

EDITORIAL: ‘TINTIN IN AMERICA!’

The Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, held in Darmstadt annually from 1946 to 1970 and every two years from 1970 to the present, have cast a long shadow over the development of new music since World War II. It was, for much of that time, impossible for a young composer to remain neutral about the nature and value of the courses. In the early years one had to contend with the fierce and unshakeable conviction of Boulez, Stockhausen, Nono, Maderna and others about the rightness of the serial path (even though Darmstadt’s concert programming not infrequently included works that would have been anathema to those composers). By the 1970s it was less and less possible for a young composer to take seriously the idea of a single, universally valid approach to composition that should be adhered to by all composers in all lands. Dissent was rife, most of it vented (not always fairly) on ‘Saint Stockhausen’, who was ejected from the teaching staff after the 1974 courses. The vision of a monomaniacal ‘Darmstadt School’, like a school of pufferfish spreading poison though the world, became in need of rethinking. In the mid-1980s Kevin Volans, in the Introduction to his book *Summer Gardeners* (Newer Music Edition, 1985) noted how depressing Darmstadt seemed, not because of its rigidity, but because there were ‘too many composers, too many ideas’. Students and professionals alike would ‘join in the fray, attacking, defending, booing, disrupting concerts, a small few arguing and discussing’.

The polemics and the heated debates raged on through the 1980s. The 1982 performance of Walter Zimmermann’s visionary cycle *Lokale Musik* was met with boos and cries of ‘neo-Nazi!’ (from the musicologist Harry Halbreich and students of the flautist Pierre-Yves Artaud), while various others, and some of the same, folded their programmes into paper aeroplanes and sent them flying in the direction of the performers. Wolfgang Rihm and Helmut Lachenmann made gestures to try to calm down the young French contingent; that having little effect, Lachenmann took his shoe off and began waving it in a threatening manner. 1982 was also the year of the visit by L’Itinéraire, the French ensemble that had been crucial to the development of spectral music less than a decade earlier. ‘L’Itinéraire in Darmstadt, it’s like Tintin in America!’ wrote Gérard Grisey in 1991. ‘Amused by the serial heroics of which Brian Ferneyhough then seemed the ultimate symbol, the brave little French set off not in pilgrimage but to conquer the Mecca of serialism. Helmut Lachenmann told me several years later: “We listened to this strange music with fascination. It sounds so good! How do they do it?”¹ (One wonders only who exactly Lachenmann meant by ‘we’.)

¹ Gérard Grisey, ‘Autoportrait avec L’Itinéraire’ (1991), in Grisey, *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions MF, 2008), p. 197.

By the 1990s such antics had begun to seem a bit silly. And it is hard to imagine such things happening at Darmstadt today. But it is not entirely clear to what one should attribute this. Young composers are certainly less oppositionally motivated, more accepting of diversity, than they used to be. The old tussles that bedevilled twentieth-century music (or gave it its lifeblood, depending on one's point of view) seem increasingly historical. The young composer Scott Mc Laughlin once memorably remarked that 'I don't need to defend my aesthetic because no-one can take it away from me'. There is now less of a need to defend than to get on and do.

TEMPO 271 offers a forum on Darmstadt 2014 with three texts, all of which are contributions by participants in the *Schreibwerkstatt*, a writing course led by Christopher Fox, Stefan Fricke and Björn Gottstein. The three pieces – by Celeste Oram, Stephanie Jones and Viola Yip – provide reflections on wider themes as well as reviews of some of the premieres. The Articles section, meanwhile, has texts by and about composers with varying connections to Darmstadt, from strong to moderate to none at all. Morton Feldman made an enormous impact on his visits in 1984 and 1986, though not always to everyone's liking; one of his seminars overran by such a long time that he inadvertently wiped the next two presentations off the programme (admittedly, both were later rescheduled). But his talks struck many participants as immensely refreshing and a welcome laxative against the excessive serialism and compositional pre-planning (and the bad food). The Paris-based pianist Ivan Ilić presents his re-translation of a 'lost' Feldman interview from the pivotal year of 1970 with the critic Françoise Esselier, recorded in Paris and until now published only in French translation; the original English-language tapes are nowhere to be found. Another significant presence around Darmstadt, first as student, then teacher, but always as provocateur, was the Calcutta-born composer Clarence Barlow, whose large ensemble piece *Im Januar am Nil* is the subject of a brilliant analytical article by German composer and scholar Tom Rojo Poller. Barlow, now teaching at the University of California, Santa Barbara, has always been a fund of new ideas and techniques in composition and a pioneer of computer music. His work has been far too little played and is far too little represented on CD; some courageous label needs to put out larger works like *Im Januar am Nil* and *Orchideae Ordinariae*, pieces that have a substantial underground reputation in the new music world but which ought to be more widely acknowledged as the extraordinary achievements they are.

Grá agus Bás (Love and Death), by the Irish composer Donnacha Dennehy, was premiered in Dublin in February 2007, and is one of the very few works I've ever seen receive a spontaneous standing ovation from a large audience. This doesn't mean that it is a tell-them-only-what-they-want-to-hear kind of piece; on the contrary, the music is often edgy, disturbing and dark, compositionally unprecedented in its mixture of traditional Irish-language singing and modern spectral techniques, as well as politically risky (given the attitudes of many traditional music purists within Ireland). In his article on the piece, Dennehy explains the research and compositional processes that informed its making, as well as the relationship of his recent music generally to the practices of spectral music. And the young Belgian scholar Christine Dysers offers an examination of the inventive, witty, and compelling *Monadologie* series by the Austrian composer Bernhard Lang, with its loops and cut-ups of fragments of the great classical literature.

Some four hundred miles away from Darmstadt, that good old English institution The Proms has recently, as I write, completed another season, and our Reviews section offers coverage of its main new music events, focussing exclusively (as we will from now on) on the premieres. That other good old English institution, the Master of the Queen's Music has a new appointee, Judith Weir, the subject of this issue's Profile. Amongst other things she discusses her early musical enthusiasms, which may seem surprisingly avant-garde for someone who, decades later, has taken up such a people-friendly position. But the apparent contradiction is surely as much in our minds as in external reality. The prospect of Tintin (read: *L'itinéraire*) setting out to conquer America (read: Darmstadt serialism) is clearly a bit ludicrous, but nowadays the conquest mentality, and the privileging of one aesthetic over another, seem no longer necessary: there is room enough for us all.



Anton Lukoszevieze, *River Sounding*, 2007, silver gelatin print