
Obituary

On 2 August 1995 the composer Irwin Bazelon died at the Lenox Hill Hospital, Manhattan. He was aged 73, and had just undergone an attempted multiple by-pass operation.

Known to his intimates as 'Bud' or 'Buddy', he was born in Chicago in 1922, the son of a salesman, and grew up there during the Depression. He developed a keen interest in jazz, and began his musical life as a jazz pianist and songwriter for Chicago jazz bands. During his teens, however, he heard his first classical concert, and decided there and then that he was going to compose. He studied composition at De Paul University, gaining his Master's Degree there. He then studied with Hindemith, though it was not a successful relationship, and subsequently with Darius Milhaud. He spent six years working as a railway booking clerk, until he finally began to make a living writing advertising jingles, and eventually found work with a cartoon animation studio. From that time onwards until the 1970s he made a good living from film music, on which he also wrote *Knowing the Score*, which many authorities, including Richard Rodney Bennett, regard as the best book yet written on film music.

From the 1970s onwards he wrote almost nothing except serious concert music. He employed an eclectic style, embracing serial technique and strong jazz influences; but throughout his career his music was accessible and agreeable even to diffident ears. He composed over 60 orchestral, chamber and instrumental pieces, including symphonies – like so many composers, he completed the fateful number of

nine, and was working on his tenth at his death. He was a passionate lover of horse racing, and wrote a piece in celebration of Churchill Downs, the racecourse where the Kentucky Derby is run, and he subtitled his Ninth Symphony 'Sunday Silence', after a famous American racehorse. Only a few weeks before his death he came to Britain to oversee the recording of that work, and the Seventh symphony, with the Bournemouth SO. The CD is available on the Albany label.

I met him once, only a few months before he died, and formed an impression of a lively, vigorous man, who seemed much bigger than his physical self. He looked, I decided delightedly, rather like Beethoven and rather more like Ernest Borgnine; with a liking for bright-coloured tracksuits and baseball caps, effusive and full-blooded in his enthusiasms, demonstrative and emphatic in his opinions, but, beneath that, a gentle, sensitive and deeply serious man – generous, affectionate and thoughtful. There was not an ounce of spite or malice in him: he was notably reluctant to say anything but good about anyone if he could help it. Not many people knew that he used to work seated on a soft cushion knitted for him by his friend Richard Rodney Bennett, bearing the legend 'Buddy's Composing Cushion', and somehow that seems to me to sum up the essence of the man: human, warm and full of fun; he was what in Norfolk, where I used to live, they call 'real'. He leaves a widow, the artist Cecile Gray Bazelon. He will be greatly missed.

Mike Seabrook

Letters to the Editor

From Robin Freeman

With further reference to the origins of the concerto for orchestra (*Tempo* 194), Viktor Ullmann also wrote one in 1929, which William Steinberg conducted. Petrassi was more likely to have known it than Holmboe's. But Petrassi's decision to spin out his symphonic life's work in

a series of orchestral concertos was primarily a composer's brainstorm. Behind it, though, lies a complex of influences and strategies that help make it the right one. Hindemith and his own Concerto for Orchestra surely come into the picture – there is a largely unpublished correspondence between the two men dating from the 1930s, while the resemblance of certain pages

of the *Ritratto di Don Chisciotte to Nobilissima Visione* with its Franciscan subject is inescapable.

Another factor was the revival of Vivaldi's instrumental music, in particular the all-important *Concerto per l'orchestra di Dresda*, at the hands of Petrassi's older colleague G.F. Malipiero. The brilliance and sharp delineation of concerto writing would have seemed more in keeping with the Italian genius at a time when Italy was looking to its preclassical past in the attempt to steer clear of German academicism.

