

LOUISE DUCHESNEAU AND WOLFGANG MARX (EDS), *GYÖRGY LIGETI: OF FOREIGN LANDS AND STRANGE SOUNDS* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011). ISBN 978-1-84383-550-9, xx+298pp, £45.

György Ligeti rightfully holds a place as one of the greatest post-war composers. His highly original output invites a wide variety of academic enquiry. The publication of this collection of essays, the first multi-author volume to appear about the composer in any language since his death, is therefore most welcome. The ordering of the essays is intuitive, reflecting the editors' 'unconscious desire to imitate Ligeti's own unorthodox eloquence' (xx). Throughout the book, the essays are complemented by some lesser known (but no less striking) photographs from the camera of long-time Ligeti documenter, Ines Gellrich.

When Ligeti is discussed in a pedagogical context, it is most often with regard to his students and his role as teacher; thus Friedmann Sallis's essay ("We play with the music and the music plays with us": Sándor Veress and his Student György Ligeti'), which begins the volume, opens a window on to Ligeti's teacher, Veress, who serves as a critical link between an older generation of Hungarian composers headed by Bartók and Kodály and the post-war composers Ligeti and Kurtág. Sallis initially presents a relationship of mutual respect and admiration, one which had a clear impact on Ligeti's own compositions and ideological thought, and then shows how it cooled considerably as Ligeti embraced aspects of the post-war avant-garde while Veress for the most part rejected it.

Benjamin Dwyer's essay in Chapter 2 connects two works for solo instruments that are separated by roughly four decades: the Sonata for Solo Cello (1947–53) and the Sonata for Solo Viola (1991–4). To do so, he employs the original concept of the 'transformational ostinato' (essentially, this is a process by which Ligeti varies or alters material through a series of repetitions (19)). Dwyer tracks Ligeti's use of it throughout these works, though the essay is significantly weighted in favour of the later work. One small stumbling block occurs in his explicit use of the words 'masculine' and 'feminine' to distinguish different musical phrases in the first movement of the cello sonata; it is unclear whether this problematic gender distinction is Ligeti's or his own. The essay finds much firmer footing in the discussion of the viola sonata, which methodically traces Ligeti's use of transformational ostinatos. Salient points of Dwyer's discussion include his analysis of the composer's use of microtones to suggest an 'imaginary F string' in the *Hora lungă* movement, and his tracing inspirations for the *Loop* movement to the music of Nancarrow and Machaut.

Ildikó Mándi-Fazekas and Tibor Fazekas draw connections between Ligeti and the renowned Hungarian poet Sándor Weöres in Chapter 3 ('Magicians of Sound— Seeking Ligeti's Inspiration in the Poetry of Sándor Weöres'). The literary bent of their

essay provides an interlude in an otherwise largely music-analytical section of the book. The authors illustrate throughout how Ligeti and Weöres 'revolutionized their own art form precisely because they were able to discern new (and old), free (and nonetheless determinate) forms, means, and inspiration, and to point towards lost, hidden and suppressed possibilities and itineraries' (63), and demonstrate how the two artists, each in their own individual yet analogous way, were able simultaneously to acknowledge tradition and to break with it. The unanswered questions about the depth and nature of Ligeti's personal contact with Weöres offer fertile ground for further research.

A high point of the volume is Wolfgang Marx's essay, 'The Concept of Death in György Ligeti's Œuvre', in which the author draws conceptual connections between two of Ligeti's most significant works, *Requiem* and *Le Grand Macabre*. The clear connection between the two pieces is, of course, death. Marx shows how Ligeti's preoccupation with this subject has its roots in the composer's experiences under totalitarian regimes. The discussion of alienation effects in *Le Grand Macabre*, particularly Ligeti's use of allusive musical quotations, is insightful. Perhaps the most interesting observation regards 'Ligeti's half-comical, half-tragic distorting approach to death' (82): Marx draws on the writing of Imre Kertész, who has criticized naturalistic cinematic depictions of the Holocaust, specifically *Schindler's List*, as inherently trivializing. Marx concludes that for similar reasons Ligeti eschews naturalism in his opera, opting instead for alienation, ambiguity and grotesquery.

Heinz-Otto Peitgen's chapter, 'Continuum, Chaos and Metronomes—A Fractal Friendship', while at times personal and touching, seems to suffer from an identity crisis, and perhaps its two sections should be read as separate yet related essays. The first is a discussion of Peitgen's friendship with Ligeti and of the composer's interest in and relationship to chaos theory and fractal geometry. This incorporates a layperson's overview of chaos theory and some of its real-world applications and manifestations. In the second section, Peitgen presents a more technical discussion of fractal geometry, which is perhaps not connected to Ligeti and his work as deeply as it might have been. Having said that, his discussion of what could be confusing mathematical concepts helps contextualize what was clearly a very meaningful friendship with Ligeti.

Chapter 6 adopts a different format from elsewhere in the book, consisting of a series of interviews between Marx and Simha Arom. Its title, 'A Kinship Foreseen: Ligeti and African Music', might suggest a singular focus, but in fact Marx and Arom's wide-ranging conversations open up proceedings to a number of related issues: Arom's own experience recording and transcribing African musicians, musical teleology, medieval music, eastern European musics and connections between Ligeti and other key figures of 20th-century composition, such as Stravinsky, Reich and Bartók.

