
Letters to the Editor

From Lady Walton

I refer to Mr. David C.F. Wright's letter published in a recent issue (*Tempo* 172).

I am obliged to Mr. Wright for his kind remarks about me, but I fear he may have got hold of the wrong end of more than one stick.

First: my husband most certainly did not 'hate' Elgar's music. Where is the evidence for this? Naturally he did not want to be thought of as Elgar's 'successor', since this would place an unwelcome burden on his shoulders. But nobody who knows anything about Walton's music can fail to hear the genealogical connection.

Second: the Humphrey Searle affair: My husband never took serial music seriously (no pun intended), and his 'lessons' with Searle were not music lessons in the accepted sense. He felt he ought to find out something technically about serialism (as he used to say: how they used their slide-rules); having found out what he needed to know, he decided he did not need to know it. If we hear greater 'clarity' and 'originality' in the texture of Walton's post-1950 music we need attribute this only to his own natural development and not to any outside influence, least of all (with all respect) to Humphrey Searle's.

La Mortella
80075 Forio
Isola d'Ischia (Napoli)
Italy

From Patricia Shaw

I, along with other Australian readers, was delighted that *Tempo* recently chose to profile an important Australian composer, Peter Sculthorpe (September 1989 issue). However, I was concerned about the author's misleading statements on Sculthorpe's use of Aboriginal melodies.

On page 15 of the issue, David Matthews discusses Sculthorpe's use of Aboriginal titles and inspiration in some early works such as the

Irkanda series, *The Loneliness of Bunjil* and *Rites of Passage*. He then states 'but [Sculthorpe] had long been hesitant about using Aboriginal melodies, feeling it impertinent.' So far so good. But he then goes on to remark: 'After *Rites of Passage* [1972-4], he felt more confident about coming to terms with *his own native tradition*' (my emphasis). The implication is either:

a) that Sculthorpe is an Aborigine, which he is not; or

b) that a non-Aboriginal Australian can claim Aboriginal culture as 'his own native tradition', which one certainly may not. It is totally unacceptable for non-Aboriginals to usurp culture as they have already usurped land.

Aborigines are, quite rightly, cynical and angry about those who miraculously discover their Aboriginal ancestors when it becomes financially or politically expedient, or those who capitalize on the popularity of Aboriginal art. Some painters, especially, have been guilty of gross impertinence, opportunism, exploitation in their brazen copying of Aboriginal painting, and of insensitivity in ignoring the spiritual, cultural and religious connotations of painting styles and techniques.

So far, this has not been a problem in music. Non-Aboriginal composers, even those trying to cultivate an 'Australian' sound, have never claimed to be part Aboriginal, nor tried to imitate Aboriginal music. What composers like Sculthorpe and Moya Henderson do is to draw on the strong identification with place in Aboriginal culture and employ some characteristics of Aboriginal music, for example: intervals; phrase structure; rhythmic patterns; repetitiveness; prolonged, stable tonal centres (see further in Michael Hannan, *Peter Sculthorpe: the man and his music*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press pp.28ff). Their music has far more in common with contemporary European and American art music, however.

As far as I know, no Aborigines have been offended by the practices of Sculthorpe, Henderson and other similar composers, as they have been by the copying of painting styles by visual artists and the claiming of Aboriginal status by those wishing for the social security

and health benefits, and special educational opportunities offered to arguably the most disadvantaged and most wronged group in Australian society. Also, I know of no Aborigine currently writing art music, although there are several successful and popular Aboriginal pop groups and bands.

In the interests of clarity and accuracy, this matter should be drawn to the attention of the author of the article and to *Tempo* readers throughout the world. Those who know nothing about Australian society and culture are liable to take the article's misleading statement at face value, and form an incorrect opinion

of both. The fact is that non-Aboriginal Australians have no native tradition, since we can claim neither that of our own country nor that of our parent country. This has been a central problem of composition in the 20th century, and one which all composers have had to contend with, whatever their solution to it might be.

P.O. Box 4188
Melbourne University
Victoria 3052
Australia

News Section

Composers

JOHN ADAMS. *Nixon in China* (Australian première)—25 September/Melbourne International Festival/c. Richard Mills.

