

THE METAPHYSICAL REVIEW

No. 14
November 1989

The Music Issue

John Bangsund:
JOHN CAGE and ROS BANDT

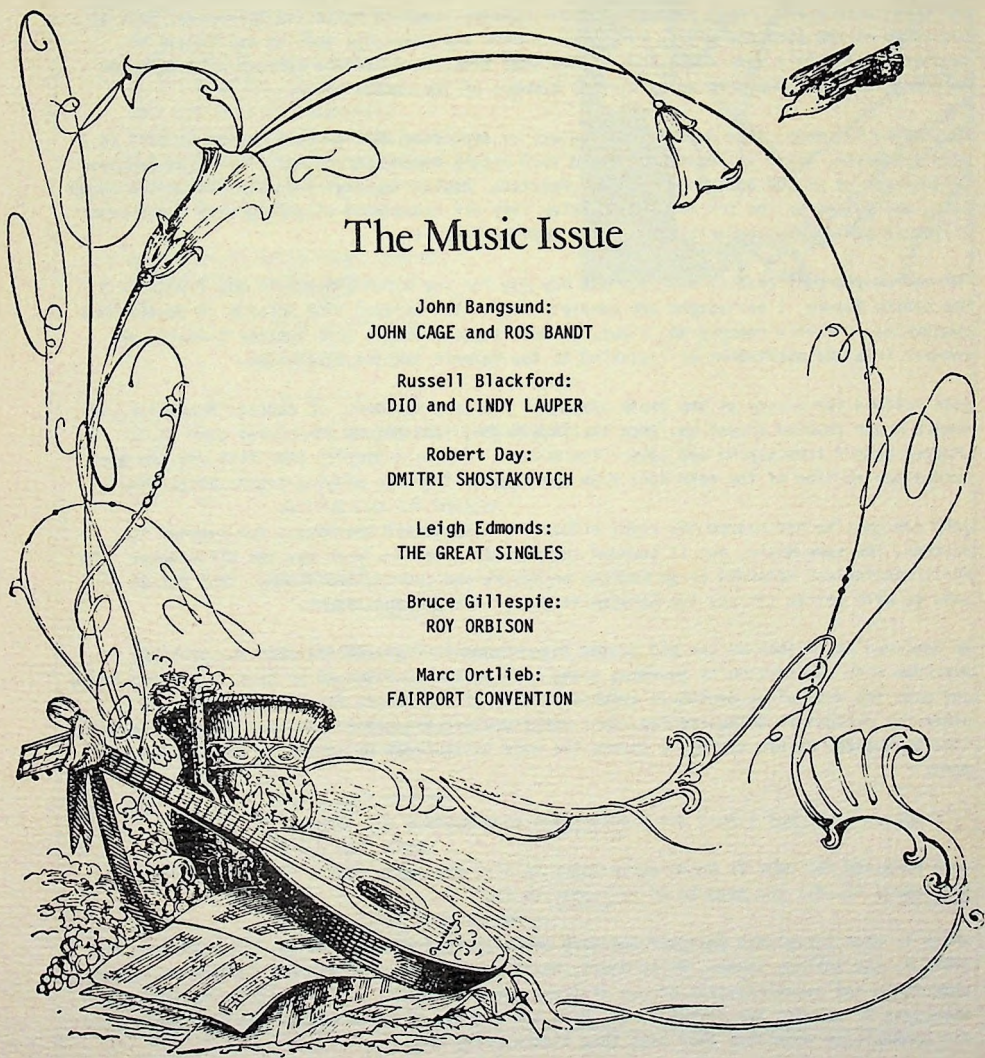
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FAIRPORT CONVENTION



I MUST BE
TALKING TO
MY FRIENDS

It's a deflating thought that this issue has taken longer to compile than the entire length of the run of the first series of Australian Science Fiction Review, or the first 30 issues of SF Commentary. Apart from apologizing to my contributors -- Robert Day in particular -- I will observe that these days three years flits by with the speed that three months did in 1969.

Speaking of ASFR: Some time in 1969, John Bangsund, the editor of the first series of ASFR, his first wife Diane, Leigh Edmonds and Paul Stevens lived in a flat in Ripponlea. Just as I turned up at the door one night, John arrived home and announced that he had thrown in another job and felt very depressed. At the same time, Paul Stevens arrived home from the Melbourne SF Club, accompanied by various members of the comics group.

Surrounded by chaos, John decided that he was so depressed that he could allow himself to play Beethoven. Naive Gillespie had heard very little Beethoven at that time. John Bangsund brightened. He played Beethoven's Choral Fantasia, explaining how it worked: the piano began solo, was joined by the orchestra, and later they all had a good singalong with the chorus. Gillespie jaw drops: wonderful! I'd heard nothing like it!

'Of course you know that it was just the dry run for the Ninth Symphony?' No, I didn't. A few months before, I had bought the complete set of the Karajan 1962 version of Beethoven's symphonies. I hadn't reached No. 9 yet. At that stage I wasn't sure whether I would ever recover from the excitement of listening to the Seventh for the first time.

John reached for a copy of the Ninth Symphony. The last movement, of course. Meanwhile, the comics group chaotied around us. When the tune began, just before the chorus came in, I stopped myself from saying out loud: 'The Seekers' "Emerald City"! (for that was the most recent pop version of the main tune from the Ninth). Then the singing began. Revelation!

John saw that he had scored the right effect. He whipped off the record and reached for another. The same music, but it sounded indescribably better. What was the difference? 'The first version was recorded by an English orchestra and chorus,' said John. 'But these' he said he with relish (it was the Karajan version) 'are German singers.'

We remained in silence at the end of the last movement of the Ninth. John was probably overcome with the emotion of becoming unemployed again. I wanted to go home to Bacchus Marsh and play the rest of my Beethoven symphonies. One of the comics fans (a venerable and otherwise delightful Melbourne fan, so I won't mention his name) came over to us. He didn't like Beethoven. He was trying to choose the most tactful way of asking us not to play any more.

'I'm sorry, John, but I just don't understand that music.'

