

Letters to the Editor

Sir,

Mr. Keller asks (*Tempo* 88, Spring 1969): "Does *Music & Letters* want to succeed with its implied battle cry, 'Stop the world! I want to get off'?" This is rather like asking: "Have you stopped beating your wife?" So far as I am concerned *Music & Letters* does not utter battle cries, implied or otherwise. Mr. Keller quotes a sentence from my editorial in the January issue: "So many people who write on contemporary music are guilty either of mere propaganda or of analytical demonstrations, often accompanied by mathematical formulae and diagrams, which show quite clearly what has been done but do not explain why it was worth doing." He draws strange conclusions from it. 'So many' does not mean 'all' or even 'the majority'. The sentence neither expresses nor implies an objection to formulae and diagrams as such or a prejudice against contemporary music. It means exactly what it says. I might add that reviewers in *Music & Letters* are allowed to say what they think, without editorial intervention. Mr. Keller is not the only writer to enjoy the privilege of expressing a personal opinion.

Yours, etc.

Jack Westrup

Sir,

As predicted, Mr. Stadlen has not given up. He supposes that in my article 'Who's Exhausted?' I was quoting his *Daily Telegraph* review of Boulez's 'Variation' from memory. I am afraid he is mistaken in assuming that his reviews commit themselves to memory, however faultily. No, his review was in front of me as I wrote and I still fail to see how his appreciation of Boulez's 'Variation' disposes of my basic point that the range of style of avant-garde music is systematically minimised by its detractors. Mr. Stadlen would answer that, on the basis of his favourable review, he was not a detractor. I do not find his credentials very convincing. To write in December 1968 that "Boulez emerges as a badly needed revolutionary force in the exhausted avant-garde camp" is, to say the least, puzzling. Boulez 'emerged' twenty years ago, when he really was revolutionary, and no case for 're-emergence' can possibly be made out on the basis of 'Variation', a minor (albeit pleasing and elegant) refurbishing of a twenty-year-old piece. Mr. Stadlen is thrusting Boulez into the front line now (just when he looks like deserting altogether) in order to reassure himself in his total incomprehension of the really vital forces of the avant-garde, e.g. Stockhausen, Cardew and Cage. It is no coincidence that Mr. Stadlen's Boulez review followed closely an extremely ill-considered and unenlightened review of Stockhausen's last concert here which, for all its technical shortcomings was a memorable experience not just for me but for most, I should guess, of the capacity audience.

Why this unmistakable desire to elevate Boulez, above Stockhausen in particular? I personally am convinced that the answer can be found in Mr. Stadlen's obsession with notation, which I alluded to in my article. This obsession was highlighted in an absurd manner in the scandalously inadequate feature on Stockhausen put out by BBC Television a few years ago. Allotted the statutory five minutes to get to the bottom of it all, Mr. Stadlen chose to attack Stockhausen, then—as now—almost entirely unknown to television audiences, on the notation of *Refrain*, seemingly oblivious of the fact that (1) this would mean

nothing to 95% of the viewers and that 2) *Refrain* is one of the finest examples of notation in the history of music. Alas, at a very early stage Mr. Stadlen had got the wrong end of the avant-garde stick.

One cannot stress too often the importance of letting new music, serial, indeterminate, improvised or electronic, speak directly to the ear, uncluttered by preconceptions or by anxiety about the way the score works. How the music is written down is a very minor consideration to the hundreds of people who fill concerts of Stockhausen's and Cage's music. They respond directly to the audible reality of the music, not to written abstractions, in a way which is all too rare in the critical fraternity. If he trusted his ears, Mr. Stadlen would be a happier man. And Henry Pleasants would be out of business.

Yours, etc.

Tim Souster

IANNIS XENAKIS

EONTA For piano and brass ensemble

AKRATA For sixteen wind instruments

MORSIMA-AMORSIMA For four instruments

METASTASEIS For orchestra of sixty-one players

PITHOPRAKTA For two trombones, percussion and strings

NOMOS ALPHA For violoncello solo

SYRMOS For string orchestra

HERMA For piano solo

NUITS For twelve mixed voices

ST 48 For forty-eight instruments

ST 10 For ten instruments

ST 4 For string quartet

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