New Books

MUSIC AND SOCIETY (*Cultures* I, No. 1, 1973), edited by G.S. Métraux.
UNESCO and la Baconniere.
(Obtainable in Britain from HMSO, £4.50.)

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For a while now some Western musicians have been increasingly concerned with music as a form of 'social' communication. (This is not meant to imply that music can ultimately be anything other than this, since all thought and action is socially mediated. The use of the word 'social' in this context is meant to emphasise the central feature of the musical process, which is more often than not ignored.) Reasons for this concern are not difficult to find. Until recently the practice of 'serious' music was exclusively associated with a cultural élite, who tended to view art as an other-worldly creation essentially dissociated from the untutored everyday world of 'mass' or 'social' existence. Great art revealed mysteries that were in the natural order of things and hence unquestionable. As such, art could only be understood by the initiated. This gap between 'high' art and general populace has been steadily increasing ever since the middle of the 19th century, with the result that there is now a minimum of communication between potential audiences and many 'serious' composers.

But this view of art had another consequence. Because art was only accessible to the initiated, any suggestion that the significance of a particular work or style could be ultimately located in the social background of its creation was unthinkable. Not only would this imply that art did not reveal permanent truths fathomable by only a few of the more highly-tuned minds, but that it, and the particular social order of which it formed an integral part, were more than open to debate and question by people in general. 'Serious' music, then, has been, and generally still is, associated with an attitude of élitism in society that many people find hard to condone.

Uneasily aware of both this association and the lack of communication that exists between themselves and the public at large, some composers have attempted to write political music, or, at the very least, 'socially informed' music which has its audience very much in mind. Again, some writers have attempted to view music in terms of its cultural and ideological milieu, thus paving the way for an understanding of different musics that does not depend on preconceived notions of art. In the case of both composer and writer, the focus is upon music as a form of 'social' communication.

The UNESCO publication *Music and Society* is entirely in accord with this concern. The articles it contains are, we are told, "designed to analyze some of the components of the equation *Sound + Musician + Society = Communication.*" Generally speaking, the more interesting contributions come from composers and performers. Ravi Shankar, for example (in one of five interviews conducted by Jack Bornoff — the others are with Berio, Boulez, Yehudi and Diana Menuhin and Andrew Lloyd Webber) discusses the initial problems he encountered in communicating Indian classical music to Western audiences, whereas Andrew Lloyd Webber comments on the vagaries which often seem to surround success in the 'pop' world. But the overriding concern of the composers seems to be in communicating through sound with people who are largely disaffected with anything but 'light' or 'popular' music. Berio, therefore, spends most of his time discussing the possibilities of presenting 'serious' music through television, while Boulez is to some extent concerned with different ways of presenting contemporary music 'live'. In a mere ten pages, moreover, Francois-Bernard Mâche speculates on what, in the 20th century, is the socially most apt approach to 'serious' composition (serial, aleatory, conventional or electronic).

The most thought-provoking article in this general vein is by R. Murray Schafer ('The Music of the Environment'). Schafer's article, which is clearly based on his *Soundscape* project, points to the way in which people are mostly unbothered by the doubtful aesthetic quality of the sounds which surround them in industrial society, and suggests that some form of acoustic design in our society would be of benefit to the spiritual life of individual communities. Such an undertaking would have the advantage of awakening people to the qualities of different sounds and involving them in aesthetic decisions concerning their acoustic surroundings. Pierre Schaeffer ('Sound and Communication'), on the other hand, approaches the problem of communicating with people through the sounds of the environment in a converse fashion. For whereas Murray Schafer's problem is to get people to wake up to the sounds of the environment in the first place, Pierre Schaeffer's is to get them to accept those sounds as part of a more formal musical composition. Sounds which are largely ignored in the environment paradoxically produce rather more violent reactions in the concert hall. Schaeffer, through an analysis of the dialectic stages in aural perception and apprehension, therefore moves towards the construction of a musical language from natural sounds which might be more meaningful and acceptable to an audience. Schaeffer's article is useful in presenting in English some of the arguments put forward in his *Traité des objets musicaux.*

Of the remaining articles, which discuss some aspects of music in its social context, it is unfortunate that only one, 'Music and Sociology' by Alfred Willener, attempts to discuss in any way the fundamental question of how music, as a non-referential medium (that is, a medium that cannot convey concrete thoughts or concepts), can be socially significant. This difficulty is highlighted for Willener through a traditional formulation of the 'sociology of music'. Within this formulation "the sociology of musical creation" is sandwiched between "the sociology of the lives of musicians" and "the sociology of the targets of music" (that is, a study of audience reaction as measured through audience attendances and record sales). Since "the sociology of musical creation" is extremely problematic, there may, within the framework of this formulation, be only two approaches to music: "on the one hand, research on music, outside of society and of sociology, and, on the other hand, the sociological treatment of cultural production and consumption without taking into account the specific musical phenomenon as such." Either music is a purely artistic phenomenon in the sense described above or, in a totally positivistic and rational fashion, it must be viewed as being totally determined in its expression by the social environment.

