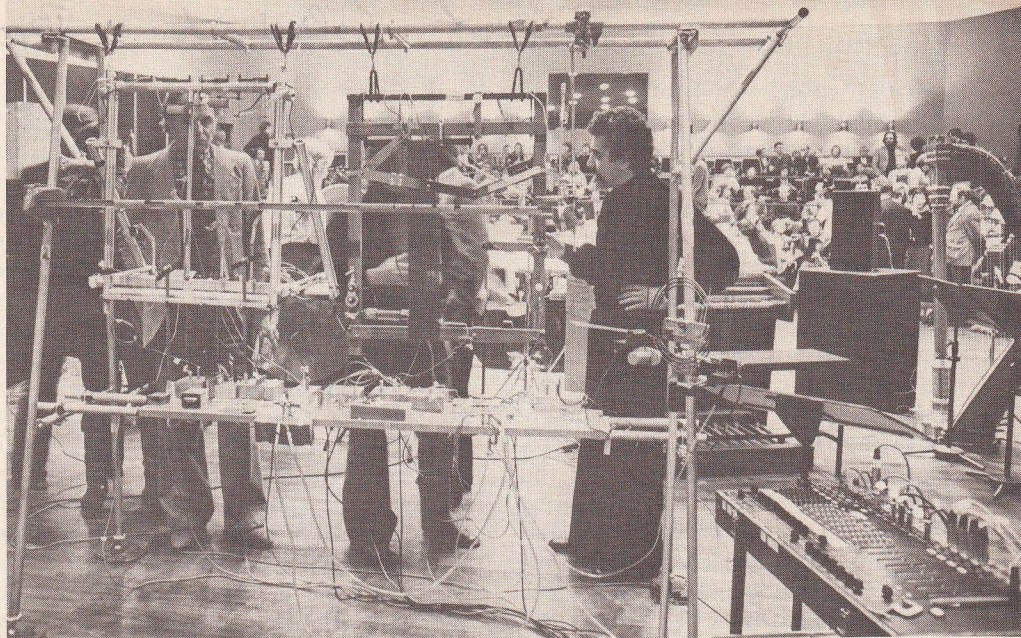


ELLIOTT SCHWARTZ  
Bonn



Mario Bertoncini explains his "wind instruments"

## ISCM WORLD MUSIC DAYS

The "environment" is very much present

**T**WO IMPORTANT areas of concern within the new-music scene were very much in evidence at the 1977 International Society for Contemporary Music festival, held this spring in the West German capital city of Bonn. One was a more flexible approach to performance situations and performance space; the other was an increasingly prevalent approach to "form" as the unfolding of a "process." The emphasis upon novel performance formats, in particular, was encouraged by the organizers of the ISCM World Music Days, and composers wishing to participate in the festival were asked to submit scores or project proposals for environmental pieces, pieces that would make use of the city of Bonn itself, or compositions for very young or amateur performers, if they wished, as an alternative to the traditional categories of orchestral music, chamber music and the like. Quite a few composers from various parts of the world did, in fact, enter works in these less-than-traditional perform-

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ance categories. Those actually selected by the international jury represented a fascinating cross-section of international activity: France, Switzerland, Japan, Britain, Romania, and the United States. The ISCM festival planners wisely chose to schedule performances of these environmental, urban, or amateur works throughout the week-long festival period (May 14 through 21), thus ensuring that they would become an integral—perhaps, in fact, the predominant—factor within the total program.

### A single premise

The relatively large number of process compositions heard at the festival was not the result of any such deliberate planning on the jury's part, but rather a general indication of the similar ways in which composers around the globe happen to be working. There were a number of pieces devoted to the working-out, either directly or subtly, of a single premise: the strong, sharply etched *Soul* for bass clarinet by Maurice Weddington (U.S.A.), in which a single virtuoso performer establishes

a polyphony of lines and timbres, gradually moving from the domain of pitch to that of noise, ritual, and theater; or the stunning *Ach Golgatha!* of Karel Goeyvaerts (Belgium), in which harp, organ, and percussion blend into a sustained, seemingly static (but actually ever-changing) "ostinato pianissimo," evocative of Reich, Riley, and Cowell. Klaus Huber (Switzerland) explored a vast series of permutations of a single subject—textural, rhythmic, always quixotic and striking—in his aptly named *Transpositio ad Infinitum* for solo cello; or, for a much more minimal sort of process-form, there was *The Sinking of the Titanic* by Gavin Bryars (England), reiterating a simple hymn tune, played by string orchestra overlaid against echoes of itself on tape, for what seemed like an eternity, the gradual blurring of contours serving to remind the listener, in a disarmingly effective way, that the *Titanic's* band kept playing when that great ship went down. The *Wind/Tornado/Cyclone Piece* of Joan La Barbara (U.S.A.), submitted to the ISCM as an environment but performed as an electronic piece in a formal concert situation, was as direct an attempt at



