

BOOKS

Gavin Dixon, *The Routledge Handbook to the Music of Alfred Schnittke*, Routledge, 2022, 335pp. \$200.00.

Russian composer Alfred Schnittke (1934–1998) is well known for his polystylistic compositions, in which multiple styles of both classical and popular music collide. From the early 1980s to the early 1990s, he enjoyed tremendous success in the West on the reputation of works such as *Concerto Grosso No. 1* (1977), leading to numerous commissions from high-profile ensembles. However, his career was cut short by a series of strokes that first obstructed his ability to compose and then led to his premature death. Perhaps because of this, his works were somewhat neglected in the West by both scholars and the public in the years following his death. This neglect has led to a relative paucity of information on him and his music in English until recently.

Gavin Dixon is among a new generation of scholars producing work on Schnittke, including the first major English-language edited volume on the composer.¹ In this *Routledge Handbook*, he has written the first comprehensive guide to all of Schnittke's compositions in English. Dixon compiles much of the extant information on Schnittke's music, including the significant untranslated Russian-language scholarship. Dixon's own contributions are vital, contextualising and synthesising the work of others as well as presenting original analyses.

In the preface, Dixon emphasises that this book is by no means a biography of Schnittke, but that biographical information is inextricable from the works discussed, particularly the series of pieces from the 1970s, which Dixon dubs 'funereal' works, written surrounding the death of Schnittke's mother. Dixon also acknowledges the difficulty inherent in categorising Schnittke's output, given the immense diversity of his work and the many threads, both technical and thematic, which connect his pieces.

Schnittke's contradictory stylistic unity and diversity inform Dixon's periodisation of the composer's work that makes up Chapter One.

Rather than opting for a simple chronological series of periods, Dixon uses an overlapping sequence of eras that are defined by technique and subject matter. After Schnittke's student works, Dixon identifies his primary periods as serialism (1963–71), funereal and religious works (1972–80), polystylism (1968–91) and late style (1985–94). For each period, Dixon details the devices and techniques used by Schnittke and their relevance to his developing compositional style. This somewhat complex chapter provides the necessary context to understand the converging and diverging currents that comprise representative works such as *Concerto Grosso No. 4/Symphony No. 5* (1988). This piece is not only an example of its two titular genres, but its second movement is an orchestration of *Piano Quartet* (1988), which is itself Schnittke's high-concept completion of an early sketch by Mahler. The complete orchestral work brings Mahler's music in dialogue with that of Bach, along the way incorporating many of the Schnittkean compositional techniques that Dixon describes.

The remaining chapters of the book are comprised of analyses of all of Schnittke's compositions, organised by instrumentation. Each chapter contains a brief introduction that gives an overview of the works discussed as well as detailing any juvenilia not deemed significant enough to be discussed individually. The mature works are grouped by genre and then chronologically, and Dixon notes each composition's biographical context and gives a short analysis. Throughout these chapters, Dixon provides numerous cross-references between related works as well as citing relevant sections from Chapter One.

The majority of the content of the analyses stems from Russian-language sources by Evgeniia Chigareva, Valentina Kholopova and Dmitri Shulgin, as well as from other sources in English and German. Dixon also presents considerable original research, drawing on his work in the Schnittke archives at Goldsmiths, University of London, and at Juilliard. A particularly fascinating example unearthed by Dixon is Schnittke's use of the *I Ching* in the composition of *String Trio* (1985): Schnittke quite literally maps the broken and unbroken lines of the *I Ching* trigrams on to the string texture of the

¹ Gavin Dixon, ed., *Schnittke Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

composition, as well as using them to produce harmonic progressions.

The analyses of individual works that make up the bulk of this book are very brief (even the most substantial and well-known works receive no more than four pages), but each provides sufficient key details and references to assist anyone seeking more information. The music examples and diagrams are concise and clearly illustrate Dixon's points.