Willener cannot accept either of these alternatives, and proceeds to look for other possibilities by reference to the work of Lévi-Strauss, Bourdieu and Adorno. Specifically, he makes the suggestion (based on Bourdieu's notion of the apprehension of generic codes) that "the sociology of music is possible to the extent that art . . . presupposes the manipulation of codes and ideologies". Consequently music as a form of socially constructed 'knowledge' "puts into motion social meanings, determined themselves by the structure and functions of society". The reverse side of this process, emphasised more by the work of Adorno, is that music as a form of 'social' communication may, of its own accord, influence the creation and articulation of these structures and functions. Instead of viewing the sociological analysis of musical experience itself as an impossible or unimportant stage in a similar analysis of musical process, therefore, Willener sees it as central to the understanding of any dialectic involving the 'production' and 'consumption' of music in society. Although no concrete suggestions are made as to how codes and ideologies might be expressed through the musical experience, nor how this experience may influence social process, the article is none the less valuable in underlining the importance of an adequate sociology of *music* to any understanding of music as communication. It is also instructive in questioning Adorno's attitude to much 20th century music.

The rest of the articles in this collection are concerned with circumstances which, in the manner just mentioned, are more peripheral to a study of music as communication. Jack Bornoff ('Technology, Techniques, Music') briefly and superficially indicates the role played by electronic media in altering listening habits during this century; Kurt Blaukopf ('Young Music and Industrial Society: an Essay on New Patterns of Behaviour') attempts, from an inappropriately 'intellectual' stance, to "prepare a definition of the new patterns of musical behaviour of ['pop'] groups" and to "throw some light on the social, technological and

other factors which have contributed to the emergence and spreading of these new patterns in industrial societies"; Edith Gerson-Kiwi ('The Musician in Society: East and West') and Trân Van Khê ('Traditional Music and Culture Change: a Study in Acculturation') indicate the changes occurring in the musical life of some traditional societies as a result of the influx of western industrial civilisation; and Joseph Eger ('The Audience Revolution — a Profession of Faith'), in a sentimentally euphoric article oblivious of many of the harsh realities of present day life, sees changes in audience behaviour as heralding a 'new art' or music symptomatic of a new global 'togetherness'.

But despite all the attempts to write socially 'meaningful' music and to understand music in its social context, there emerges one train of thought in some of the contributions which seems to belie the very philosophy implied by those same attempts. This train of thought emerges in a marked hostility to so-called 'pop' music. Berio, for example, tells us that "in certain highly sophisticated countries . . . the radio and record industries are ruining the potential ears and brains of the musical audience through the very low standards of pop music". For Boulez, 'pop' music has little worthwhile content. "Elimininate the microphones of a pop group, and it no longer exists. A large part of the impact is obviously due to sound power: the volume of what you hear is more important than the content. The substance is shallow indeed unamplified; . . . "This criticism evokes the rather bizarre image of a medieval consort trying to perform a Romantic symphony. Would one say in this case that the symphony is of shallow substance? But the most explicit contradiction is achieved by Francois-Bernard Mâche. In one breath we are told that "sound recording . . . brought to ears which were . . . willing to hear . . . the voices of other musical civilizations, thus calling to mind the relativity of aesthetic dogma", and in another that the output of 'serious' music "is almost insignificant . . . . as compared with the vast mass of sonorous banality liberated by the advent of the musical industries." Charity, it would seem, does not begin at home. In the face of these authoritative statements one might tentatively put forward two thoughts. The first is that 'pop' music might not be the homogeneous entity it is sometimes imagined to be, and that the vast and varied production subsumed under that label should not therefore be judged simply on the basis of one type or a small sample of that production. The second is that brilliance at 'serious' music does not necessarily provide a person with the appropriate set of criteria for judging *any* type of 'pop' music.