John Bangsund (as near to murderously angry as I've ever seen him): 'You don't have to understand it. All you need to do is listen to it.'

Which is what I feel say whenever somebody wonders why I like Beethoven, Shostakovich, Roy Orbison, the Rolling Stones, Miles Davis, Helen Merrill and the Fairport Convention. I don't understand the technicalities of any of these types of music, but I do listen to what the musicians or singers are trying to do. Here are a group of contributors who love music, and can communicate what they hear when they listen. Play on.

DMITRI

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out of copyright illustrations.

In memory of Dmitri Shostakovich,
Roy Orbison, and my father.



THE MUSIC ISSUE

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WAITING FOR ROY ORBISON

by BRUCE GILLESPIE

(The first version of this article appeared in Raw Bits 7, ANZAPA Mailing No. 119, December 1987, and a much shorter version was published in The Melbourne Report, March 1989.

NB: In Melbourne, Australia, summer lasts from 1 December to 28 February, and the long summer holidays once stretched from 19 December to the second Tuesday in February.)

In '75, when I went into the studio to make Born To Run, I wanted to make a record with words like Bob Dylan that sounded like Phil Spector, but most of all I wanted to sing like Roy Orbison. Now everybody knows that nobody sings like Roy Orbison.

-- Bruce Springsteen, at the induction of Roy Orbison into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, 21 January 1987

I The summer of 1961-62

During the summer of 1961-62 I was fourteen years old and sitting on a chair in the middle of a lawn in the Melbourne suburb of Syndal while the sun beat down. In one hand I held a hose pointed limply at the nearest thirsty patch of grass. In the other hand I held a science fiction magazine, while I squinted in the glare of the sunlight. At my feet was my new transistor radio, which I was paying off, at one pound a month, to Paterson's Stores.

I was reading J. G. Ballard's 'The Drowned World'. As I eye-tracked it, the sweat gathered on my forehead and poured down over my cheek onto the page, and another bit of lawn drank water but remained obstinately dry. In 'The Drowned World', sweat poured over the characters and water rose from beneath them as heat and ocean overtook the world. Life and art oozed together.

From my transistor radio, continually threatened by my inaccurate hosing, came the sound of 'Peace Pipe', an instrumental hit by the Shadows. A calm attractive tune, 'Peace Pipe' had been picked by Stan Rofo and Keith Livingstone as the main theme for their day-long 'Summer Hits' program on 3KZ.

That was the perspiring summer of 1962: the Shadows' 'Peace Pipe', Ballard's 'The Drowned World', and the early hit songs of Roy Orbison. 'Crying' had just disappeared from radio playlists, and 'Dream Baby' had just been released. For Christmas my Auntie Linda and Uncle Fred had given me my first long-playing record -- Roy Orbison's Lonely and Blue -- and I found every possible chance to play it. This was not often, as there was only one record-player in the house, and my parents preferred Mozart to Roy Orbison.

That was a summer of impotence and damned, damned potentialities. I did not choose to sit out on that lawn in the heat. Given a choice, I would rarely have left my room.

I was there because the summer of 1961-62 was long and hot, and the dams were drying up, as they did most summers in Melbourne until Cardinia Reservoir began supplying the city in the 1970s. The government had banned watering lawns with fixed sprinklers. Therefore somebody -- me -- had to sit on a chair in the middle of the of the lawn, out of the shade, and hold the hose.

I had no choice. That's what irked me. Fourteen years old, and the product of a Good Christian Home during the early 1960s, I did what I was told. Being me, I grumbled the whole time, but I did it.

1961 was the year in which I fell in love yet again, and really discovered Roy Orbison's music. 'Falling in love' meant worshipping from afar. Once my eyes were filled with the image of the beloved, I thought of little else. But I did nothing about it. Instead I walked moonily around schoolgrounds singing in my head 'she walked away with m-e-e-e-e'. I pedalled down the edge of Blackburn Road, disregarding the stream of traffic bent on pushing me off the curb, while within my head I wandered lonely lanes, 'crying in the rain' with the Everly Brothers.

My life seemed a series of sad songs, which might have been happier if I had ever let the girl know that I doted on her. But I didn't, because I had no idea what to do next. What do you say to a glorious goddess you worship eternally? Especially when you are the merest worm of the earth, with no muscles, no ability at sport, no smart conversation, and no money? I couldn't actually ask her out, as my weekly pocket money did not even stretch as far as the price of one cinema ticket. Maybe I could declare myself in song. Perhaps I could get over the message, the tale of my breaking heart, by singing Roy Orbison songs. But I couldn't sing. I still can't sing.

How did I survive this heartrending situation? By getting on with being fourteen -- listening to the radio; collecting and writing up hit parades, which was my main hobby then; buying the few science fiction magazines I could afford; and publishing my first fanzine.

I owe a great deal to Ron Sheldon. I haven't seen him for more than 20 years, and have no idea where he lives, but someday I'd like to thank him for introducing me to two lifelong obsessions -- publishing magazines and collecting the records of Roy Orbison.

At the beginning of 1961 Ron Sheldon volunteered to do all the donkey work for a magazine that I would edit. Yes, Ron Sheldon was the first Carey Handfield. Ron and I typed the Fordigraph ('ditto') stencils, and Ron duplicated the four- or six-page magazine on his father's machine. During 1961 we published 26 issues, which were sold to kids and staff at Oakleigh High School, and made 7 shillings profit for the year. That was the last time I made a profit on a fanzine. In 1962 Ron's parents told him he had too much homework to continue the magazine, so it stopped.

Sometime in 1960, Ron said that his favourite singer was Roy Orbison, and his favourite song 'Only the Lonely'. I said 'Uh?' I liked 'Uptown' well enough. That had been Roy Orbison's first hit in Australia. 'Only the Lonely' was nice, but I hadn't really listened to it. After Ron mentioned it, I listened to it. One day, when I was riding my bike from Syndal with the transistor radio buckled to my belt, I had a road-to-Damascus (road-to-Oakleigh?) experience. At the end of 'Only the Lonely' Roy repeats the verse, but sings ever-higher notes, finishing with the word 'take'. For the first time, I heard that 'k' explode at the end of the song, echoed cavernously and gloriously in that wonderfully epic sound of the early Orbison records. From then on I was an Orbison fanatic.

