Hartmann, 1905–1963
70th anniversary of birth, 2nd August

Andreas Hammerschmidt, 1611–1675
300th anniversary of death, 29th October

Paul Hindemith, 1895–1963
80th anniversary of birth, 16th November

The New Music today

1975

Inter Nationes

Bonn, 1975, pp. 7–8

Ernst Thomas, director of the Darmstadt International Music Institute which organised the 1974 International Vacation Course for New Music, put the following questions to the composers associated with the course.

1. Is it possible to talk today of a post-serial phase in the New Music, and what do you understand by that?
2. Can the current fashionable concern with "nostalgia" be meaningfully applied to the most recent developments in music, and do you see any signs of a return to tonality?
3. Where do you see problems, limits, and under-utilised opportunities of popularising the New Music?
4. Can the New Music serve as a means of political or social change?
5. How do you assess the up-and-coming generation of composers?
Here are the views of Iannis Xenakis, Mauricio Kagel, and Karlheinz Stockhausen.

Iannis Xenakis

1. There exists a category of composers who have written serial music and for that reason are now in a post-serial phase. But there are other categories

too, people who have never written serial music — and cannot therefore be post-serial — since they stood outside this movement . . . like myself, for example, and all the others proceeding along the same path, making use of all the compositional methods that employ the totality of sound material (note masses, glissandi) completely outside serial technique. The New Music has therefore pursued its path by way of a diversity of stylistic combinations. If you look at scores by younger composers, you see these combinations of various tendencies — of which there, however, not many. As ever, few of these trends survive their age and remain of interest.

2. Nostalgia directed towards the tonal system? In my opinion, there can be no return in the sphere of music. As in all things, there may perhaps be cyclical or similar manifestations, but never a return without more ado. That is impossible. Music has never been seen to copy what went before, even if it may perhaps sometimes have been inspired by a previous epoch. As far as the nostalgics are concerned . . . well, there have been nostalgics in all ages.

3. That is a question of the education of musicians, of teaching music in a way that does not at present occur. Music teaching is still largely the same as in the Nineteenth Century. The dissemination of music is also still more or less in the hands of commercial set-ups. Gramophone records and radio have listeners who are neither trained nor informed. All that blocks getting to know about musical developments, and this blockade — in my opinion — can only be overcome very gradually in present circumstances by way of generations to come creating a different situation. That means that today's New Music will have become part of the classics.

4. Music — and art in general — is an environment that changes people, and thus human society and politics. But utilisation of art as a means of change is an idea that all forms of government have taken up from time to time — and is futile, in my opinion. Politicised or committed music can be very good music if talent is involved in its creation. Politisation is another matter, bringing into music whatever conveys the ideas and ideologies. The music itself cannot be political. Is mathematics perhaps political? On the other hand, involvement in the musical and creative sphere can change a person deeply. The significance of music, in fact, lies in changing him, whether he wishes this or not.

5. The young generation of composers? I think there is one. Considering the difficulties involved in communication, studies, and examinations, I want first to talk about the difficulty of providing fundamental criticism of music. Young people do not educate themselves. They behave like parasites. They pick up a lot of things from all around, but without any correct definition or genuine criticism of what they need. The consequence is that most of what they produce is superficial, as like as two peas in a pod. That involves a lack of depth in their attitude towards composition, and results, in my opinion, from a lack of discussion and from the education young musicians receive at schools, colleges, and conservatoires where it seems they are only taught the traditional things rather than there being any discussion, criticism, and instruction on new developments. They cannot master the New Music on their own. What they are doing is to imitate what already exists all around them. That engenders confusion

and a decline in musical thought, quality, and taste.

Mauricio Kagel

1. It is too late today to talk of a "post-serial phase" in the New Music since more than 10 years have passed since the twelve-note series attained a peak and simultaneously a termination as generative element within musical composition. It seems to me superfluous to search for a succession of new captions for rapid changes in style in order to delimit trends in composition within clearly defined epochs and periods. Today an underlying eclecticism constitutes a fundamental starting-off point (but even then it would not be desirable to talk of a "pan-stylistic" or eclectic phase).

2. Catchwords are like fateful turnpikes. They are mostly used when a clearly perceptible development is already in decline, or at least when its beginnings lie far in the past. As early as 1963, I attempted a systematic confrontation with thoughts and yearnings from the past in the 4 melodramas in "Phonophonie", involving the portrait of a Nineteenth Century singer in a state of vocal decadence. I did not see any disposition towards nostalgia there, rather just the opposite — a clarification of the Nineteenth Century which in my opinion, has still not been completely comprehended.