A third signpost is the *Concerto romano* by Alfredo Casella. Casella was born in Turin, the first capital of united Italy, which is as handy to Paris as it is to Rome. His early music reflects this fact, but later on Casella was caught up in the passion for *romanitas* as Rome became the symbol of a resurgent Italy at a time when few people would have predicted the ultimately disastrous outcome. The *Concerto romano* with its hieratic

modal colouring and its 'imperial' scoring for organ and brass is a founding document of the modern Roman style. Respighi, an Emilian composer who made his career in Rome rather than the north, made his well-known contributions to the genre, to which should be added the *Quartetto dorico* and the *Concerto gregoriano*. But it was the Roman Petrassi – a native of Zagarolo, seat of the Rospigliosi princes, and a former chorister at the church of San Salvatore in Lauro – who was to raise all this to the level of abstract musical argument and weave it into a monumental cycle. Thanks to Petrassi the concerto for orchestra remained part of the Italian scene, as the lesser cycle of the Milanese Bruno Bettinelli is there to attest.

S. Angelo in Pescheria
Rome

News Section

Composers

THOMAS ADES is composing a new piano work for performance at the Cheltenham Festival.

STEPHEN ALBERT (d.1992). *To Wake the Dead* (Netherlands première)—22 February/Utrecht/Combustion Chamber Orchestra c. Rutger van Leyden.

JULIAN ANDERSON. *Three Parts Off The Ground* (première)—6 December 1995/London, St John's Smith Square/London Musici c. Mark Stephenson.

PAUL BARKER. Violin Concerto (première)—17 February/Croydon, Fairfield Hall/Tasmin Little (vln), London Mozart Players c. Matthias Bamert.

ERIK BERGMAN. *Mana* (UK première)—19 February/London St Olave's Church/City of London Sinfonia Soloists.

SIR HARRISON BIRTWISTLE. Celan Setting No.6 (première)—27 April/Basle/Christine Whittlesey (sop), Ensemble InterContemporain c. Pierre Boulez. Movements for String Quartet Nos.4-8; Celan Settings Nos.7 & 8 (premières; first performance of complete cycle)—28 April/Witten/Arditti String Quartet, Claudia Barainsky (sop), Klangforum Wien c. Hans Zender. *Pulse Shadows* (première)—29 April/London, Queen Elizabeth Hall/Arditti Quartet, Claron McFadden (sop), Capricorn c. Lionel Friend. Chorale Preludes (première)—4 May/London, Queen Elizabeth Hall/London Sinfonietta c. Diego Masson.

MICHAEL BLAKE. *Olive Schreiner* for 2 pianos (première)—31 March/London, ICA/Tony Gray and Sally Rose (pianos). This is part of a concert by Michael Blake's group London

New Music featuring new keyboard music from South Africa, with the UK premières of works for piano(s) and clavichord by MARTIN SCHERZINGER, DAVID KOSVINER, PETER SMIT, RUDIGER MEYER, DIRK DE KLERK, MATTEO FARGION and ROELOF TEMMINGH.

RONALD CALTABIANO. *Preludes, Fanfares and Toccatas* (European première)—16 February/Edinburgh/Royal Scottish National Orchestra c. Andrew Litton.

ELLIOTT CARTER. *Figment* for solo (UK première)—3 April/Manchester, RNCM/Thomas Demenga (vlc). String Quartet No.5 (German première)—28 April/Witten/Arditti Quartet.

RICHARD CAUSTON. *The Persistence of Memory* (première)—25 January/London, Queen Elizabeth Hall/London Sinfonietta c. Oliver Knussen.

JAMES DILLON. *Blitzschlag* (première)—18 February/Paris, Maison de Radio France/Pierre-Yves Artaud (fl), Orchestra National de France c. Paul Daniel.

PASCAL DUSAPIN. *Loop* (première)—7 May/Beauvais Cathedral/Octour Tempo di cello.

MICHAEL FINNISSY. *Verdi Transcriptions* (première of complete, revised version); *What the meadow-flowers tell me* (UK première)—26 January/London, Conway Hall/Ian Pace (pno).

VINKO GLOBOKAR. *Eisenberg* (UK première)—9 February/London, Conway Hall/Reservoir dir. Mikels Toms and Ian Pace.

BERTHOLD GOLDSCHMIDT. Cello Concerto (Canadian première)—20 February/Montreal/Yo Yo Ma (vlc), Montreal SO c. Charles Dutoit.