

## EDITORIAL: THE GROUND BENEATH OUR FEET

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One of the less commonly remarked consequences of increasing human longevity is that there are more very old composers on our streets than ever before. And while it may be some time before anyone surpasses, or even equals, the achievement of the late Elliott Carter – a major composer producing substantial work past his hundredth birthday – it is no longer unusual for a composer still to be productive in their ninth, or even tenth, decade. *TEMPO* 272 celebrates the achievement of two soon-to-be nonagenarians, Pierre Boulez and Ben Johnston, composers who, although at either ends of the fame scale, have been at pains not to leave new music as they found it. If Boulez, as Paul Griffiths suggests, had already painted his masterpiece by the age of 30, Marc Sabat shows that Johnston's characteristic work had by that age not yet begun: his career has been a slow burn in contrast to the brilliant firecracker that was the young Boulez.

Ninety years on, the worlds into which the two men were born no longer exist. Not only have their home towns changed almost beyond recognition – the small-town world of Montbrison in the Loire, in Boulez's case; or Macon, the 'twenties transportation capital of middle Georgia, in Johnston's – but, more importantly, so too have their whole musical and artistic worlds. Over such long lifetimes both men have seen not just a revolution but multiple revolutions, the ground shifting under their feet and then shifting again. That their music has endured, and is better known today than ever, is a cause for celebration. Many younger composers have appointed one or other (perhaps occasionally both) to the inner tribunal of inspirational figures they carry in their minds, where they act as an artistic, even a moral, conscience.

*TEMPO* 272 also takes a fresh look at the problematic place of creative activity in academia, in the form of our thought-provoking lead article by composer John Croft. According to one politically pervasive stream of thought now widespread in the UK, the 'problem' is solved; we may have thought that composers putting notes on staves, or editing sound-files, were being creative artists (read: ungovernable anarchists with no place in universities), but what they were really doing all along was *research!* On this hot topic, Croft's text provides abundant food for thought. As, on a related subject, does Michael Hooper's examination of the sorts of creative confusion that yield new knowledge, here as applied to the domain of performance with, as centrepiece, a work for mandolin and tape by Michael Finnissy.

In this issue we also celebrate the merely 80-year-old Peter Dickinson, composer, pianist, scholar, teacher and long-time *TEMPO* contributor, and profile the pianist Nicolas Hodges, tireless champion of the contemporary piano. And we examine a new crop of books, CDs, and first performances. As always, we introduce several voices new to the journal, to help steady us as the ground continues to shift beneath our feet.