The standard biographies tell me that Roy Orbison was born in Wink, Texas, in 1936, that he became a country singer at an early age, but for a while became a rock 'n' roll singer when Johnny Cash suggested that he send a tape of 'Ooby Dooby' to Sam Phillips of Sun Records. He made quite a few records for Sun, but had no success. Later he was employed as a song-writer; his most notable success was the million-selling 'Claudette' for the Everly Brothers. Joe Tanner of Monument Records signed a recording contract with him in 1959. Orbison's first record for the company was 'Paper Boy', a light, even hesitant rockabilly ballad that had no success. On 'Uptown', in late 1959, Orbison sounds more confident, but the song still gives no hint of his later style. 'Uptown' succeeded nowhere but in Australia. It was followed by 'Only the Lonely', which became very successful in America and Australia in 1960. From then on, Orbison had a string of hits that lasted until he changed record companies from Monument to MGM in 1965. In 1966 his wife was killed in a motorcycle

accident, and a year later two of his three children were killed in a house fire. Except in Australia and England, he has had virtually no recording success after 1968.

What was marvellous about Roy Orbison's records? I'm tempted to let other people describe them: for instance, The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Rock:

The songs utilised sweeping strings, crashing choruses and powerful crescendos. At a time when pop music was irredeemably lightweight, Orbison stood head and shoulders above his contemporaries; his vocals were peerless, his range extraordinary. His songs compelled attention.

There was the Roy Orbison voice, the vocal chords I wish I possessed. A voice that was often called 'operatic'. More accurately, a voice that could have been operatic. Roy wasn't all that great in the low range. He used the low notes at the beginning of songs to roll them along, to the point where he could take off. When he pushed that voice off the ramp, it flew or crashed. One of the great flat notes of all time is Orbison's last note in 'Crying'. So is the last note of 'Borne on the Wind', and he sings flat through most of 'Falling'. On the other hand, the last phrases of 'Only the Lonely', 'Running Scared', 'Leah', 'Gigolette' and 'Crawling Back' still sound to me as miraculous, uplifting, hair-raising (choose an adjective, then double it) as they did when I first heard them.

Roy Orbison had another recording voice, seldom used. On his version of 'Beautiful Dreamer' you hear a frail, lilting semi-falsetto, a soft Southern version of the Irish tenor voice. I wish he'd sung more songs that way.

Where did the startling originality come from? Not from Roy Orbison, I suspect. After his basic style became unfashionable, Orbison seemed incapable of adapting to the pop music styles of the 1970s and the 1980s. The standard biographies suggest that the loss of his wife and children disturbed him so fundamentally that he was unable to write or arrange new material for many years. Perhaps. Or perhaps somebody else had invented the 'Roy Orbison style'.

It's difficult now to recall the pace and excitement of pop music in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Today Fleetwood Mac or AC/DC can survive three-year gaps between albums. In 1960, a six-month gap between hits would finish a career. Chuck Berry remains a legend, although his well-known singles came out over only a four-year period. Roy Orbison had nearly 30 successful singles in less than seven years -- at least four singles a year, most of them double-sided hits. And each of those singles had to be seen to be better than the one before, or in some way different. When everybody in Nashville, New York, Detroit, and Chicago was competing at that level, pop music changed very rapidly.

Roy Orbison recorded several of the songs that Buck Ram wrote for the Platters. Before Orbison came along, 'Twilight Time' and 'The Great Pretender' were the two songs that came closest to his style. Who saw the possibilities for Roy Orbison's voice? Probably Fred Foster, owner of Monument Records, or Joe Tanner, who is credited as the arranger of Orbison's songs. The real breakthrough came with 'Running Scared' (1961). While Orbison's voice rises throughout the song, the march rhythm remains insistent and steady. The instrumental accompaniment starts with a solo rhythm guitar. Drums and electric guitar join it; then strings; then bass and sax; then chorus; and then the explosion of Orbison's triumphant last note. The same formula as Ravel's 'Bolero', but squeezed into 2 minutes 10 seconds. Instant opera.

And the power of the song is in the arrangement, not merely the song. You can't perform 'Running Scared' any other way.

'Crying' (1961) was a different matter -- a far more complex song, with a slow shuffle beat, two climaxes, and a tune so wayward that I suspect it is unsingable. Orbison failed the test. But the effect of the song is the same as in 'Running Scared': instant opera. If you're fourteen, and whistling around the house, trying to do your homework and read a book

and forever driven outside by parents because 'the sunshine's good for you', you stop dead when you hear 'Crying' on the radio, arrested, without realizing it, by the same emotions that will stop you dead eight years later when you hear the last movement of Beethoven's 9th for the first time.

II The summer of 1962-63

Everything changed during '62. It was, I now realize, the last year of my childhood -- the last year in which I had no control over my destiny. It was the greatest year ever for pop music, although nobody would agree with me now. It was the year I nearly became a Normal Functioning Member of Ordinary Society, but failed.

1962 is the year I had what is usually thought of as a normal social life for an adolescent. I joined the Christian Youth Fellowship of the Glen Waverley Church of Christ. An older girl (all of 16!) tried to organize dancing, but the minister stopped that. The group met each Friday night, and went on midnight rambles, and talked, and playing ping-pong, and had deep and meaningful Biblical discussions. (Readers of *Lake Wobegon Days* will be familiar with this intense but limited lifestyle.) And -- you guessed it -- I fell in love again. Again I had no idea what to say to my new love, and again I had no money to take her out, but she sort of got the idea, and Something Might Have Happened if we hadn't moved to the country. My feelings about everything became stronger, and I still had no way express those feelings except playing Roy Orbison records and singing his songs in my head.