tone-painting, in its own way, as the Bryars ship sinking: La Barbara's shifting of taped sounds among four loudspeakers, growing from a whisper to near-deafening volume, eventually swirling about the hall with great speed, was a provocative, and at least partially successful, attempt to place the listener in the "eye" of an aural hurricane.

The more overtly environmental works included a tape collage by Tim Souster (England) played in the foyer of Bonn's large Beethoven Hall be-

ment would, in his view, be capable of realizing a variety of musical styles and events—but, rather, a "sound sculpture" especially built to play only one sort of piece. Presumably another sculpture would be needed for a different work. In that sense, then, Bertoncini's activity is more akin to environment and process than one might at first suspect. There is, of course, a close link between instrument-building as a compositional activity and an interest in process as form, to the degree that the new mu-

ell Cross, entitled *Free Spectral Range IV*, was another tight wedding of esthetic concept and unique instrument, in this case a multicolor visual projection system (using lasers as light sources) that provides direct analogs for electronic sounds.

Two final instances of environmental music—instances that are distinctly urban as well—must be mentioned: both are the work of American composers, and both involved performance over a wide area of downtown Bonn. One of the



Bonn children perform Hugh Davies' work, on instruments they built themselves.

fore, between, and after performances of orchestral music within the hall itself, and a live-electronic transformation of environmental signals (Bonn city sounds, random radio broadcasts, Telstar beamings from the sky above the German Rhineland) by Yale University students Richard Feit and Richard Shaer, that functioned not only as environment but urban music as well, since the sources being processed were those of the Bonn area.

A bit harder to define, perhaps, was a fascinating work by Mario Bertoncini (Italy) entitled *Chanson pour instruments à vent*; the "wind instruments" in the title are actually part of a large assemblage of wires, tubing, and potentiometers, capable of producing hauntingly lovely sustained gestures in a variety of timbres. It's interesting to report that Bertoncini considers his performing resource not a new "instrument"—such an instru-

sical gestures one envisions and the new instruments one builds are twin aspects of a single creative thrust: each aspect is, in effect, a demonstration of the other. This was apparent not only in the Bertoncini and the Shaer-Feit collaboration, but in the experimental work for children by Hugh Davies (England), not so much a finished piece as the final demonstration of a project which had begun with a group of children building their own instruments (out of bottles, cans, wires, wood), then discovering what sorts of sounds resided within their instruments, eventually learning about group gestures, soloistic ones, and traffic signals to coordinate them all. The Davies work, conducted by the composer along the lines of an Earle Brown "mobile," was easily the most successful of the ISCM festival projects for children. A collaborative work by Americans David Tudor, Carson Jeffries, and Low-

pieces, *Drive-In Music(s)* by Max Neuhaus, could not be performed—a real pity, because it would have been a novel experience. Neuhaus' concept, which has been realized a few times in this country [see *MUSICAL AMERICA*, February 1975], was to have sound sources installed along various streets and boulevards, to be heard on one's car radio while driving along a series of predetermined but flexible routes. (The obstacles to the Bonn performance, ironically, were not physical or technological, but legal ones concerning the broadcast rights.) The other piece, by Pauline Oliveros, was awarded the city of Bonn's 1977 Beethoven Prize, a most appropriate gesture in view of her use of Beethoven (not only the music, but the spoken name and visual images of the man) in much of her earlier music. Her winning piece, entitled *Bonn Fire*, involved a subtle alteration of the ev-

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Richard Wagner

who have done a superb job in the layout of the book, using *art nouveau* designs. P.J.S.

WAGNER AND HIS WORLD, by Charles Osborne. 128 pages. Scribner's, \$8.95.