The present partial return to tonality is not necessarily a manifestation of nostalgia. At the end of the Fifties, at the height of the Webern cult, I said that young composers succeeding my generation would compose tonal music of a new kind as a necessary act of defiance and as a means of opening up "unused" materials. That has been confirmed in numerous instances since the mid-Sixties — and, paradoxically, also co-initiated by composers of my generation. "Tonality" is, all the same, not a precise term for utilisation of harmony not based on the equality of 12 related notes. The preference during the serial phase was for major and minor seconds, sevenths, and ninths, whereas today other combinations of intervals predominate — and these can arouse the impression of (ostensible) tonality because thirds, fifths, and sixths occur more frequently than previously. My "Abend" for double vocal quartet, trombone quintet, electric organ, and piano, written in 1971, provides a graphic example of that. The starting-off

point was the idea that the "wandering chords" which much preoccupied Schoenberg (He invented this admirable term) could be led into a state of complete tonal indeterminacy if only sevenths (double vocal quartet), ninths (trombone quintet), eleventh (electric organ), and thirteenth (piano) were utilised. It does not worry me in the least that this harmonic material has partly been usurped from light music. The castles in the air conjured up by such relaxing chords succumb to their own intrinsic ambiguity. Exclusive utilisation of chords based on minor and major thirds leads to elimination of any reference to a stabilised tonality. Our idea of tonality is in need of constant revision. Composers such as Janacek, who had original ideas about the role of harmonic functions and thus developed a "disrupted" tonality, remain outside general awareness of the history of music.

3. The limits to popularisation of the New Music certainly result from the difficulty of genuine dissemination of music as a whole. I no longer make any distinction between "new" and "not new" because I am convinced that a broad distribution of new categories of listeners can only come about with assistance from the totality of possibilities open to music. It would not be clever to strive for specialisation in such a special sphere as the New Music.

One of the most difficult issues to be solved is the traditional form of realisation of the concept of the "concert". It remains naive just to struggle against this ritual because people time and again feel the necessity of coming together to listen to music. If the attempt is made — on the basis of falsely comprehended progressiveness, rejecting the idea that the interpreter/producer should be assigned an active role and the listener/consumer a passive — to break down by force the limits to interaction between musicians and public, the outcome is embarrassing and often only an unsatisfying exchange of roles. It cannot be a question here of adding an ideological load to the necessity of an initially one-sided flow of information (the public presentation of music for an assembled audience). It is the petrified ontology of the theory of concert that should be damned, not the theory itself.

The fact that people make unceasing use of music — even without being able to follow some of the complex acoustic processes involved — should be taken

into account in any systematic clarification of the conceptual possibilities in listening to any kind of music. For that, comprehensive verbal information is necessary at a concert. I know from experience how grateful listeners are if their thoughts are stimulated by music and they are then called on to express their views. The idea that concerts must be exclusively devoted to the acoustic experience is increasingly becoming a pure illusion. The exceptions overwhelmingly confirm the rule.

4. I always have to smile if someone believes, and does not hesitate to proclaim, that the New Music can contribute towards really changing our social system. But why do people always talk about the New Music here rather than about music as a whole? What was not achieved by way of a living presentation of the musical past cannot be brought about by the most up-to-date music either. Total transference of concepts from the spheres of sociology and philosophy to aesthetics often leads to an aesthetic form of political science (and usually to imprecise inferences). Nothing would be more terrible than pseudo-change. Surprisingly, it is not the composers who spout the most fashionable phrases, but rather those critics who want to write about such social involvement (because those are the goods they can usually sell). There have always been the equivalent of colour supplement revolutionaries. Today, however, the impotence of the word seems to me to be an excessively obvious means of power.

5. Younger composers are today often confronted by problems involving their status in an excessively rigid musical world rather than formulation of a new musical style. The meaning of music-making can be called into question today more than hitherto because the institutions developed for bourgeois consumption of music are no longer adequate or up-to-date for a changed society. But it is the fact of a transformation of economic conditions — and not the ideological framework of these institutions — that undermines their structures.

Karlheinz Stockhausen

1. Only a few people understand what serial music is. It sometimes happens that even my pupils in composition are surprised when I explain the simplest relationships within serial music.

Die folgenden Stellungnahmen zeitgenössischer Komponisten
sind das Ergebnis einer Anfrage des Autors.

IANNIS XENAKIS (geb. 1922)

Generell empfinde ich Webern als ziemlich schwerfällig und ohne große musikalische Imagination, verglichen zum Beispiel mit Schönberg oder Berg oder, in einem weitergefaßten Sinn, mit Varèse oder sogar mit dem Strawinsky des «Sacre du printemps». Theoretisch dominiert Schönberg völlig zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts und überragt nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg sogar Verstand und Ästhetik vieler Musiker der jüngeren Generation. Da ich mich außerhalb der seriellen Musik bewege, bin ich froh, dies erklären zu können.

