
Letters to the Editor

From Robin Freeman

Elfriede Witte has written to me to correct a point in my review of Volker Heyn's *Quetsch* (*Tempo* 185, June 1993). I explain the title as a kind of schnapps made from plums in Alsace. This is true as far as it goes, but the primary reference is to *Quetschkasten* or *Quetschkommode* which are equivalent to 'squeeze box' in English. My apologies to Volker Heyn, who I should have rung up before, not after, writing about his piece.

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From Gary Brain

In his letter to the Editor (*Tempo* 187) John Mansfield Thomson defends his *Oxford History of New Zealand Music* against some of the criticisms in my review (*Tempo* 185; modestly, he ignores the praise). He seems to have failed to understand my principal objection, his neglect of those New Zealand musicians who over the last few decades have done so much to promote contemporary music in their home country. Surely a history of New Zealand music must include this. Mr. Mansfield Thomson assumes that my objection to his silence over Music Players 70 is because I was associated with it. Not so: Music Players 70 was an elastic group of from four to 25 players, who put an enormous amount of (often miserably paid) time into travelling music – by composers such as Berio, Haubenstock-Ramati, Birtwistle, Stockhausen, Thärichen, Takemitsu, Crumb, Foss, Varèse, Carter, Messiaen and a host more – the 5,000-kilometre length of New Zealand and further afield. Those ten years of virtually unparalleled effort on behalf of music hardly heard anywhere deserved a mention in the book: not for my sake, which is what Mr. Mansfield

Thomson rather mischievously suggests, but in recognition of the sheer sweat that the musicians put into it and the striking amount of good they did for modern music (I ignore the many commissions from New Zealand composers that were instigated – and paid for – by the group). There's no avenging egotism in my review, *pace* Mr. Mansfield Thomson, just a desire to see justice done; and if William Southgate can forgive him, so can I.

More importantly, this letter gives me chance to correct a point of fact in *Tempo* 187. The News Section billed my conducting of Harold Truscott's Symphony in E minor in Walbrzych (Poland) on 12 November as the first complete performance of the work. In the event, that turned out not to be true, since bad copying of the parts lost too much time to allow us to rehearse the first movement. The first full performance took place in recording sessions for Marco Polo in Dublin, on 15-17 December, with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland. That may have made symphonic history, since the first performance of the final movement had been at a student concert at Huddersfield (where Truscott taught) in 1961: I know of no other symphony where each movement has been premiered in a different country. Had matters been otherwise, Truscott might have been recognized decades ago as one of the finest composers Britain has yet produced. The deeply moving *Elegy* for Strings, one of the works that will accompany the Symphony on the CD, will make the point even more forcefully: it is nothing less than the greatest piece in the English tradition of music for strings since the Tallis *Fantasia*. Quite why Harold Truscott kept it unannounced in his cupboard for half-a-century may turn out to be one of music's best kept secrets.

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