My father was stuck on a low-paying rung within the State Savings Bank until he saw the chance to become a branch manager. In mid-1962 he gained the Melton branch. At that time Melton was a tiny village (500 people) 30 miles west of Melbourne, and my father would be the first State Savings Bank manager in the town. (Today Melton, with 40,000 people, is a satellite suburb of Melbourne.) In August 1962 the rest of the family moved from suburban Syndal to country Melton. For the last four months of 1962 I stayed with my Auntie Linda and Uncle Fred in Murrumbidgee and finished my fourth form exams. In December 1962 I moved to Melton. Eventually my hoped-for girlfriend and I stopped writing to each other.

Again the summer of 1962-63 was hot. The northwest wind built up speed as it hurtled over the Western Plains and, it seemed, straight through our flimsily built house. We had no lawn or garden, and had to spend the whole summer spreading out tons of soil so that my father could sow the lawn in the spring. There was no escape from the heat, dust or boredom except playing Roy Orbison records or listening to the radio.

1962 was Roy Orbison's crowning year, a short period of time in which he released four perfect records ('Dream Baby', 'The Crowd', 'Leah' and 'In Dreams'). During his tour of Australia early in 1962 he said in interviews how happy his life was, how unlike his songs was his own temperament. Cashbox magazine named him as Best Pop Male Performer. As each Orbison song was released, I spent all day crouched over the radio, pretending to be doing homework, waiting for the next playing of the latest Orbison record.

The most perfect pop song ever written or recorded is 'The Crowd' (May 1962). It wasn't a great success in Australia or anywhere, but it still astonishes me every time I hear it. 'The Crowd' is a simple song that sounds complicated, which is probably why it failed. Here the innovation in 'Running Scared' has been taken one step further. The insistent march rhythm is here, and all the compressed melodrama of the earlier song, but this time the rhythm turns into a snare-drum tango. The song begins with Orbison's immensely mournful 'I go out with the crowd', accompanied by a tolling piano note. The Voice rises, and the great dramatic tango begins. Orbison's notes lift ever upward. He ends each crescendo with a note higher and more exciting than the one before. Opera has nothing to match it, until you're nearer forty than fourteen.

How was the 'Orbison sound' constructed? As far as I know, nobody has published a history of recording studios. How did the engineers in Nashville gain that punchy, epic sound, an aural glow, that nobody can repeat now? Why did Orbison himself abandon this sound, so that by

1968 his songs sounded cheap and scrappy? Nothing fades like information about popular art, because usually it's not written down until after the popular art itself becomes decadent.

Orbison was already losing his musical way in 1963, but he had one last season of success. In 1964, when the Beatles sound had already displaced the other veterans of the early 1960s, Roy Orbison gained a worldwide hit with 'Oh, Pretty Woman'. He toured England, Europe and Australia with both the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. His records suddenly became hits in places where they had been ignored. All that ended when in 1965 he changed record companies (from Monument to MGM) and in 1966 when his personal life was destroyed. I waited for his return.

III The summer of 1987-88

The summer of 1987-88 was the longest and hottest since the series of horror summers that I remember at Melton and Bacchus Marsh during the 1960s. The cool changes didn't cool down the house; each hot spell was more vicious than the one before. I turned 41 years old. Some time between 1962 and 1988 I ventured to speak to girls, and even got around to kissing (et cetera) a few. One woman, Elaine, consented to marry me, although not until after a complicated romance that might just as easily have left us both as bachelor people. I live in a house which we own. It has a small garden that we don't need to water with a hand-held hose. I earn money. I publish fanzines occasionally. In a manner of speaking, I have achieved all the ambitions -- except writing a novel -- that I had in 1962, plus many that I could not have imagined.

Why look back to the pop music of 1962? Journalists say that we keep enjoying popular music of particular periods for the instant nostalgia it provides. That can't be right. I have no desire to relive periods of my childhood or adolescence. Enjoyable personal experience started with first year at university (1965) and, more poignantly, my first year in fandom (1968). I would reverse the old saw. The only reason to enjoy remembering the age of fourteen is to recall the music itself. It contained an unrepeatable simple integrity, a concentration of material into two-minute epics, and a sharp sense of the ludicrous comedy of teenage emotional life. I can't go back again. I don't need to. The music is still here, preserved on vinyl, tape, and CD.

Playing Roy Orbison records today reminds me that I might have done much, but didn't. If I have nostalgia for 1962, it's for a sense of having the rest of my life ahead of me. Life in 1988 brings no choices. There seem to be no great second chances after you turn forty.

Or is that also a delusion? In 1962 I could never have imagined the future that lay before me. In 1988 I can't imagine any future except a gradual downward slide of the life I'm leading now. Perhaps it's time to play those Roy Orbison records again -- anthems for an unknown future, not merely tunes from a lost youth.

IV The summer of 1988-89

In 1987 I was startled to see a video clip for 'In Dreams'. The song was the same as Roy Orbison's great hit from 1962. The black-clad, dark-spectacled figure was the same. But the newly recorded version was inferior to the original. Same arrangement; same voice; different recording engineer. Later I bought the new version by mistake. It was on the well-publicized CD from Virgin Records: In Dreams: The Greatest Hits, complete with cover note by Bruce Springsteen, saying that he always wanted to sing like Roy Orbison. All the songs were re-recorded, not the originals. Virgin Records became interested in Orbison because the original version of 'In Dreams' sparked a lot of interest among the people who saw the film Blue Velvet.

Blue Velvet began the revival of interest in Orbison. In early 1987 Orbison was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. At a later special concert to celebrate Orbison's career, Springsteen, Elvis Costello, Dave Edmunds, k. d. lang and many others played with him, and he was singing as well as ever. There were rumours of an album of new songs.

Everybody in the music business was on Roy Orbison's side. When would he produce the goodies? Could he write good new songs, arrange them in a way that will make an impression on 1988's audiences, and finally gain a hit album? Would CBS, who now owned Monument Records, put on CD all the original versions of his records?

In December 1988, Roy Orbison finally achieved the success I had waited for since 1964. The Travelin' Wilburys: Volume One, his collaboration with Bob Dylan, George Harrison, Jeff Lynne, and Tom Petty, reached Number 1 on the album chart. His new album, Mystery Girl, with songs written by U2, Elvis Costello, and Jeff Lynne, was about to be released. Once again that glorious voice would float above us from the radio. We, the fans, had not waited in vain.