GOTTFRIED MICHAEL KOENIG (geb. 1926)

Ich hege große Bewunderung für das Werk Anton Webers, das der Komponistengeneration, die nach 1945 zu arbeiten begann, die Augen für eine mögliche Weiterentwicklung der musikalischen Sprache nach Arnold Schönberg geöffnet hat. Mein Interesse an der seriellen Musik hat mich jedoch über elektronische und Computermusik zu Fragen der Programmierbarkeit und damit der musikalischen Grammatik geführt. Ich bin sicher, daß die weitere Forschung auf diesen Gebieten das Verständnis Webers um eine Dimension erweitern wird, die vom Publikumserfolg, dessen sein Werk sich inzwischen erfreut, noch nicht erschlossen ist.

HANS OTTE (geb. 1926)

Webern macht die Schande des so gegen- wie widerwärtigen Musikbetriebs offenbar. Seine Werke, die für den Konzertsaal gedacht sind und heute fast nur noch im Rundfunk zu hören sind, finden ihrer besonderen Art wegen oder aber auch aus barer, anhaltender Unkenntnis noch heute nicht den Weg in die musikalische Öffentlichkeit.

So bleibt seine Musik der – neuesten gleich – nach wie vor eine Herausforderung an alle Musiker und Veranstalter, über die Funktion ihres Berufes ständig und gründlich nachzudenken.

MAURICIO KAGEL (geb. 1931)

Das Werk Anton Webers bedeutet für mich als Komponist nicht mehr als das Œuvre anderer Großen: gute Musik. Den Kult um Webern habe ich nie gemocht, wie ich jegliche Mystifizierung auch außerhalb der Kunst ablehne. Bereits in Argentinien, als ich meine ersten selbständigen Töne niederschrieb, führte ich lange Streitgespräche mit jungen Komponisten, die nach der Entdeckung Webers völlig seinem Zauber erlagen. Der Instinkt sagte mir damals, daß die mühsame Synthese seiner Musik, die er nach einem ganzen Leben erreichte, nicht das Richtige für einen Siebzehnjährigen war, der ein Vorbild suchte. Und tatsächlich: nicht wenige dieser Kollegen gaben im Laufe der Jahre das Komponieren auf. Die Töne Webers, die fast immer am Rande des Schweigens erklingen, brachten meine Freunde frühzeitig zum Verstummen.

ROLAND KAYN (geb. 1933)

Webers Zeitkunst war sicher nicht die Anschlußstelle für die ab 1951 beginnende erste Phase der Elektronischen Musik. Sein Œuvre präsentierte sich damals wie heute als ein in sich abgeschlossenes System. Ihm fiel die Rolle zu, zwischen Spätromantik und überhitztem Expressionismus gleichsam wie ein Filter mit engem Durchlaßbereich zu wirken.

Webers Strukturierungen blieben selbst bei fortgeschrittensten Reihenmanipulationen eine auf Gestalten ausgerichtete Thematisierung des Materials. Dies führte – die atonale Periode sei hier ausgeklammert – zur Versteinerung im Denken von Musik. Die Schönberg-Schule erkannte nicht die Zeichen der Zeit: Maxwell, de Broglie, Birkhoff. Das Schönbergsche Prinzip der «Komposition mit zwölf nur aufeinander bezogenen Tönen» sicherte nicht die Vorherrschaft der europäischen Musik für die nächsten hundert Jahre, wie dessen Erfinder 1922 postulierte. Dagegen Amerika: Cage, Varèse, Ives. Später nicht die Serialisten: Boulez, Nono, Stockhausen. Vielmehr Brown, Evangelisti, Xenakis. Hauer erahnte vielleicht 1924 mit seinen in der Tropentafel festgelegten 479 001 600 Melosfällen das Computerzeitalter. Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts: – Kybernetische Musik: läßt uns sie produzieren.

HELMUT LACHENMANN (geb. 1935)

Man liebt (und fürchtet bzw. ignoriert) Webern heute genauso als Klassiker, wie man Bach, Beethoven, Mahler liebt (fürchtet, ignoriert).

Wichtig bzw. sichtbar bei Webern für uns heute: der Sprung heraus aus einer gesellschaftlich verankerten ästhetischen Geborgenheit in einer bestimmten historischen Situation; und zwar ein Sprung nicht im rebellischen Widerspruch zur Tradition, sondern als dialektisches Produkt von an die äußerste Grenze entwickelten kompositionstechnischen Mitteln und Denkformen dieser Traditionen selbst.