

EDITORIAL: GOING BACK

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This is, I hope, the last pandemic-oriented editorial that *TEMPO* will publish, although news from China reminds us that the risk of COVID-19 infection is a continuing challenge. Nevertheless, elsewhere in the world, social spaces are full of people again, people who trust the efficacy of multiple vaccinations, or their own resilience, people who want to share activities with other people.

One of those activities is music-making and it has been a delight to rediscover the joy of live performance, of concert-going, of shared listening. It is also clear, however, that this is not a straightforward return to the world as it was before 2020: some of us may be going back to clubs, concert halls and theatres but it is not at all predictable how many other people will be joining us. Promoters across the world have reported strange dips and spikes in attendance, with small audiences for events that they would have expected to sell well, packed houses for more esoteric shows.

I don't have any real evidence to explain this behaviour but it does seem that there are new factors affecting people's decisions as to what they want to go and see or hear. In an unashamedly unscientific poll conducted in October 2022 through this journal's Twitter account, @TempoNew Music, more respondents thought that audiences were 'less numerous' than 'as numerous as before'. On the other hand there was a small majority who believed that 'excitement' was exercising a stronger attraction than 'celebrity'. Reassuringly, this confirmed my own experience over the months since it became possible to go back to live arts events. With all the usual caveats about whether or not events have been effectively publicised, it does seem that audiences are more likely to be drawn to imaginatively curated programmes. In *Hard Times* Charles Dickens has the circus master Mr Sleary assert that 'people must be amused'; today people want their amusements to be surprising, provocative and socially engaged as well.

This should be good news for new music, and the current issue of *TEMPO* documents a variety of ways in which musicians have not only innovated but also engaged with the contemporary reality of our lived experiences. Of these the most terribly immediate is Richard Gillies' article on the music of Valentin Silvestrov, the Ukrainian composer whose music has become symbolic of his nation's defiant resistance to Russian invasion. Gillies provides a fascinating portrait of this enigmatic artist, a composer in his eighties but with an Bandcamp presence worthy of a musician many decades younger. My own article on the music of the American composer Michael Hersch examines a body of work whose expressive concerns are similarly bound up with political, social and personal trauma, although the two composers are strikingly different in the ways in which their music responds to the events that inspire it.

Articles on Berio's *Sequenza XIV* and new Australian works for the Paetzold contrabass recorder offer views on the ways in which

innovative approaches to instrumental writing can also extend music's expressive potential. Silvio Ferraz and William Teixeira reflect on the relationship between composer and performer in Berio's final *Sequenza*, a work written for the cellist Rohan de Saram that manages to find ways of translating de Saram's Kandyan drumming into polyphonic cello writing. Alana Blackburn considers new music for the Paetzold contrabass, an extraordinary instrument that sounds like a member of the recorder family yet looks like as if it was originally designed as a *Star Wars* prop.

Science fiction also plays a part in the first of two articles about recent developments in opera. Héloïse Demoz introduces Dai Fujikara's first opera, *Solaris*, and considers how Fujikara and his librettist, Saburo Teshigawara, adapted Stanislaw Lem's 1961 novel for the stage. Over its 400-year history opera has often taken familiar narratives as a starting point and Fujikara's opera follows in the wake of celebrated film versions of the novel by Andrei Tarkovsky and Stephen Soderbergh, although, as Demoz points out, there have been remarkably few operas set in outer space. Oliver Rudland turns his attention to another way in which opera companies try to connect with society, not through productions on the main stage but through projects that reach out into local communities, making work collaboratively in an attempt to give voice to their concerns.

Recent events have made Rudland's article even more relevant. He writes about four opera companies, three of which currently receive funding from Arts Council England (ACE). But in November 2022 ACE announced that it was no longer going to fund the London-based English National Opera (ENO) within its National Portfolio, nor would it continue to fund the touring activities of Glyndebourne Opera. It is impossible to know what impact these cuts will have on the community-oriented work of the Glyndebourne company but for ENO and for music provision in London this withdrawal of funding is a disaster. It is also a reputational disaster for ACE, an organisation created to be politically neutral but now revealed as an agent of the Conservative Party's so-called 'levelling up' agenda.

The issue closes with a retrospective survey of Stephen Pruslin's writing for *TEMPO* between 1965 and 1985. Pruslin died in September 2022 and was a scholar-musician of extraordinary distinction: not only was he the brilliant pianist of the original Fires of London line-up, but he was also a fine soloist; not only did he write the *TEMPO* articles about the music of Peter Maxwell Davies that established the critical discourse around that work, but he also created the verbal fireworks that are the libretto of Harrison Birtwistle's opera *Punch and Judy*. The world is a poorer place without him.