

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

Gyorgy Ligeti: Of Foreign Lands and Strange Sounds. Ed. by Louise Duchesneau and Wolfgang Marx.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/15v6k6j2>

Journal

Music and Letters, 94(4)

ISSN

0027-4224

Author

Bauer, A

Publication Date

2013-11-01

DOI

10.1093/ml/gct110

Peer reviewed

for contemporaries, and rightly so, for they propounded one-dimensional, nostalgic, and insulting images of contemporary African Americans. Still, he observes, Berlin's notion of minstrelsy was based on its theatrical framework rather than its racial stereotypes, and blackface was not integral to Berlin's conception of the genre. This comes out in shows like *The Cocoanuts* (1925), in which the trial scene is built on the interlocutor–endman model of minstrelsy without any characters wearing burnt cork. Magee leaves it to the reader to judge whether or not the framework of minstrelsy is redeemable apart from racial stereotypes. He also makes clear that Berlin could also make audience members confront their own prejudices; 'Supper Time' from *As Thousands Cheer* (1933), in which a woman laments the death of her lynched husband, made many white audience members uneasy, and became one of Ethel Waters's most famous songs.

Magee also treats Berlin's Jewish roots with a similar nuance. He is careful not to fall into the trap of attributing Berlin's apparent stylistic fluidity to the composer's ethnic heritage. Following Andrea Most's *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), Magee also sees Berlin's immigrant roots in the stories of many of his shows, reading assimilation narratives into not only *Annie Get Your Gun*, but also *This is the Army*, and the unfinished *Happy Holiday*. But he is also careful to emphasize that 'such qualities are not exclusively Jewish' (p. 12), and are characteristic of many immigrant groups of the era, in a sense allowing for a broadening of Most's methodology.

Until now, Irving Berlin has been treated mostly as a songwriter in the history of the Broadway musical. With Magee's contribution, we can now recognize that he was a sensitive and talented dramatist as well, and highly attuned (for a time) to the social and political trends of his audience, with the exception of his blind spot for minstrelsy. The book provides a valuable account of the aesthetics of the formative years of the Broadway musical and one of its most enduring progenitors.

NAOMI GRABER
 University of Georgia
 doi:10.1093/ml/gct115

© The Author (2013). Published by Oxford University Press. All rights reserved.

György Ligeti: Of Foreign Lands and Strange Sounds.

Ed. by Louise Duchesneau and Wolfgang Marx. pp. xx + 298. (The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2011, £45. ISBN 978-1-84383-550-9.)

Heinz-Otto Peitgen speaks of Edward Lorenz and the famous 'butterfly effect' when he writes, in his contribution to this volume, 'This is an example of how *one* single scientist can disconcert a whole scientific community' (p. 89). Substitute composer for scientist in the above quote, and you have the subject of the beautifully produced *György Ligeti: Of Foreign Lands and Strange Sounds*, a grab bag of delights, as befits the gaddly nature of its subject and projected audience of both academics and aficionados. Stemming from the 2007 Dublin conference 'Remembering Ligeti', organized by Wolfgang Marx and others, *Of Foreign Lands* is edited by Marx and long-time Ligeti assistant and musicologist Louise Duchesneau (Duchesneau also translated four of the essays with great attention to context and detail). The scope of the collection, which includes former students, scientists, analysts, and distinguished musicologists, resembles that of a much earlier collection edited by Constantin Floros, *György Ligeti: Die Referate des Ligeti-Kongresses Hamburg 1988* (Laaber, 1991), with the poignant character of a retrospective rather than *Referate's* comprehensive snapshot of a thriving career with great works still to come.

The collection sets analytical essays alongside general considerations of Ligeti's interests and new discoveries from the archives, allotting fresh insights into the music equal weight to ruminative contributions by senior scholars. I therefore discuss the sixteen essays in four groups. Two larger groupings deal with historical/cultural aspects and considerations of specific works, while the categories of 'source studies' and 'student reminiscences' each contain two complementary essays that will especially intrigue those already acquainted with the literature on Ligeti. The essays are complemented by twelve figures, fourteen black-and-white images by the late photographer Ines Gellrich, and sixteen full-colour plates representing sketches and diagrams from the Ligeti collection housed at the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel.