But on 7 December 1988, at the age of fifty-two, Roy Orbison died of a heart attack. All his summers ended. Ours too? But we still have the music.

-- Bruce Gillespie,
November 1987/January 1988/March 1989

Notes:

- * Because of Roy Orbison's death, suddenly we have on CD far more Orbison music than we ever could have expected. CBS didn't admit to having his Monument tapes until the man died. The songs are being released randomly on CDs with names such as Our Love Song and Best Loved Standards. CBS does not supply discographies with the records, but the digital remastering of the old songs is magnificent.
- * Long before I had to turn this article into an obituary, I wrote it as a way of hunting down a mint or near-mint copy of Orbison's greatest album, In Dreams (1963) -- not the recent Virgin release I was complaining about above, but the record with Roy on the cover wearing what looks like a football jumper. My copy's worn out; I can't buy it new. I'll pay lots. How else can I keep alive the summers of 1962?

For
ROY ORBISON (1936-1988)
FRANK GILLESPIE (1919-1989)

The thing is, I see, to be great, to sit the world like a prince on horseback, to send out the will like a tyrant his armies, with the warning not to come back empty-handed. I need what the tyrant needs. Like him, I need plunder and booty and tribute and empire and palace and slave. I need monuments and flags and drums and trumpets. I need by photograph enlarged a thousand times in the auditorium. I am not, however, a great man. I see that I will never have these things, that I must adjust to my life as I must to my death, and that finally the two adjustments are the same. But despite this, I will never do what others do. I will not write my life off or cut my losses. I will never treat with it as the man in the next room has been forced to treat with his. I see what happens to such men. Their cancers take away their histories. My cancer, when it comes, must not do that. When I am downed, when the latest drug proves useless, when the doctor, embarrassed, asks who is to be notified, when the morphine is no longer effective and pain builds on pain, like one wave slapping another at the shore, when the high tide of low death is in, I must still have my history, and it must, somehow, matter!

-- Stanley Elkin, Boswell (1964), p. 133

* FAIRPORT CONVENTION

MARC ORTLIEB was introduced to fandom by Aussiecon I (the 1975 World SF Convention, held in Melbourne). Ten years later he found himself with a leading role at Aussiecon II. In between have been innumerable fanzine articles, letters, fanzines (Mad Dan's Review, Minador, Q36, and Tigger), and appearances in apas. But not, until now, an appearance in a Gillespie genzine. This is a bit surprising, since his Tigger took very much the direction that I expected for TMR. Hi there, Marc.

JUST A ROLL

by MARC ORTLIEB

(First appearance: G'Nel 51, ANZAPA Mailing 109, April 1986)

I saw Fairport Convention for the first time in more than ten years the other night. While not quite the sort of magical concert that Fairport provided in Adelaide in April 1975, it was a good show. Of course, 1975 was an interesting year for Fairport. Sandy Denny had just rejoined the band, and Bruce Rowland had been recruited as drummer. Dave Swarbrick was still there, and Trevor Lucas, Jerry Donahue, and Dave Pegg rounded out the line-up. I remember talking to friends who had been in the balcony seats who were scared that the people dancing on their seats during Swarbrick's spots were going to bring the entire hall down. Sandy Denny was pissed, and brought an intensity to 'Tam Lin' that sent shivers down my spine.

Fairport 1986 are a different band. They've regained founder member Simon Nicol and their second drummer, Dave Mattacks. Dave Pegg is still there. Swarb has been replaced by a demon fiddler from the Albion County Band -- Ric Sanders. They also have a guitarist named Martin Allcock, whose name reflects his guitar playing rather aptly. Still, one can't have everything. The week they were due to play Melbourne was a bad one for me, but I knew I'd kick myself if I missed the show, so I went.

It was the first concert I'd attended solo since going to see Pat Benatar in St Paul in 1981. There's something strange about going somewhere on one's own when one has become used to being part of a pair. Still, I knew the music would be far too loud for Cath, though she would no doubt have enjoyed some of the quieter folk numbers. I had dinner at the Pancake Parlour, reading an assortment of fanzines, including two recent Dillinger Relics that had arrived at the GPO box that day. Then it was out by tram to the Dallas Brooks Hall.

As is my wont, I arrived early, and sat on the sunwarmed steps reading Playing Beatie Bow, a rather sweet Australian time-travel fantasy by Ruth Park. There were two ageing bohemians, who were probably hippies once, giving away broadsheets of poetry down below me, but they didn't bother with me. I was wearing a tie, and had my teacher's red and blue pens in my shirt pocket. It has certainly reached the point that, if you want to look really nonconformist at a rock concert, you just need a collar and tie.

In the foyer there were the usual rock concert types, perhaps a little older than your Dire Straits crowd because of the vintage of the band. I spotted a couple of vaguely familiar faces, but no one I knew well enough to go and talk to. There was a bloke selling printed matter. Taking a close look, I discovered that what he had were Fairport Convention fanzines. Needless to say, being an avid reader of amateur publications, I bought the first two issues and gave him the money for the next three. While standing looking at the zines, I heard the huckster nattering to the tour promoter. The rumour that Trevor Lucas would join the band on stage was scotched. It appeared that Mr Lucas was out of town. It was a pity. It would have been good to get another ex-Fairporter on stage. (I will admit that I was hoping

that the McGarrigles might make an appearance with Fairport, as they were due to play the Dallas Brooks the next two nights, but that didn't happen either. I had had to choose between Fairport and the McGarrigles. Sigh. It never rains but it pours.)

