



EDITORIAL: SOMETHING ELSE

Christopher Fox

For most people music is, I suspect, always about something. Most music is there to serve a function, as we celebrate, mourn, dance, worship, fall in and out of love. In this respect the concert music of the Western classical tradition is an outlier, with its preludes and fugues, sonatas and symphonies, all of them resolutely refusing to admit to any purpose beyond the working out of their own formal processes; music is itself and that's quite enough already.

But the something else of music is something we should talk about and it is, in at least five different ways, the subject of the articles in this issue of *TEMPO*. Aaron Moorehouse addresses it head on. 'What has your music done?' he asked every composer listed in the British Composer Index of the British Music Collection and in his article 'Where are we Going? and What have we Done?' he takes composers' responses as a starting point for an account of his own recent compositional practice. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, many of his respondents questioned whether the 'done' in 'what has your music done?' was the best word from which to begin a discussion of their work. Moorehouse suggests that most composers find it much easier to talk about work in progress, about what they are doing now, than about how previous works made an impact in the world. In Moorehouse's own recent work, however, it is more straightforward: he has been writing music for individual people, creating text and graphic scores that are intended to have a positive psychosocial impact on the children for whom they are written.

Such specificity is unusual. Nevertheless there are many composers who are prepared to admit to an extramusical something else that may help listeners enjoy their work. Christian Carey's account of narratology in Elliott Carter's String Quartet No. 5, his last work for this instrumental medium, begins from just such an admission in the composer's own programme note. Carter explains that the music grew out of the familiar experience of sitting in rehearsals and listening to individual musicians trying out passages from the music that they will soon play in earnest. This becomes part of the narrative of the quartet, in which fragments of music are introduced and gradually coalesce into more developed statements. Just in case this might seem too esoteric, Carter points out that it is a narrative that echoes the 'experience of forming, ordering, focussing, and bringing to fruition' our thoughts and ideas.

Pascal Dusapin is another composer who is prepared to share clues about possible meanings for his music but, as Thomas Metcalf explains, this does not necessarily make writing about Dusapin's music less challenging. Dusapin often includes images or texts, sometimes both, at the front of his scores, but he has also described the composition of musical works as a 'theoretical act'. Are the diagrams and literary quotations just 'false trails', asks Metcalf, or do they enable us to find significances in Dusapin's musical imagery that take us into other territories. What does catastrophe theory sound

like and can we hear it in Dusapin's Piano Études? When is a rocking motif in his String Quartet No. 4 just a pitch oscillation and when is it also the rocking chair in which Samuel Beckett's Murphy sits?

Such questions are easier to answer, perhaps, when the work in question is an opera, yet, in her article on recent operas by Chaya Czernowin, Sarit Shley Zondiner is confronted by a composer who has said that she wants 'to hear a voice singing without pathos', a composer who often uses vocal ensembles, rather than single singers, to represent her characters. In most operas embodiment is the most effective strategy for convincing us that we are watching a human, rather than musical, drama, but Zondiner's analyses of passages from *Heart Chamber* (2015–16) and *Infinite Now* (2017–19) demonstrate how Czernowin's extraordinary re-casting of voices in her operas melds 'traditional dichotomies, such as culture/nature, body/mind and subject/object' while still 'manifesting the corporeal'.

Czernowin's operas may invoke more complex relationships between voice, body and representation but they are works in which the voice remains corporeal. In contrast, Andrew Chen's article 'Voice without Speaker: Human Speech Synthesis in Acoustic Instrumental Contexts' considers ways of creating voices that, if not literally disembodied, nevertheless do not originate within a body. As is the case in Adrian Moorehouse's article, Chen's argument develops out of his own creative practice and a method that he is developing that uses acoustic instruments to synthesise the pitch and noise content of speech, but along the way he also considers a fascinating series of precedents, paying particular attention to works by Clarence Barlow, Peter Ablinger and Jonathan Harvey. Once again, it is the something else of this music – the composers' intentions of making acoustic instruments talk – that seems to be important.

Perhaps it is inconsistent, then, to conclude this issue of *TEMPO* with a profile of a composer whose music is determinedly focused on what she calls 'harmonic space'. Catherine Lamb is an American-born, Berlin-based composer and viola player whose work explores a 'true-to-acoustics pathway of musical development', producing music whose only something else is the human agency that brings it into existence. Or perhaps not; after all, it is human agency that is the most significant something else of every musical experience.