In the category of historical background I include essays by Louise Duchesneau, Otto Peitgen, Ildikó Mándi-Fazekas, and Tiborc Fazekas and Friedemann Sallis (whose *An Introduction to the Early Works of György Ligeti*

(Cologne, 1996) remains the most complete account of Ligeti's Hungarian music). Sallis writes comprehensively on the sometimes fraught relations between Ligeti and his teacher Sándor Veress from 1945 to 1948, as the composers' exiles from Soviet-dominated Hungary took divergent paths. If Veress had an ambiguous relation to both wartime and post-war Hungary, he still served for the recently exiled Ligeti as a model of moral rectitude when he left for Berne in 1949, and Sallis traces the influence of Veress on Ligeti's *Musica Ricercata* (1951–3). For his part, Veress watched one of his favourite students succumb to the 'rationalization' and spiritual sterility of the West, and rebuffed Ligeti's request for a post in Switzerland (p. 13). Throughout Sallis is sensitive to the difference between artistic refugees who hope to return—whether they would or not—and those who left with no intention of going back.

From the time of his earliest studies with Veress (the *Three Weöres Songs*, 1946–7), Ligeti was inspired by the *sui generis* Hungarian poet Sándor Weöres. The contribution of Mándi-Fazekas and Fazekas is a welcome addition to the sparse literature on the prodigal, cosmopolitan, multi-faceted poet and translator. (The primary English-language source on Weöres is a Swedish dissertation by Susanna Fahlström, *Form and Philosophy in Sándor Weöres' Poetry* (Uppsala, 1999).) After leaving Hungary, Ligeti would not set the Hungarian language again until the *Magyar Etüdök* (Hungarian Études) of 1983, when he returned not only to Weöres but to poems of the early 1940s for inspiration, as he did for his final vocal work, the song cycle *Síppal, dobbal, nádihegedűvel* (With Pipes, Drums, Fiddles, 2000) for soprano and percussion ensemble. In Weöres, Ligeti found 'Hungary's Mozart' (Ligeti in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Monika Lichtenfeld (Mainz, 2007), ii., 313), a fellow artist whose wide-ranging aesthetics and delight in form and novelty matched his own proclivities. Perhaps the best evidence of this, beyond the songs, can be found in the preface to Weöres' *Tűzkút* (Fountain of Fire, Paris, 1964), which Mándi-Fazekas and Fazekas cite at length: 'My intention is neither to bewitch nor to annoy those who cringe when they encounter anything unusual: it is of no interest to me whether I am understood or not... I would like to see through you and to incite you to rearrange your closed, restricted and existential ego into an open, social, cosmic and infinite self' (*Tűzkút* (Paris, 1964), 6–7, cited on p. 57).

Ligeti's fascination with the science of chaos and fractal geometry is recounted in Peitgen's account of 'A Fractal Friendship'. Peitgen relates the genesis of the science of deterministic chaos, with examples taken from his own interests in risk analysis in surgery and auto industry crash testing. He cites Ligeti's *Poème symphonique for 100 metronomes* (1962) and *Continuum* for harpsichord (1968) as early exemplars of chaotic structure in music, before using the fourth movement of the piano concerto to illustrate how iterative processes can slip into chaos. Ligeti's growing interest in chaos and fractal geometry during the 1980s was accompanied by a parallel interest in the rhythmic structures and scale patterns of sub-Saharan music, touched on in a conversation between Marx, Duchesneau, and the French-Israeli ethnomusicologist Simha Arom. Arom recounts every meeting with Ligeti, and explains his technique of rerecording: a method of recording multipart pieces with one or two musicians in sequence, and of discerning the underlying beat of the music. Given a perspective based in years of fieldwork, Arom has his own view on the so-called 'illusory rhythms', inherent pulse, and aksak rhythms often cited in African repertoires and in music shaped by similar principles.

Finally, Louise Duchesneau opens a Pandora's box of wonder and speculation with a survey of Ligeti's record collection, which spanned a huge range of genres and types (a complete listing of the 242 LPs in the Paul Sacher Foundation—but part of a much larger collection—serves as an example of the collection's range, pp. 139–47). She includes a poignant account of listening to records in post-war Budapest on a record player with a thorn from an acacia bush, and chronicles the discoveries Ligeti made via LP and CD in different eras, many of which are notated in the margins of works such as the *Nonsense Madrigals* and the sketches for the unfinished *Alice in Wonderland*. (Here references to the British group Supertramp, European *schlager*, and Balinese *kecak* give some idea of Ligeti's vast listening interests.)