DOMINICK ARGENTO. *The Aspern Papers* (European première)—16 June/Kassel, Staatstheater/c. Jeanpierre Faber. *A Toccata of Galuppi's* (première)—24 July/Sante Fe, New Mexico/Sante Fe Desert Corale.

SIMON BAINBRIDGE. *Double Concerto* (première)—16 July/Cheltenham Festival/Nicholas Daniel (ob), Joy Farrall (cl), City of London Sinfonietta c. Richard Hickox.

SANDOR BALASSA. *Little Grape and Little Fish* (UK première)—3 June/London, Mermaid Theatre/Orchestra of the 20th Century c. Lionel Friend.

RICHARD BARRETT. *I open and close* (German première)—22 July/Darmstadt Ferienkurse/Arditti Quartet.

GERALD BARRY. *The Intelligence Park* (première)—6 July/London, Almeida Festival/Opera Factory dir. David Fielding, c. Robert Houlihan.

JUDITH BINGHAM. *Dove Cottage by Moonlight* (première)—11 July/Abingdon, Summer Festival of British Music/Stephen Coombs, Christopher Scott (pnos).

ELLIOTT CARTER. *Violin Concerto* (European première)—17 June/Saarbrücken/Ole Böhn, Saarbrücken RO c. Heinz Holliger. Carter has recently accepted a commission from Holliger for a new work for piano and wind instruments. *Con Leggerezza Pensosa - Omaggio a Italo Calvino* for clarinet, violin and cello (première)—29 September/Latina, Italy/Italian Institute for Musical Research.

JOHN CASKEN. *The Land of Spices* (première)—22 June/Durham/Hatfield College Choir c. Gerald Cornelius.

CHRIS DENCH. *Funk* (première)—7 July/London, Almeida Festival/Accroche Note.

FRANK DENYER. *A Monkey's Paw* (German première)—21 July/Darmstadt Ferienkurse/Irvine Arditti (vln), New London Choir and Percussion Soloists, c. James Wood.

ANTAL DORATI (d.1988). *Herbst* (première)—26 August/Gstaad Festival/John Shirley-Quirk (bar), c. Yehudi Menuhin.

JACOB DRUCKMAN. *Nor Spell* (première)—19 July/Aspen, Colorado, Jan DeGaetani Memorial Concert/Milagro Vargas (mezzo-sop). *Nor Spell nor Charm* (NY première)—13 October/Carnegie Hall/Orpheus Chamber Orchestra.

MICHAEL FINNISSY. *Obrecht* (première)—17 July/Cambridge Festival/Fine Arts Brass Ensemble.

ERICA FOX. *Letters and Notes* (première)—4 July/London, Almeida Festival/Gemini.

BERTHOLD GOLDSCHMIDT. *Ciaccona Sinfonica* (UK première)—10 October/Birmingham/CBSO c. Simon Rattle; London première 18 October/Barbican.

HENRYK MIKOLAJ GÓRECKI. *O Domina Nostra* (première)—7 July/London, Almeida Festival/Patricia Forbes (sop), Christopher Bowers-Broadbent (organ). *Variations*, op.4; *Intermezzo*; *For You, Anne-Lill* (premières) 3-4 August/Lerchenborg Musikdag, Denmark/Anne-Lill Ree (fl), Krzyszof Bakowski (vln), Jaroslaw Kapuscinski and Rosalind Bevan (pnos). *Totus Tuus* (US première)—26 October/Cathedral of St. Paul, St. Paul, Minesota/Plymouth Music c. Philip Brunelle.

SOFIA GUBAIDULINA. *Hommage à T.S. Eliot* (Australian première)—Brisbane Musica Nova/Merlyn Quaife (sop), University of Queensland Sinfonietta c. David Porcellijn.

JONATHAN HARVEY. *Cello Concerto* (première)—9 June/Parma/Frances Marie Uitti, Sinfonica Toscanini. *Ritual Melodies* (première)—11 July/France, Saintes Festival/Musique Oblique c. George Benjamin.