When I'd booked my seat, I'd been told that it was in the front row. That sounded pretty good. What I hadn't been told was that it was carefully shielded from the stage by a huge great bank of speakers. I like loud music, but am no longer tempted to sit with my head in the speakers. The seat was not the best. Fortunately the concert wasn't booked out, and an usher moved the three of us in that predicament into seats with a better view, albeit a touch further from the stage. This saved me a little embarrassment as, from where I was sitting, to see any portion of the stage I had to gaze across the front of the two people seated to my left. It was a hot night, and the woman immediately to my left had left quite a bit of her frontage uncovered. I'm sure her boyfriend wasn't impressed by my direction of gaze. Okay. You know I'm a happily married man; I know I'm a happily married man; but they didn't.

The first act was the lead singer of the now-defunct Goanna -- Shane Howard, I think. He was average; not the worst support act I've ever seen, but not the best either. He did a couple of numbers solo, and then brought out two backing vocalists for a couple of Goanna songs. They looked as though they were just out of music school, and were doing the gig rather than the sort of coffee lounge/cabaret circuit on which you usually find young female singers. They had good voices, and the sense not to giggle too much when Howard hit the bum notes and had to tune his guitar in the middle of the last song of the bracket.

You would have thought that there wouldn't be any need to reset the stage for the second band if the first act was simply one bloke with an acoustic guitar and two backup vocalists. You would have been wrong. The roadies obviously had a clause in their contracts allowing themselves at least as much stage time as the headlining band. They spent twenty minutes setting up the Bushwackers' kit. Since I was sitting in a seat for which I did not, strictly speaking, have a ticket, I sat through the set up.

The Bushwackers were a band I knew by reputation but not from personal experience. They started off with an old Australian folk tune done à la Bill Haley and the Comets. I was amused. It seemed like a nice silly touch. It wasn't until they did another in the same manner that I realized that they were serious. All in all, I found them too much like a rock band and not enough like a folk-rock band. Their lead guitarist looked as though he'd be more at home in AC/DC, and their lead singer was just a touch too brash for my liking. Both impressed me at different times during the bracket -- the guitarist when he swapped his guitar for a violin for a string trio with the other two violinists (it became a duo when one of the regular violinists broke a string); and the lead singer impressed me with his manic antics with a lagerphone during some of the better dance songs. They are an interesting band, but not one I'd ever pay to see as headliners.

There was another equipment change, and this time I wandered out for a beer. I noted a bloke who I think is an MSFC member. I wasn't feeling particularly communicative though, and, throat lubricated, I regained my seat for the main feature.

The band were a bit of a shock. Dave Pegg had, in the ten years since I'd seen the band, changed from a long-haired muso to the type of character you'd expect to see sipping a pint in the Red Lion of a Friday night. (I noted that, when they played on Channel Nine's 'Sunday' program, Pegg was wearing a hat to disguise his bald patch.) Simon Nicol, in shorts, looked rather like an overgrown English schoolboy. Of the old band members, only drummer Dave Mattacks looked anything like he used to, and he hadn't been with the band the first time I saw them.

The new members were a mixed couple. Ric Sanders did the impossible. He filled the gap left by Swarbrick. The band started off with an old Fairport instrumental and, if I closed my eyes, I could imagine that it was Swarb on fiddle. As the bracket continued, though, Sanders stamped his own sound on the band and, if not an improvement, it was certainly not worse

than the Swarbrick sound. Meet on the Ledge, a history of Fairport Convention, compiled by Patrick Humphries, includes in a bogus advertisement for new members of Fairport Convention:

The long-established pop group Fairport Prevention have the following situations vacant (yes, folks, you have to be vacant to apply):-

AN EVIL-LOOKING SPACED-OUT FIDDLER (No, this is not an advert for a manager). No applicants over 3'6" need apply. Wages: 26 ounces of duff grass per week.

WHIZZ-KID LEAD GUITARIST. Must be capable of wheedly-wheeping at 140 miles an hour and chasing spotlights around the stage at the same time.

Sanders fills the violinist's part to perfection, except that he is a little tall. Martin Allcock fails abysmally to fill the guitarist's role. He and Simon Nicol played the Thompson/Swarbrick classic 'Sloth' as though performing at the Richard Thompson Guitar Academy end-of-term concert. Most of the notes were right, but the song got lost, except when Ric Sanders was playing.

Otherwise the band played very nicely indeed. It was a comfortable sort of a concert. Simon Nicol's vocals fitted some tunes, though not all. I suppose what they were really missing was a good lead vocalist and a lead guitarist.

Of course patter is an important part of any live performance, and Pegg and Nicol provided just the right amount, with Sanders adding the on-stage gymnastics. I got the feeling, though, that the audience were never really all Fairport's, and the fact that half left before the encore confirmed that. (I was on my feet to go, thinking that they wouldn't do an encore. They did 'Matty Groves', which was worth missing the last tram home for.)

To add to the atmosphere, the band were out in the foyer after the concert selling and autographing their new album. Had I had the money, I'd have bought a copy there and then. Nicol and Pegg made excellent salesmen. However, I wasn't sure how much the taxi home was going to slug me.

Review: Fiddlestix -- a Fairport Convention fanzine

Although I'd known about music fanzines for a while, Fiddlestix is the first I've bought. If I had to compare it to anything, it would be with Paul Kennedy's Time Loop. However, in the place of the six Dr Who Icons, there is a new pantheon, with spaces one and two occupied respectively by Sandy Denny and Richard Thompson: Sandy, because she's dead, and so is ideal for canonization, and Thompson, because he's the enigmatic ex-member. The only current member of the band who gets much of a mention in the first two issues is Dave Pegg, making the zine's subheading, 'The fanzine of the Australian Friends of Fairport', somewhat misleading. It seems more a fanzine for those interested in ex-Convention members.

The cover for the first issue is a rather necrophiliac montage of Sandy Denny references. The cover for Number Two is a cartoon of Dave Pegg as he looked umpty-one years ago. The contents include discographies, particularly for Richard Thompson, photocopied press clippings about the band and its members/ex-members, drawings of the band, and bad photocopies of photographs of the band. Snuck in there are also brief descriptions of the meetings of Friends of Fairport, which consist of going to someone's place to listen to Fairport-related albums. I guess it's all very well, if you like that sort of thing.

