LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

from ALAN POULTON

Enthusiasts of British Music may be interested to know that a Dictionary of Modern British Composers, 1893-1923 is being compiled by Alan Poulton and Stewart Craggs. A total of 40 composers are surveyed and their complete output, including film and incidental music, is listed chronologically.

As well as including such data as first performance(s), the dictionary includes information on Dedicatees, Instrumentation, Publishers, and MS location, plus a useful artist cross-reference index.

Thanks to the co-operation of the composers, their families and their publishers, as well as the BBC, British Library and the British Film Institute, some 6000 of the potential 10,000 entries have now been entered onto a word processor since compilation began in 1986.

The following is a typical example of one entry in the Lutyens catalogue:

"The Ring of Bone" for piano (with optional speaking voice) Op. 106 (1915)
Commissioned by the Manchester the Manchester New Music Forum for a concert celebrating the composer's 70th birthday.
Dur: 10'
3. broad.p. Peter Lawson - 20 July 1977
Pub: Olivan
(* The title is taken from Samuel Beckett's novel Imagination Dead Imagine and the speaker's text consists of fragments by Elisabeth Lutyens)

It is expected to take a further four years to complete the survey and publication is anticipated in 1993.

The 40 featured composers are:

1. Eugene Goossens
2. Arthur Benjamin
3. Gordon Jacob
4. Roberto Gerhard
5. Alan Bush
6. Edmund Rubbra
7. Lennox Berkeley
8. Priaux Raineri
9. William Alwyn
10. Francis Chaignon
11. Constant Lambert
12. Christian Darnton
13. Walter Leigh
14. Alan Rawsthorne
15. Matyas Seiber
16. Benjamin Frankel
17. Arnold Cooke
18. Elisabeth Lutyens
19. Grace Williams
20. Elizabeth Maconchy
21. Howard Ferguson
22. William Wordsworth
23. Franz Reizenstein
24. Phyllis Tais
25. Daniel Jones
26. George Lloyd
27. Harold Truscott
28. Andrzej Panufnik
29. Humphrey Searle
30. Bernard Stevens
31. Dennis Apilow
32. John Gardner
33. Richard Arnell
34. Peter Racine Fricker
35. John Addison
36. Geoffrey Bush
37. Robert Simpson
38. Ruth Gipps
39. Ian Hamilton
40. Don Banks

Any information which your readers have on file, such as work lists, programmes, press notices—anything in fact which could assist us in tracking down 'gaps' in our data base, particularly first performance details, would be much appreciated (and, of course, duly acknowledged).

Please write to me at the address below. I look forward to hearing from you.

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from REGINA BUSCH

(apropos Kathryn Bailey's article 'Willi Reich's Webern' in TEMPO No. 165; extracted from a longer letter to the Editor of TEMPO)

I. First of all, when discussing the form of Webern's Variations in the light of his own analytical remarks, one should distinguish cautiously between primary sources (like letters), secondary sources (like notes from pupils, friends, or musicians who performed his music), and interpretations by musicologists and other music-lovers. Neither Reich or Webern can be blamed for the confusion (in Webern research) about Webern's op. 27 and its relation to the traditional concepts of 'form' and 'variation'.

Furthermore, it is important to discuss a single source on the basis of all available ones, especially if, as in the case of Reich, it was transmitted to us through a third person and its authenticity is not completely guaranteed, not in every detail.

(* The title is taken from Samuel Beckett's novel Imagination Dead Imagine and the speaker's text consists of fragments by Elisabeth Lutyens)
We know of Webern's own analytical comments on, for instance, op.21, op.24 (in the manuscript score*) op.28, op.30—I am mentioning only some published ones. We know about Leopold Spinner's analyses of, among others, movements from op.24, op.31, and—in his A Short Introduction to the Technique of Twelve-Tone Composition—op.27; and we are well acquainted with the musical terms used in the Schoenberg-Berg-Webern circle, for instance from Schoenberg's writings, or from Ratz's Fornenlehre. In the light of these Reich's notes don't sound completely wrong; in fact they even sound plausible. In Spinner's Introduction the first movement of op.27 is called Scherzo, and analysed as such: an ABA form with a contrasting middle section, the middle section having the character and function of an elaboration—as it were a sonata movement with only a single theme; whereas according to the musical thinking of the Schoenberg School, a three-part Andante is an ABA with Seitensatz (second theme group) but without an elaboration section.

The interpretation of the first movement of op.27 as 'Scherzo form' and 'Andante form' respectively does not represent a contradiction, but reflects compositional questions (such as those concerning ideas of form and formal functions) current at the beginning of the 20th century, and especially those of 12-tone music. Similar or comparable formal cases occur in the first movement of op.21 or in op.28—and are related, among other things, to the fact that Webern decided to have only two movements in opp.20, 21, and 22 (as I described in the article mentioned by Kathryn Bailey in her note 13).

With the third movement things are similar. As Kathryn Bailey mentions in her article, movements that are at the same time variations and of some other form are well known in Webern's music (the Variations for Orchestra, op.30, and the one in op.28 are the most famous ones—and, by the way, not mainly 'concerned with symmetry'). They are, among other things, examples of Webern's aiming at the combination, the unification of two formal ideas in the context of 'Synthese'—rather than for 'structural ambiguities and double meanings' (TEMPO 165, p.22).