The tone at times is almost stream-of-consciousness; nevertheless, a great deal of ground is covered in a short time frame, and all subjects are (eventually) brought back around to Ligeti.

To one degree or another, composers are products of their influences. A great deal can be learned, therefore, from a study of a composer's listening habits, the subject of Louise Duchesneau's chapter, "'Play it like Bill Evans": György Ligeti and Recorded Music', in which she charts many significant phases of Ligeti's life as a composer through the lens of his own collection of recorded music. Drawing not only on the collected recordings at the Paul Sacher Foundation (sadly only 242 LPs out of a much larger collection), but also on annotations in Ligeti's sketches and notebooks, Duchesneau shows that Ligeti listened widely and voraciously, allowing himself to be influenced by a broad cross-section of music. The abridged list of recordings in the Sacher Foundation which concludes the chapter begs the question of how much more could we learn from the rest of Ligeti's extant collection.

Jonathan W. Bernard's chapter, 'Rules and Regulation: Lessons from Ligeti's Compositional Sketches', considers the multitude of compositional techniques that Ligeti employed and the eclectic nature of his compositional output. Bernard begins with a general discussion of the sketch studies of post-war composers, explaining why this particular field of scholarship is so fraught, and why it has been relatively unexplored. Bernard then breaks down Ligeti's sketches into five distinct types, drawing examples from the extensive collection in the Sacher Foundation, complemented by excellently reproduced colour plates. The second half of the essay is a discussion of the Kyrie movement from the *Requiem*, showing the roles played by the various types of sketch in Ligeti's compositional process.

Continuing the theme of Ligeti's compositional sketches, Richard Steinitz contributes an extensive examination of the composer's meticulous and at times tortured process, accompanied, as in the previous chapter, by several colour plates. Steinitz also offers insights into the history and dispositions of sketches and manuscripts of many key works. After a brief look at Ligeti's process in earlier pieces, Steinitz launches into the titular topic of the essay, the 'genesis of the Piano Concerto and the Horn Trio', interweaving a study of the sketches for these works, and their broadly concurrent composition, with relevant events in Ligeti's life. One particularly interesting observation is the possibility that the composer's experience of playing classical chamber music with students may have 'accelerated his disenchantment with the avant-garde' (182) that pervades his late works. As Steinitz concludes, though, it was this disenchantment, coupled with (or despite?) a reluctance 'wholly to jettison the past' (212) that led to Ligeti's success in his later years with the general public.

Wolfgang-Andreas Schultz holds the enviable position of having been a student and protégé of Ligeti; he brings this experience to bear in a highly personal essay, 'Craft and Aesthetics—The Teacher György Ligeti'. Schultz relates the two qualities of craft and aesthetics in a series of anecdotes; while some involve the expected critiques by Ligeti of his students' work, the most interesting relate instances of the students criticizing their master's pieces. Continuing this theme, Manfred Stahnke's chapter, 'The Hamburg Composition Class', looks not only at how Ligeti sought to inculcate in his students a sense of individuality but also his complex relationship with the music of other post-war composers. Stahnke then shows how concepts that Ligeti introduced in his classes are borne out in the Ligeti's own Piano Études, with a particular focus on *Vertige*.

The basic nature of the relationship between Ligeti's music and Stanley Kubrick's films is well known. Despite this familiarity, Ciarán Crilly's essay, 'The Bigger Picture: Ligeti's Music and the Films of Stanley Kubrick', provides some new perspectives on the topic, drawing on a thorough understanding both of the specifics of this relationship and the theory and history of film music. The result is a chapter that provides as much insight into the creative genius of Kubrick as it does that of Ligeti.

The final chapter in this volume, Paul Griffiths's 'Invented Homelands: Ligeti's Orchestras', raises from the outset a question very pertinent to contemporary composers: 'Is there such a thing, in the music of the late 20th century and early 21st, as "the orchestra"?' (257) In citing various examples of 'the symphony' from Stravinsky's oeuvre, though, Griffiths makes one small misstep: *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* was not so titled because it is 'a symphony' but rather because Stravinsky was evoking the Greek connotation of 'sounding together'. However, his tabulation of instrumentation in Ligeti's 'orchestral' works is helpful, demonstrating as it does the considerable variety of the composer's ensembles. Also revealing is a table that shows how the statistics of performances of Ligeti's works compare with those for other significant 20th-century works, as it shows just how deeply his orchestral works had penetrated the international repertoire by the time of his death. There is a telling, though unfortunately brief, mention of the possibly independent development of 'sound mass' by Ligeti and Xenakis, which suggests further study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the piano and violin concertos, showing the richness of Ligeti's 'invented homelands'.

In the conclusion to their preface, Duchesneau and Marx state that they wish to present 'a selection of informative as well as, in the highest sense, entertaining essays' (xx). While these essays perhaps skew more towards a learned audience, the editors' hopes have for the most part been fulfilled. Aside from what is unfortunately very poor binding, which frequently released pages, and some small editorial oversights,

L. Duchesneau and W. Marx (eds), *György Ligeti: Of Foreign Lands and Strange Sounds*

this is a well presented and meticulously edited volume, and is a significant contribution to Ligeti scholarship.

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