-- Marc Ortlieb, March 1986

I introduced RUSSELL BLACKFORD in TMR 11/12/13, so I won't do it again. Not sure what he's up to. Like the rest of us, he's probably earning a living. He's still a member (with Jenny Blackford, John Foyster, Yvonne Rousseau, and Janeen Webb) of the Collective who produce the dismayingly regular Australian Science Fiction Review (Second Series).

I think this is the first time I've received an article directly addressed to me as if it were a letter of comment.

A NOTE TOWARDS
THE GREAT MUSIC DEBATE

by RUSSELL BLACKFORD

I

I don't know anything about Country Punk or most of BRG's other musical interests, but I have my own reasons for believing that Popular Music Has Not Yet Gone Wholly To The Dogs -- some of those reasons are covered in what follows. I still find the Top 40 amusing to follow, at a safe distance (much like VFL football), despite the predominance of boring (to me) disco pop. But (to me, again) the best music is still rock 'n' roll, and the most exciting rock 'n' roll is still live. Part I of this article takes a case in point that has little to do with the Top 40.

To cases, then. Last night (as I write this), on 16 September 1986, almost unheralded by publicity, the world's greatest heavy metal band did a concert in Melbourne. Now the 'world's greatest' accolade would certainly cause a debate in the right quarters, but it caught your attention, and if Dio isn't the greatest it did a bloody good imitation thereof last night. BRG, I know you think heavy metal is 'vulgar' because I read it in Rataplan, and I won't try to convert you now, God knows; the concert would probably have left you cold. But, for the record (no pun intended), you'd have to have been there, and in the right frame of mind for the experience, really to appreciate the concussive, iconoclastic band.

Some heavy metal outfit from Sydney, whose name entirely escapes me, warmed up the Festival Hall audience. The act was basic, prancing up and down along the stage in front of a backdrop of painted spider webs, but they were good, the lead singer almost competing for vocal histrionics with Ronnie James Dio himself as heard on record or CD... or so it seemed until RJD commandeered the stage at nine o'clock, after interval.

The main band, then. Curtains drew back in darkness: dim lights teased the stage, the credits music (what else could you call it?) hummed and rolled, and then the lights, gradually brightening, revealed, dominating the stage and the musos through coloured smoke, a huge array of drums on a high platform: drums piling and arching high over the drummer's head (and, yes, the drummer used them all, reaching backwards to pound the big fellas behind his head for a cataclysmic solo). You've got to picture it, construct the atmosphere: stadium packed with young people in denim and leather, splashed with the sewn icons of favourite bands -- Metallica, Motley Crue, Motorhead, WASP... Dio -- shibboleths, totem images, names of power. T-shirts and jackets flaunted HM logos and slogans ('SPEAK OF THE DEVIL' read the back of one dark jacket, not a cliché but an injunction). Picture it: the crowd chanting, 'DEE-OH! DEE-OH!'; the sea of waving arms in front of stage, forefingers/little fingers outspread as horns in the sign of the Devil; the drumset, massive

at centre stage, dwarfing the stacks of amps which flanked it -- the amps themselves looming over the musos' heads.

Over all, the astonishing vocals of RJD, wailing, throaty, piercing, urgent, punctuated by high volcano gushes of sparks from Roman candles at front of stage. And, occasionally, synchronized explosions of fire, light, and sound! 'Next time we'll bring the dragons and all the stuff you've read about in magazines!' Sure, but even without the dragons it was enough.

BRG, forget the Satanist trappings, forget the repetitive lyrics -- hymns in praise of desire, energy, rock music itself, laid over with the iconography of Heaven and Hell produced by some kind of archetype-to-cliche sausage machine. Forget that. Here was rock 'n' roll, and here was a vocalist with no need of a hi-tech recording studio to give him voice, give him a voice -- and backed up by one Hell of a band (sorry...). They did songs from Dio's three albums to date, plus some old Rainbow songs -- 'Long Live Rock 'n' Roll' and 'Man on the Silver Mountain' -- from RJD's days heading up that group. Their last encore was the headbanger Aid-for-Africa song, 'Stars'.

The night had plenty of humorous moments. Humorous to my eyes. Image 1: We were standing on our plastic orange chairs behind an adolescent bunch that consisted of a vaguely seedy-looking thirteen-year-old couple and their friend -- a blonde girl, angelic, dolled up in blue denim. They were trying to teach angelface the Dio-concert equivalent of dancing: banging heads and feverishly flinging arms, throwing them forward or outward past heads, fingers stretched -- horns of the Devil, heavy rock signature. She seemed to find this slightly embarrassing, tended to dissolve into helplessness and giggles.

Image 2: Behind us, standing on their chairs like the rest, a young man and what appeared to be his mother, Mum getting into the music, the two of them surrounded by the crowd around them, hands of the crowd raised in the horned fingersign, dark power salute -- gesture of obeisance and act of participation in the band's magic and the magic of rock 'n' roll itself. Not that a one-time sword-and-sorcery writer, slave to verbal logic, could so abandon the boundaries of self and knowledge as to understand truly, much less join in...

And what the small contingent of police who turned up in the last encore to watch over the sinister, good-clean-fun-loving crowd made of it all I'm damned if I know (sorry again!).

For the next instalment of this article, I'll report on real Top 40 stuff -- the hugely publicized Cyndi Lauper concert that came up two weeks later at Melbourne's Sports and Entertainment Centre. Hell and Heaven, kiddies; Heaven and Hell.

II

Two nights ago as I write Part II, I made it to the Cyndi Lauper concert with Jenny Blackford and Lucy Sussex, good company and -- while it would give this piece rhetorical tension if I could say otherwise -- a great show. I'm not gullible, kiddo. I've seen some disappointing shows in my time. The big Police concert at the Showgrounds when that group was supposed to be number one in the world was a case in point. And supporting Cyndi Lauper was Wa Wa Nee, pretty close to the most popular Australian band still doing time confined to the Australian scene... at least according to the charts; but, apart from some very snappy choonkah! choonkah! guitar work, the band had little going for it live. The lead vocals were gutless, undistinguished, tending to get lost amidst the music of a not particularly overpowering band. In fact this could lead me to some melancholy reflections on the state of Australian music: in the last few weeks I've seen two astonishing overseas vocalists touring this country, Ronnie James Dio and Cyndi Lauper, and I wonder whether any Australian popular vocalist has a voice to compete on this level of power, distinction and versatility. Yeah, yeah, give 'em the same equipment and then judge, I know. But there's still bloody few obvious candidates. BRG... whaddya think?

