

Editorial

EVER since the Russian Group of Five, music critics and publicists (sometimes abetted by the composers themselves) have enjoyed making convenient packages of apparently like-minded composers who are also friends, or appear to be so. If the 'groups' themselves have not been to some extent a fiction, much that is fictional tends to be attached to them. Only with very rare exceptions have composers of our time shown that same inclination to combine for discussion and collaboration which has been characteristic of painters and writers in almost every country. Perhaps the famous isolation of contemporary composers also makes them isolated from each other? At any rate, the most coherent groups since the pre-war days of 'Jeune France' have tended to be the post-graduate classes of some seminal figure such as Messiaen or Stockhausen.

Of groups in the true sense of the word there has perhaps been only one of recognized international significance since the war—the so-called 'Polish School' of Lutoslawski, Penderecki, Gorecki, Serocki and others. The historical and socio-political conditions which encouraged its formation were peculiar to Poland, and need no discussion here. But significantly the school began as an opposition group whose members needed and benefitted from the security of numbers. In the post-war West there did not seem at first to be anything to oppose, apart from obscurantism; 'the end of ideology' was being widely celebrated, and for the first time in the history of modernism the avant-garde lived and worked in well-subsidized comfort. But with the change in the economic and political climate in the mid-1960's the avant-garde was one of the sections of the establishment which came under critical scrutiny. The establishment's reactionary wing had of course always opposed it; but it was the secession of composers brought up in the Darmstadt-Cologne milieu which gave rise to new constellations in several countries. Whether the composers proceeded in a neo-romantic direction (as for instance in West Germany) or a Marxist one (e.g. West Germany also, and Italy) and/or a minimalist or systemic one (in most countries), they have been much criticized for turning their backs upon a vast range of new possibilities for the future of music—at the very least, the range from, say, IRCAM to Princeton. Nevertheless it is clear that the groups exist precisely because of these possibilities and of a felt need to find alternatives. One way or another there is generally something to be learnt from their experience. But whether or not the groups themselves survive as such, their musical interest is of course strictly proportionate to the achievements of the individual members.

The present issue appears on the occasion of the world première of HK Gruber's chanson-cycle, *Frankenstein!!* (at the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall on 25 November, with the RLPO under Simon Rattle, and the composer himself as soloist). At the age of 35 Gruber is still little known outside his native country, and *Frankenstein!!* is not easily approached without reference to the Viennese group of composers and instrumentalists with which he was associated in the late 1960's and early 1970's. One part of that context, however, is the work of Gruber's friend and informal mentor, Kurt Schwertsik (born Vienna 1935), whose secession as early as 1962* from the official avant-garde was a key event in post-war Austrian music and is still a controversial issue within and beyond his native country.

Detailed consideration of Schwertsik must await a later issue of *TEMPO*. Meanwhile the present issue is designed as an introduction in both a general and a particular sense. Insofar as it refers to the Viennese group as a whole, it necessarily includes a consideration of the group's literary father-figure, H. C. Artmann, whose collection of children's verse entitled *allerleirausch* provided Gruber with the text for *Frankenstein!!*

* See Cornelius Cardew, *Stockhausen serves Imperialism* (*Latimer New Dimensions*, 1974), pp.37 and 112.