As for 'Variations' as the title for the whole piece—Webern's description in the letter to Jone quoted by Kathryn Bailey (p.18) is quite clear: 'The completed part is a variations movement; the whole will be a kind of "Suite"' (my italics). This does not mean, as the author concludes in her next paragraph, that the rest of the work is 'a kind of "suite"', and it also does not exclude the first two movements being variations as well. The original German version does not have the 'whole...'—however the sense is clear, as is the use of 'Variationen' for the whole work: 'Einen Teil meiner neuen Arbeit habe ich schon fertig gestellt. ... Das Fertige ist ein Variationen-Satz; es wird eine Art "Suite". Ich hoffe, mit den Variationen etwas schon seit Jahren Vorgestelltes fertiggestellt zu haben'.

II. There are three relevant sources of information about the form of op.27 which Kathryn Bailey does not mention (and I am sure the following list is not complete):

1) Peter Stadlen's edition of the work (Universal Edition, 1979) which is an edition (facsimile and transcription) of the score he used in studying the piece with Webern. In the last movement we can see the numbers 1 to 4 at the accepted places. This fits very well with Reich's notes: in Dohl's transcription he does not maintain that the 'verkürzte Reprise' (foreshortened reprise) is more than one or at most two variations. Also, his not mentioning a Coda section does not mean that there isn't one.

2) A manuscript of the third movement given by Webern to Rudolf Kurzmann (now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York; brief description in Musik-Konzepte, Sonderband Anton Webern I, Munich 1983, p.43, footnote 103) which has the same numbers I to IV (I don't remember about V) in what looks like Webern's hand.

3) Webern's own remarks in his letter to Steuermann, dated 6.XII. 1936 (published in the Musik-Konzepte volume mentioned above, p.32f). 'Ich schickte Dir mit gleicher Post meine "Variationen" ... sind sie in für sich abgeschlossene Sätze (drei) aufgeteilt. Ich stelle auch das "Thema" gar nicht ausdrücklich hervor (etwa in früherem Sinne an die Spitze). Fast ist es mein Tempod, nicht mein anderes. In den zwei letzten Variationen ist schon alles angeordnet ... Ihr erster Satz ist quasi ein Andante, der 2. ein Scherzo (er ist ein zweistimmiger unendlicher Canon, unendlich innerhalb seiner zwei Teile, aber auch in Bezug auf diese beiden selbst; man muss ihn als etwas Freundliches spielen d.h. trachten, trotz des schnellen Zeitmasses doch das expressivo der Gestalten (gleichsam "cantabile") zu bringen. Der 3. Satz ist nun wirklich eine Variationen-Reihe, in seinem Bau. (Die vorletzte Variation im Sinne einer bewegten Melodie aufzufassen; der Charakter der anderen u. des Themas selbst ist ja wohl kaum verkenntbar.)'†

This explains nearly everything, only it doesn't say anything about the last movement as a Sonata.

The only really strange thing in Reich's notes is the number '12' or, more precisely: that the third movement is said to contain variations 5-12. From our knowledge of Webern's other variation movements (in op.21, 24, 28, or 30; op.30 is an interesting exception) we can conclude that here also the variations are of equal length, and so '5-12' cannot mean the number of variations. As the movement contains Theme and five variations, only the '12' needs an explanation (assuming for now that Dohl made no mistake in deciphering and transcribing Reich, and in typing his dissertation). I would like to propose the following explanation: In playing the whole piece from beginning to end, we have all in all:

* Cf. Regina Busch's article "Taktgruppen in Webern's Konzert op.24", in Muuse, November-December 1986, pp.532-537. (Ed.)
† 'I am sending you, by the same post, my Variations ... it is divided into self-contained movements (three). Also I make the theme by no means expressively prominent (at the head, so to speak). I almost wish that it could remain unknown as such ... Nonetheless, it had better remain as it is, at the rear. (It is—naturally I can disclose it to you—the first 11 bars of the 3rd movement.) ... The first movement is quasi an Andante, the second a Scherzo (it is a 2-voice 'endless' canon, endless within its two parts, but also with regard to these two together; one must play it in an almost aimiable way, viz. try, despite the fast tempo, nevertheless to bring through the expressive of the structure (likewise the 'cantabile'). The third movement is indeed a variation-sequence, in its construction. (The penultimate variation stands out in the spirit of a restless melody; the character of the others and of the Theme itself is fairly difficult to misunderstand.)'
1st Movement: 3 variations (or: Theme + 2 variations) = 3 variations of the THEME
2nd Movement: 2 variations, repeated (=2x2) = 4 variations of the THEME
3rd Movement: THEME + 5 variations = 5 variations of the THEME
Making: THEME + 12 Variations.

The remarks about the rows have to be taken differently. Usually Webern did not talk about his rows. Reich liked to count and calculate; we know that he discussed such things with Berg. It is possible, therefore, that he made the remarks about the rows independently of Webern. Moreover, so far nobody knows whether and how Orbinalreihe, Grundreihe were used by Webern. I insisted on taking the rows which Webern numbered ‘1’ as the basis for analysing his works (in row-analyses and others), but as far as I know that approach has attracted little attention, and we cannot blame Reich for something which is unfortunately common practice in Webern research. Also it seems that Webern used to have different Grundreihen for the different movements of one work, just as a Beethoven Symphony in D minor does not mean that every movement is in that key. Leopold Spinner, when asked about the idea of ‘Grundreihe’—and about the fact that in the first movement of op.24 the first 10 measures are not the first theme, but introductory (the main theme beginning in m.10/11, with the degree of the prime row)—answered: ‘Die ‘Grundreihe’ ist jeweils mit dem Thema bestimmt,—nicht umgekehrt!’

† Especially in the Muagia article on op.24 previously cited, and in ‘Wie Berg der richtige Reihe fand’ in Musik-Konzepte, Sonderband Anton Webern II (Munich, 1987). (Ed.)