Schnittke's film music is the subject of the final chapter, in which Dixon discusses select scores by director instead of chronologically, focusing on the composer's work with five of them in particular: Igor Talankin, Andrei Khrzhanovsky, Alexander Mitta, Larisa Shepitko and Elem Klimov. Dixon concludes with a complete listing of Schnittke's works, combining catalogues by Alexander Ivashkin and Schnittke's publisher Sikorski, as well as a very thorough bibliography. This book is a significant contribution to the newly burgeoning English-language Schnittke literature. It is an invaluable reference source for both its consolidation of existing research and for Dixon's original work.

Nathan Friedman
10.1017/S0040298222001012

Eldritch Priest, *Earworm and Event*. Duke University Press, 2022, 200pp. \$24.95.

I must confess that I made a number of assumptions about the content and style of this book based solely on the author's name. The word 'eldritch' is exclusively associated, in my mind, with the work of H. P. Lovecraft. Additionally, I knew that this book was published by Duke University Press, implying that there would be a creative approach to critical theory and cultural criticism that challenges easy categorisation. These assumptions combine to suggest that Eldritch Priest was a member or part of the extended network of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU), a renegade group of academics, philosophers and musicians at Warwick University from the early to the late 1990s, a hotbed of experimentation in continental philosophy, specifically Deleuze, which was and still is uncommon in anglosphere academic philosophy. The most famous alum is probably Mark Fisher, and the most infamous is certainly Nick Land, who has since taken a political turn to the hard right. Other figures include Kodwo Eshun, author of *More Brilliant than the Sun*, Steve Goodman, who creates music as Kode-9 and is the founder of Hyperdub Records, and Reza

Negarestani, author of *Cyclonopedia*. The latter is an extraordinary book, an example of so-called 'theory fiction'. In it, the Deleuzeo-Guattarian notion of nomadology (among others) is developed and explored in the context of a fictional quasi-narrative, Lovecraftian in style, in which Oil is a sentient entity explicitly trying to eradicate humanity by ensnaring it in addiction and bringing about the climate catastrophe. As I would discover, Priest is a member of The Occulture, a group of four authors who contributed essays to a book edited by the aforementioned Steve Goodman, so there is a direct connection. My expectation was that Eldritch Priest would write something within this style, and in a sense he has.

There are, in fact, two books contained in this volume, bound *têch-bêche* like an old science-fiction double shot. *Earworm* is a book of cultural criticism circling the titular theme, while *Event* is a collection of creative writing – not necessarily essays or short stories, but perhaps long-form musings. *Earworm* is, to be blunt, a difficult read. Andrew Hugill in this journal's review of Priest's earlier book, *Boring Formless Nonsense*, wrote 'keeping going is the hardest thing, since in almost every paragraph the book presents us with reasons to stop'.¹ Priest will often reference arguments – that capitalism seeks finer control over our emotions, for example – without really crafting the logic or making an argument. The most cogent writing is typically found between quotations marks. Priest reads Suzanne Langer's theories of feeling and music to develop the idea that earworms are 'felt as thought'. What exactly that means doesn't seem to be as important as creating a conceptual land bridge away from earworms, because this book is not really about the phenomenon of an earworm per se, but rather circles it, using it as a touchstone or motivic reference point. The best chapter is the last, a reading of the film *Upstream Color*. Priest introduces it as 'a series of impressionistic responses to the film'. As the prose drifts away from formality, logic and argumentation, one feels the author becoming more comfortable and the writing more interesting.

Unsurprisingly, *Event* is a much more enjoyable book. These five chapters are each little gems of what might be called pataphysical academic papers. Each is very much its own piece and has its own character. The second chapter, 'Beating a Dead Beetle', is the most successful piece of the whole

¹ Andrew Hugill, 'Boring Formless Nonsense: Experimental Music and the Aesthetics of Failure', Eldritch Priest. Bloomsbury, 2013. £18.99'. *TEMPO*, 69, no. 271, 98–99.