THIS picture-and-text book (in that order) duplicates a number of the illustrations of the Oxford University Press volume reviewed here in January 1976, and as such might appeal to those who do not want to spend the \$37.50 the other one costs. But it cannot be recommended, since Charles Osborne's text is the work of an author basically utterly out of sympathy with the composer. Osborne, to be sure, makes the requisite bows to Wagner's greatest works (e.g., *Tristan*), but the phrase "damning with faint praise" has never been given a better elucidation. All of Wagner's very real faults are relentlessly paraded; every possible "reading-in" of them to his work is made. Not surprisingly, Osborne relies on Robert Gutman's revisionary biography for many of his ideas (particularly about *Parsifal*): Osborne's evaluation is, "to some temperaments, *Parsifal* is an uncommonly persuasive work of art"—and implicit is that he doesn't think much of those temperaments. But Gutman's provocative book was written by someone as deeply attracted by Wagner as he was repelled by certain of his ideas; the message of Osborne's writing is that by and large Wagner repels him. If you believe the worst of the composer, this book will appeal. But if you believe the worst, why would you want to spend money on a book about Wagner? P.J.S.

## NEW MUSIC CIRCLE

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extremely successful, as was the joint effort with the St. Louis Opera Theater in sponsoring Grace Bumbry's first solo recital in St. Louis. And the Tenth Anniversary "Catalytic Celebration" in 1970—re-emphasizing the NMC's venturesome spirit and commitment to all possible new directions—received acclaim in the national press.

### Something for everyone

In cooperation with Young Audiences and the Missouri State Arts Council, the NMC has presented numerous high school and community concerts in the St. Louis metropolitan area. Those who attended the 1973 July 4 St. Louis Mississippi River Bicentennial celebrations heard a concert of twentieth century music performed by the U.S. Army Band and Chorus; the Story Theater by the Loretto-Hilton Repertory Company, with original music under the direction of Robert Wykes; Ragtime Concerts; and a concert of American music performed by the St. Louis Symphony. In January of 1974, the NMC spawned the plans for "Bicentennial Horizons of American Music and the Performing Arts" (BHAM), a national performing arts festival held in St. Louis in the summer of 1976.

During the 1976-77 season, pianist Easley Blackwood presented a concert of works by Berg, Sessions, Webern, Wuorinen, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky. At post-concert forums, NMC members talk with the composer and/or performers, with discussion ranging from general observations to specific musicological queries.

In the history of music, contemporary composition has held an important place—only in recent times has performance repertoire included such a large portion of music from previous periods. Communities and educational institutions can be of significant service to the contemporary musician—and to the public—by including a fair share of recent music in their concerts and festivals. The New Music Circle, now in its sixteenth consecutive season without a deficit, serves as a positive example of what can be done for contemporary music and for the community. △

## ISCM

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everyday life of the town center, imperceptibly transforming it into something surreal, extending over a week's time and ending with a real bonfire in the large market square on the evening of the final day. It's impossible to witness a "complete" performance of a work such as this; I can only say that I observed a number of Oliveros-inspired events over an extended period of days—musicians performing in the square but not making any sound, pickets marching about with blank signs, a man undressing and applying make-up to his face in very slow motion—with great delight. [For more on *Bonn Fire*, see New Music, page MA-11.]

### More conventional settings

It would be a mistake to assume that the 1977 ISCM festival was entirely environmental: a number of traditional concerts, held indoors in the usual places, were organized as well. Among the pieces played at these were a particularly memorable work for five pianists by the Dane Karl Aage Rasmussen, entitled *Gensklank* and utilizing fragments and resonances emerging from a Mahler fragment; a very cogent, strong Trio by Mario Lavista (Mexico); and an eruptive, compellingly harsh work for winds (activating amplified drums) by Michael Levinas of France. There were also two disturbing orchestral works featured. One was by Peter Schat (Netherlands), and puzzled me because it seems to be a stylistic regression on the part of a composer who has always been one of Europe's most imaginative. His *Houdini* Symphony, based on material from his new Houdini opera, is harmonically rich in a lush, neo-Mahler (or is it Scriabin?) sort of way, and it is simply not convincing on first hearing. The other disturbing score was a wildly eclectic pastiche of styles (in fact, what I might have expected of Schat), intentionally disrupting time-form sense, by the German Nicolaus Huber. The work, *Gesperster*, utilizing a speaker-singer and electronic tape in spasmodic, fragmented, unpredictable ways, toys with the listener's preconceptions and anticipations at every turn; it virtually demands to be heard again. △



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