In the category of analytical and critical discussion of the works, Benjamin Dwyer's analysis of transformational ostinati in the sonatas for solo cello and viola stands out as a hardcore analytic offering. Although it is a sensitive treatment, Dwyer looks at processes of variation as all based on ostinati, which has the effect of flattening out processes that—while based on repetition and variation—take place

on radically different time scales, and are rooted in different historical and folk inspirations. Movements based on a chaconne and a lamento ground, quasi-strophic melodies, and the repetition of cyclic rhythms and rhythmic segments are all subsumed under the category of transformational ostinato. Yet Dwyer's analysis offers the first sustained focus on the cello sonata, and one that considers the viola sonata as a whole, rather than focusing on specific movements. (Studies of the viola sonata are found in Peter Edwards, 'The Music of György Ligeti and his Violin Concerto: A Study in Analysis, Reception and the Listening Experience' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Oslo, 2005) and Steve Schani, 'György Ligeti's Sonata for Solo Viola (1991–1994)' (D.M.A. diss., University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2001).)

Wolfgang Marx considers Ligeti's representations of death, discussing the *Requiem* and Ligeti's only finished opera, *Le Grand Macabre*, in relation to alienation effects, ambiguity, exaggeration, and the grotesque. Marx compares Ligeti's representations of death at two different periods of his career as part of a large discussion of how a composer in Ligeti's position engages with this topic in the late twentieth century. The *Requiem* had roots in Ligeti's early fascination with the *Dies irae* sequence, but a commission in 1961 led to the work we now know. As Marx emphasizes, Ligeti's non-liturgical Requiem took a personal approach to a collective expression of grief. In *Le Grand Macabre* farce substitutes for the exaggerated expressiveness found in the *Requiem*. Marx notes that, in borrowing from Beethoven's Eroica symphony for the ostinato in Scene 3, Ligeti chose 'the least heroic theme' as a commentary on Nekrotzar, the presumed bringer of death and destruction (p. 80). Ligeti's approach to death is compared to that of the Nobel prize-winning author Imre Kertész, whose writings deal with surviving Auschwitz and Buchenwald. In 'Who does Auschwitz belong to?' ('Wem gehört Auschwitz?', in *Eine Gedankenlänge Stille, während das Erschießungskommando neu lädt* (Reinbek, 2002), 107–17), Kertész famously had harsh words for Spielberg's movie *Schindler's List*, suggesting that a 'fairly tale' may be the only way to capture an authentic moment of such horror.

Ciarán Crilly tackles 'Ligeti's Music and the Films of Stanley Kubrick', a topic well covered by film music scholars and others, although those films that employ Ligeti's music are rarely treated as a group. Crilly offers a brief

history of the role of film music via Herrmann and Hitchcock, and the role played by temp tracks, but supplements his historical survey with his own reading of music in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (wherein the sounds worlds of Ligeti, J. Strauss, R. Strauss, and Khachaturian represent Universe, Earth, God, and Man respectively) and *Eyes Wide Shut* (where pitch references from *Musica Ricercata* No. 2 represent temptation, sin, and retribution). Paul Griffiths's contribution is unique in taking on a larger and more persistent genre: Ligeti's focus on orchestral music, a constant of each phase in his career. Griffiths notes that the standard orchestra was viewed with suspicion by Ligeti's generation, who sought to amend or question its makeup. Unlike many of his peers, Ligeti didn't emphasize percussion, but experimented with various sizes of large chamber ensembles and small orchestras. The works of the 1970s include fewer violins and more winds, leading to the incorporation of non-tempered winds (ocarinas, basset horns, and natural French horns) in the final concertos, an interest that parallels the rise of the early music movement. A list of performances worldwide in 2007 shows how deeply Ligeti's orchestral works have penetrated the standard repertory.

In the category of source studies, Jonathan Bernard's attempt at a taxonomy of the Ligeti materials available at the Paul Sacher Foundation will come as a welcome aid to those scholars who continue to make regular pilgrimages to that inclusive collection. (See also Richard Steinitz, 'The Study of Composers' Sketches, and an Overview of those by Ligeti', *Contemporary Music Review*, 32/2–3 (2012), 115–34.) Bernard identifies five basic types of sketches, any or all of which may be attached to a work, and discusses them, from the most general (verbal *jottings*, visual *drawings*, and charts of pitch names) to specific (tables listing pitch, rhythm, and duration; and two types of musical notation: rhythmless pitches in staff notation and pitchless rhythms). The most general categories may simply represent lists of qualities or ambiguous descriptions, although even the latter may be quite detailed and are often typed (Bernard notes a jotting of *Atmosphères* that represents 'almost a continuity draft in words', p. 151). The sketch record for the Kyrie of the *Requiem* serves as an example of Ligeti's process: textual description embellished with marginalia is followed by a blurry drawing. This in turn is followed by pitch series and descriptions of voice-leading rules (elaborated in a letter to Erkki Salmenhaara;

Salmenhaara's dissertation became the first published analysis of Ligeti's work: *Das musikalische Material und seine Behandlung in den Werken 'Apparitions,' 'Atmosphères,' und 'Requiem' von György Ligeti* (Regensburg, 1969).

