

CORNELIUS CARDEW (1936 - 1981)

CORNELIUS CARDEW was killed in a road accident last December. Though he had translated several German articles for recent issues of *TEMPO*, he himself contributed only once, and that twenty years ago: his article 'Notation—Interpretation, Etc.'* remains an important document of its times and of the quality of extreme commitment which Cardew (who had recently been closely involved in the composition of Stockhausen's *Carré*) brought to everything he did. Through the various developments and differing ideological stances of his career, it was this quality of commitment which made him such an inspiring figure to so many people concerned with wholly different kinds of 'New Music' throughout the 1960's and 1970's.

Susan Bradshaw, who had known Cardew as a fellow student at the R.A.M., gave the première, with John Tilbury, in March 1981 of his last work: *Boo-lavogue* for two pianos, an example of the highly politicized music that had become his prime concern. Howard Skempton was a pupil of Cardew in the 1960's, and a representative of that generation of young English composer-performers who were involved with him in the extraordinary range of improvisational activities centred on the *Scratch Orchestra*. Kurt Schwertsik knew Cardew well, and was deeply influenced by him, during his early years in Cologne.

WHEN I first met Cornelius he was 17: the most impressively single-minded person I'd come across, his ability to concentrate one hundred per cent on whatever interested him at the moment was extraordinary. And this characteristic would seem to have persisted through the many apparently conflicting phases of his all-too-short life. The devotion to every one of his espoused causes was total to the point of blindness to all other considerations. Meeting him again last March, after a gap of some years, he seemed hardly to have changed. Yet he showed signs of an uncharacteristically mocking attitude towards the new seriousness of his latest work, which conveyed more than a little sadness at having suppressed his own talents (as pianist as well as composer) for so long. What a tragic pity that he should have been torn away just as he appeared to be on the verge of returning to the world of a more self-demanding kind of music-making. . . .

Susan Bradshaw

* *TEMPO* 58 (Summer 1961) pp. 21-33. Copies of this issue are still available, price £1.00.

A Tribute to Cornelius Cardew

I have been re-reading *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*.¹ After seven years, I find it no less powerful, if less disturbing (the passage of time and the tragedy of Cardew's death have drawn its sting). The book contains contributions from Rod Eley and John Tilbury. Eley refers to Cardew as 'a focal point' for many people with similar interests and attitudes. It was this quality of leadership that drew me to London in 1967 to study with Cornelius. He was an associate, and principal advocate, of many of my favourite composers: Stockhausen, Cage, Feldman, and LaMonte Young. Of his own music, I knew *Octet '61*, *February Pieces*, and *Four Works*. I recognized his intelligence, virtuosity, and practicality. Later, at first hand, I appreciated his humility and integrity—the humility and integrity of a great artist; a complete musician, reminding me in that respect of Britten, but of nobody else.

I recall his devotion at that time to the music of Bach, Mahler, and Webern. And with Webern, I am reminded of the principle of necessity. In *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*, Cardew quotes Engels: 'Freedom is the appreciation of necessity'.² During the last ten years, he became increasingly aware of the need to abandon the role of the bourgeois composer. In 1972, he exhorted Cage to 'shuffle his feet over to the side of the people and learn to write music which will serve their struggles'.³ It is now clear that Cornelius himself succeeded in this aim—no mean achievement. Unlike his critics, he realized that 'the business of changing one's class stand, remoulding one's world outlook, is no easy thing, no "lover's bed"', but a long a complicated process of struggle'.⁴

Howard Skempton

. . . for CORNELIUS CARDEW

At a concert in Vienna in the 1950's where I'd conducted some Cage, a quiet-spoken English composer played his 2-piano pieces. I remember him rehearsing them very beautifully. But for some reason we didn't get to meet.

The very important part he played in my life began shortly after my arrival in Cologne in '59. I was feeling somehow betrayed by the social graces of my musical heroes in that capital of New Music. I believed that an artist should live outside society altogether, or at least on its outermost fringes: as a hermit or clochard.

I worked quite hard to achieve that.

One day in the Hohestrasse I caught sight of someone who had succeeded without trying. His loping walk, his dress, his entire demcanour—all different! Unmistakably, at whatever distance, Cornelius Cardew. He never needed to avoid normal patterns of behaviour; he simply never came within sight of them. For

1 1974, Latimer New Dimensions Ltd.

2 p.113.

3 'John Cage; Ghost or Monster', *The Listener*, 4 May 1972; reprinted in *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* (p.40).

4 *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*, p.102.

instance: seeing a grubby old coat draped over a parked motorcycle to protect it from the Cologne weather, he took off his own coat, compared the two, meditated for a moment, and swapped them over.

* * *

So much for appearances.

More important: in Cornelius I found for the first time someone who felt as I did about the New Music, and helped me develop a critique of it. I was greatly impressed by the way he managed to make ideas workable by radical simplification rather than by compromises. He never tried—as I was still trying—to reconcile the demands of ‘The New’ with the desire to change them; he just wasn’t concerned to please respected authorities as well as pleasing, and being, himself. He was free.

Musical ‘possibilities’ that I was still nebulously pondering he had already realized according to a highly original and practical method (for instance, in *Autumn* ’60).

This went on for some time. (I grew up slowly).

When eventually I recognized what it was that I myself had been driving at, the clarity of his own musical formulations still impressed me as outstanding—(e.g. *Treatise, The Great Learning or Piano Album* 1973).

* * *

So much for his music.

But most important for me to remember today: his serenity, and, humanly, his sense of the right time to do things. Long before anyone else, he understood the use of a juke-box. Already in ’59 or ’60 he knew how to cheer up a gloomy group simply by selecting the right song. From Presley to jazz, he knew it all. He once said to me that his real models were there, and not in ‘serious’ music at all.

His serenity: simply to be with him always brought calm and reassurance. Easter ’69 . . . sensing that I was hopelessly depressed and nervous he took me on a little picnic with his family; and there I sat, happy as a clam.

We haven’t seen each other for quite some time, but planned to get together soon. That will have to wait now.

Kurt Schwertsik

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