
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From Mark R. Taylor

In response to the letter from Styra Avins (*Tempo*, January 2003), I am grateful to stand so fascinatingly corrected with regard to the (poorly documented?) aspect of US cultural history in question.

Whatever my shortcomings, though, I can hardly be accused of ignorance of the work of Japanese composers of the period: perhaps if the writer had herself ‘dipped somewhat more deeply into realities’ on *this* side of the Pond, she might have been aware that I featured the music of Toshi Ichianagi in a festival I ran three years ago – an attempt to promulgate awareness of it which was more an act of faith and labour of love than get-rich-quick scheme, I assure you.

In any case, there exist, incidentally, detailed and seemingly authoritative accounts of the origins of Fluxus which are significantly at variance with the recollections of Ms Avins. Rosella Ghezzi’s, e.g., in L. Vergine (ed.), *Art On The Cutting Edge* (Skira Books, 2001):

In September 1962, the first “Fluxus Internationale Festspiele Neuer Musik” took place at the Städtisches Museum in Wiesbaden. The organiser was George Macinnas, an architect of Lithuanian origin, who had moved to Europe in ’61 after having closed his A.G. Gallery in New York ... The Wiesbaden Festival followed a series of informal concerts held at the end of the Fifties in New York in Yoko Ono’s loft.

While technically speaking I suppose this doesn’t directly contradict Ms Avins’s assertion that ‘Fluxus ... was formed without reference to Yoko’, it seems natural (at least to one far too young to have first-hand knowledge of these events) to construe Ghezzi as implying Ono’s involvement, does it not?

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From John Ceander Mitchell

A Response to Just and Unjust Criticism – and an Appeal

In Volume 57/223 of *Tempo*, my book, *A Comprehensive Biography of Gustav Holst*, was critiqued by Raymond Head. Not being adverse to

justifiable criticism, I can accept much of what he has to say. There are indeed some editorial problems. The index, in particular, was originally perfect, but had to be hastily reconstructed at the last minute due to a publication design change. It is also true that there are a number of misspellings—largely due to some faulty guesswork from partially legible manuscripts – but not nearly as many as implied by the critique, especially when one considers the length of the work. And yes, I admit that I unintentionally included a misrepresentation of the physical Egdon Heath in Wareham. These items will, hopefully, be addressed and corrected in later editions.

It is true that my book does place significant emphasis upon Holst’s American visits and contacts. This was what I had intended from the very start. Michael Short’s definitive epic 1990 biography, *Gustav Holst: The Man and His Music*, was carefully written from a British perspective. I intended mine to be a view from the opposite side of the Atlantic. Indeed, my original title for the book was *Gustav Holst: An American Perspective*; it was changed by the publisher. The book is, as Mr. Head correctly states, a ‘documentary biography’. It is too bad that Mr. Head did not also mention, undoubtedly inadvertently, that in addition to many of Holst’s letters being published for the first time, the book contains the most complete chronological listing of Holst’s compositions available anywhere.

There are some remarks made by Mr. Head that seem to be rather caustic. His quip about there being ‘little understanding of context: Holst and school music in general’ could come across as being mildly insulting to this life-long music educator; I was merely trying to balance the book by not overdoing it in this area. As for Holst’s relationship with other British composers of the time, there is actually a significant amount of information. For example, Holst’s letters to Percy Grainger shed light on Holst’s high regard for Grainger as well as showing Holst’s desire to share his successes at Morley College with him. Holst’s relationship with organist William Vowles is also explored. Items of this nature were far more important to this author than the inclusion of Frank Bridge’s meeting Rabindranath Tagore at a societal function. While it may have provided additional information, I preferred to keep the

focus on Holst's relationship with Rothenstein as well as Vaughan Williams' with Rothenstein (as determined by the primary source material at my disposal). As for the lack of photographs, one has only to look at the front cover of the book to see a photograph of Holst. The choice to include artist's sketches rather than many of the same photographs appearing in so many other books about Holst was mine to make and I offer no apology for it. And as far as the impact of astrology on Holst, well, I don't think that Mr. Head and I will ever agree. Nobody owns Holst – not Mr. Head, not Michael Short, not Alan Gibbs, not me. Holst left quite a legacy – there is a lot of factual material

here – yet facts often yield different truths and the interpretation of these must be left up to the beholder.

This having been said, mention was made in the April issue of *Tempo* about the appeal to save the Holst Birthplace Museum (of which Mr. Head is a Trustee). This in itself puts any quibbling over style or content into a lesser perspective. Perhaps I should amend my statement about nobody owning Holst to one saying that we all own Holst and that preserving his birthplace is in everybody's interests.

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