The redoubtable Richard Steinitz follows his intriguing remarks on the troubled genesis of the Piano Concerto in his *Music of the Imagination* (London, 2003) with a study of its history, achieved primarily via a painstaking survey of materials in the Sacher Foundation. The Piano Concerto was commissioned in the early 1970s by the American conductor Mario di Bonaventura, but not completed until 1988. Steinitz found over fifty successive beginnings spread over six years, plus three preliminary plans projecting four-, five-, and seven-movement versions. As work on the concerto overlapped with other works, Steinitz includes detailed sketches on the Horn Trio as well, and traces the history of sketches that have escaped the capacious embrace of the Sacher Foundation. Steinitz's consideration of the sketches is informed by his conversations with Ligeti and by his own translucent prose. The reader will be impressed by the Herculean task involved in teasing out a chronology among varied and often undated sketches, as well as by the taut narrative Steinitz constructs, which leads to Ligeti's 'eureka moment': a first movement design in which piano and orchestra are distinguished by complementary harmonic casts, metres, and accent patterns.

My final category of student reminiscences steps away from the work and career to consider the man, as seen through the eyes of two students from Ligeti's group classes in composition at the Hamburg Musikhochschule: Wolfgang-Andreas Schultz and Manfred Stahnke. Both essays betray their authors' unease with certain aspects of their subject; remarkably intimate revelations appear alongside distanced, at times unsympathetic accounts of Ligeti as teacher and mentor. The heated discussions on aesthetics and compositional ethics that marked Ligeti's classes, and which often set students against one another, remain vivid for Schultz and Stahnke. In both articles—but particularly in Stahnke's lengthy account—we see the class evolve from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, through assaults from the compositional 'left' and new developments in style and technique. Ligeti appears, in Schultz's words, as something of a *musicien maudit* (p. 219), an artist whose high standards often seemed to negate his own past work as well as that of his contemporaries.

The inclusion of such reminiscences alongside probing source studies and historical and analytical commentary makes *Of Foreign Lands and Strange Sounds* a feast for not only Ligeti fans but also chroniclers of late twentieth-century musical life. My one caveat with the physical book: the spine of my copy completely deteriorated before I was halfway through.

AMY BAUER

University of California, Irvine

doi:10.1093/ml/gct110

© The Author (2013). Published by Oxford University Press. All rights reserved.

Stockhausen: A Theological Interpretation. By Thomas Ulrich, trans. Jayne Obst. pp. xii + 138. (Stockhausen-Stiftung für Musik, Kürten, 2012, €25/\$39. ISBN 978-3-9815317-0-1.)

In the last decade, Thomas Ulrich has made a significant contribution towards demystifying the rich theological associations in Karlheinz Stockhausen's works. Recently, the Stockhausen Verlag translated and published the first half of his book, which deals with Stockhausen (*Neue Musik aus religiösem Geist: Theologisches Denken im Werk von Karlheinz Stockhausen und John Cage* (Saarbrücken, 2006)). Not simply a theologian with academic facility, Ulrich has also distinguished himself by serving as the dramaturge for several recent staged productions of Stockhausen's works, including the memorable 2011 premiere of *Sonntag aus Licht* in Cologne. Ulrich's book provides a valuable but somewhat limited perspective on theological thinking in Stockhausen.

It has long been known that Stockhausen's creations are inundated with theological meaning. The composer himself fancifully called his works a 'fast airship to the divine'. While many have emphasized the variety of religious influences on his works, and Stockhausen often alluded to a diverse array of religious inspiration (perhaps most memorably in the calling of divine names in *Stimmung* but also at numerous other moments, particularly in the *Licht* cycle), Ulrich treats the compositional project primarily as an expression of Christian epistemology. His main thesis is that 'Stockhausen's theological aporia fuelled his artistic development until he found a stable basis for his work in formula composition' (p. viii). Ulrich's methodology seems cautious but prudent: begin by examining the works themselves, not the 'abyss of motives to which Stockhausen occasionally refers' (p. ix). He