

The ISCM Festival at Hamburg



A scene from (l) Penderecki's "The Devils of Loudon, with set by Konrad Swinarski; and (below) "The Journey" with set by Joseph Svoboda / Scène de l'opéra The Devils of Loudon, de Penderecki (à g.) dans des décors de Konrad Swinarski et (ci-dessous), scène de The Journey, décors de Joseph Svoboda.

The Hamburg State opera presented operas ranging in style from Menotti, Hindemith to Penderecki. Rehearsal time must have been sufficient for performances were excellent. Considering the difficulties of newer music, the Cologne Radio Orchestra may well be the world's most experienced ensemble for new music; the exactitude of its playing made a most convincing impression. Chief critics in attendance were French musicologist Antoine Golea and the German high priests of new

by **LOTHAR KLEIN**

FROM June 20-27, the old Hansa port city of Hamburg played host to the 1969 International Society for Contemporary Music. The week's festivities featured two concerts of chamber and symphonic music daily with contemporary opera topping the evening's bill of fare. Composers from Western and Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, Israel and Japan brought their latest musical wares. The twofold purpose of the festival was to provide composers with an opportunity to exchange ideas and the chance to assess one another's work.

Since its founding 43 years ago, this International Society has served as platform for serious musical thought unfettered by commercial box-office considerations. Works which ordinarily would not fit into conventional concert programmes are given preference and many key works of 20th century musical literature have made their debut under ISCM auspices. During the 1930's, Bartok, Berg, Schoenberg and Webern were often premiered at such festival concerts. Today the Society still provides an outlet for music discriminated against by popular taste.

The workings of the organization are simple. Member nations are divided into regional sections; these regional sections submit scores to the national committee which, in turn, selects scores for an international screening committee. Those



scores, surviving this elimination process are, supposedly, the best new music qualified for performance. Although in years past, living composers of prominence (Blacher, Boulez, Dallapiccola, Messaien, Nono, Stravinsky, Stockhausen) have figured heavily in programmes, current policy emphasizes lesser known composers. Festival costs are shared by member nations, the host country and a substantial contribution is made by the host city. Since 1950, German cities have most often volunteered as sponsors.

Performing organizations during the 1969 festival were the orchestras of Radio Hamburg, Cologne, Baden-Baden, and the Czech chamber group, Musica Viva Pragensis.

musical criticism Heinrich Strobel and H. H. Stuckenschmidt. Disputes between those critics were more often topics of conversation than the music heard. In the main, those disputes were polemical and concerned themselves with questions of stylistic superiority. Yet, on the whole, there was little stylistic variety. During the 1958-59 ISCM festivals which this reviewer attended, tonal, electronic, twelve-tone, serial and aleatoric musics were heard. This year, almost without exception, all music presented was of an aleatoric, improvisatory nature, with the glissando emerging as the 20th century arpeggio. Stylistically composers from certain countries followed

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suit; their music may perhaps be described as Boulez-filtered-Bartok. Music-theatre pieces and happenings à la Cage were absent. Despite innovations in technique, the father-figures present were Boulez and Stockhausen haunted by the ghost of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. Despite the completely free amalgamation of sound, most compositions offered little textural contrast. The quasi-scientific titles of pieces (*Mutations*, *Paraboles*, *Continuum*, *AMN*) many suggest the nature of the music heard.

The work which most impressed this listener was *Seven Songs for oboe, orchestra, voices and loud-speakers* by the Swiss composer-oboist Heinz Holliger. Based on poems by George Trakl, these heavily romantic songs revealed an impassioned lyricism reminiscent of a latter day Mahler. The composer was soloist, and as oboist may be without peer. Holliger's technique, intonation, tonal coloration, plus the ability to play double stops in quick succession was the sensation of the Festival. Greatest disappointment and flop of the Festival was the opera *The Devils of Loudon* by Poland's highly touted Krzysztof Penderecki. It

was generally agreed that Penderecki's style, as typified in his *Hiroshima Threnody*, was totally unsuited to the demands of the operatic stage. Heaviness and lack of musical characterization produced little more than a series of statuary, oratorio-like tableaux.

Swedish composer Lavs Johan Werle's opera *The Journey* was the festival's sleeper. It is neither musically memorable or distinctive, Werle's sense of theatre, coupled with Czech designer Joseph Svoboda's highly imaginative sets, produced an engaging operatic experience.

Low point of the festival was *Distributions For Strings* by Japanese composer Yori-Aki Matsudaira. The piece consisted of microtones and players rapping the anatomy of their instruments with their knuckles for twenty minutes. Supposedly made musically respectable by the application of Poisson's Law of Distributions, the whole was an exercise in Oriental patience.

Summed up, creative energy checked by musical conformity characterized the Festival. There is little question that to qualify, all music had to fit a preconceived stylistic mold. Invariably the nations represented sought to prove their up-to-date membership in the

common market of new music. Thus, while the concert programmes seemed richly provocative, attendance at concerts soon revealed a certain sameness and lack of compositional variety. The atmosphere of the festival was not unlike a trade fair; the order of the day, clearly enough, was to demonstrate that everyone's wares were keeping pace. A major triad, among the gimmicks and gadgetry, would have been terrifying.

There can be little doubt that musical and perhaps international politics play a leading role in a festival of this sort. The absence of Canada, Italy and United States (for inexplicable reasons) did not make for a truly international week. The most heroic performing organization in absentia may have been the University of Toronto's Opera School. Humphrey Searle's opera *Hamlet*, which was given its North American premiere by the Opera School last spring, was also performed during the Festival. Without doubt, no European university is capable of handling such a demanding work. All of this makes one wonder: Can Canada not display the variety of the world's music today? Perhaps it is once again time for another Stratford Composer's Conference.

Annual meeting of CAUSM in Quebec

by G. Welton Marquis

THE Canadian Association of University Schools of Music, a member of the Learned Societies, held its fifth annual meeting on June 9, 10 and 11, 1969 at Laval University in Quebec City. The assembled delegates elected a new executive for the next two years as follows: President, Dr. G. Welton Marquis (U.B.C.); First Vice-President, Professor Lucien Brochu (Laval); Second Vice-President, Professor Lorne Watson (Brandon); Secretary, Dr. Terence Bailey (U.B.C.); and Treasurer, Dr. George Proctor (Mt. Allison).

Relatively little is known in Canada about CAUSM but I should like to give some details of its history, philosophy and importance in a future report. I might only say in this necessarily brief report that

our Association represents twenty-six Canadian universities at the present time. Of this total, twenty-one universities are "Full Members," in that they offer a professional degree program in music, while five are "Associate Members," offering one or more courses of general music interest. At the Laval meeting, an individual membership status was established so that the CAUSM will represent university teachers of music as well as the institutions to which they belong.

One might say that the CAUSM has one basic goal: to upgrade all facets of music in Canada through the establishment of truly professional university music programs which, in turn, will train better teachers in the elementary and secondary schools, universities and

in private studios. Furthermore, CAUSM is vitally interested in strengthening the Canadian composer through an increasing emphasis on the performance of new (as well as old) music.

During the past five years the CAUSM has worked hard to establish basic philosophies that will act as guidelines in undergraduate and graduate programs of music and its decisions in these areas will be published in the near future for nationwide distribution. The CAUSM will act, therefore, as a Canadian accreditation body in university music matters so that curricular and teaching standards will continue to rise throughout our nation. This will also enable students to transfer from one university to another without penalty.

Now that the basic planning work of CAUSM has been completed at Laval (where, I might add, we were extended a most wonderful and warm hospitality by Professor Brochu and his colleagues!), the association will meet annually as a body of scholars who will read research papers and

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