This essay at music criticism deserves to have more binary snap and crunch about it, and,

yes, you couldn't imagine two more different crowds than those at Dio and at Cyndi Lauper. The Satanic bangers of metal attracted proletarians or pseudo-proletarians, more males than females, mainly late teens, and sticking pretty much to black leather and blue denim. The New York City rainbow waif brought in a younger crowd, mostly female, dressed up in all the colours of a paint set (maybe that's what they were: The Paint Set). Here was God's plenty: plenty of yuppie parents mother(-or-father)-ducking along with little girls in tow, early primary-school age, hair sprayed into fluorescent swirls of teased-up colour in imitation of the redoubtable Cyndi's and in celebration of the title of her new album, chart-jumping salmon-fall-leaping single, and associated concert tour: True Colours. Jenny commented to me that the whole atmosphere was like a Sunday-school picnic, which was not one of her hyperbolic denigrations but a precise description of the atmosphere at the good ol' Swimming Pool.

And how do you compare first impressions of the performers? It's a bit like comparing a World War II battleship with a sleek new hi-tech guided-missile destroyer (bearing in mind that the gigantic and lumbering Missouri now carries nuclear-tipped missiles aboard, and if modern heavy metal bands are dinosaurs they're highly augmented, long-evolved ones). The Cyndi Lauper band set up behind a translucent white curtain. What showed through were glowing LEDs; and the vanishing curtain revealed glittering decks of electronic equipment that belonged on the bridge of starship Enterprise, the instruments themselves gleaming like the hi-tech metallized audio playcentre of some nest of Swedish yuppies. Mind you, like RJD's band, this one was suitably big, fast, and percussive: two mighty drum sets dominated the stage (and, indeed, the drummers) -- one conventional, the other bongo-orientated (no nukes). Yeah, and amidst all this glitter and glam Cyndi danced, climbed, twirled (in a swirly, whirly skirt over calf-length tights, the skirt (but not the tights) to be abandoned in mid-performance.

How the crowd loved her! The kiddies would race along the length of the Entertainment Centre to try to get close to her whenever she climbed the steep rungs to one of the high platforms at side of stage, and then there were the individual devotees running onto the stage itself at frequent intervals during the night, desperate to touch her before being led away by the security folks -- Cyndi continuing on regardless. 'I love you, too!' was her catch cry; and, though this became a bit irritating, it went without saying that everyone there loved her. The night's icon was no horned fingersign, but the personal lights of (God help us!) cigarette lighters snapped open all across the darkened auditorium while the lady sang 'True Colours'. Hell and Heaven, I said, folks.

What is immediately staggering, sensational, about Cyndi Lauper is her sheer vocal range -- and the volume and control she develops through her full reputed four octaves. Not that the songs come across as exercises in technique. They are all varied: anthemic, boppy, wistful, outrageous, cute. And the singer gives energy, damn it, physical, emotional, to everyone -- the performances emotionally enthralling, the requirements of vitality, of stamina, truly awesome (here's a woman for whom every aerobics class must have paid off!). She talked to the audience, sang especially for us, told us a corny joke in her almost unintelligible (to Australian ears) accent. At the punch line there was incomprehension until she told us 'That joke really breaks me up!' Good on yer, Cyndi; we loved you, too! The crowd would have gone off its several thousand heads laughing at anything she wanted it to believe was funny... and without even believing it for a minute.

When the True Colours album is available in CD, I'm going to buy it. If the songs that were new to me sound half as good, as convincing, as they did live, it's a great album.

Despite the parenthetical Jeremiad about Aussie vocalists, and despite the amount of undistinguished pap on the pop charts (or vice versa), there's still delight to be found in the live performance of at least one singer the Top 40 has taken to its Top 10 heart. It'd be nice to be gloomy, BRG, but the signs over the last month have all been good. I'll keep you posted on developments.

-- Russell Blackford, October 1986

brg In all that, you don't report on the acoustics at the Sports and Entertainment Centre (formerly Melbourne's Olympic Swimming Pool). There have been lots of rock acts I've wanted to see over recent years, but until the new Tennis Centre opened they've all been staged at the Sports and Entertainment Centre. The Age reviewers all make the comment: probably a good show, but we didn't hear it because of the rotten acoustics. Very few shows are now put on at the Festival Hall, which has a clear amplified sound since an acoustic-tile ceiling has been installed.

Russell's bitchings at BRG go back to immoderate, long-forgotten articles I wrote in 1982 and 1983 for Leigh Edmonds's Rataplan. I can't even remember why I would have called heavy metal music 'vulgar'. It disappoints me because it became formularized, especially when you consider that the first heavy metal bands, such as Led Zeppelin, were noble innovators. Recently I saw a television program of video and film clips of performances by AC/DC. The early stuff, with Bon Scott as lead singer, is the most exciting visual rock I've seen; the later stuff, after Bon Scott died and Brian Johnson became lead singer, seems heavy footed and dull. The heaviest, most exciting rock I've heard and seen was a concert given during the most recent tour by Neil Young and Crazy Horse. No gimmicks at all: just a great band, a very great vocalist, and brilliant songs. Young has become so good that radio stations don't play him at all now. (The Neil Young/Crazy Horse show was at the Festival Hall.)

Australian performers? Without having seen him in concert, I would guess that Jimmy Barnes (formerly of Cold Chisel) is as good and loud as anybody else in the world. After him, there's nobody in the shout-and-holler school. My favourite Australian vocalists on record are Joe Camilleri (Black Sorrows; formerly Jo Jo Zep and the Falcons) and Paul Kelly, but they have a more subtle appeal than Dio, Cyndi Lauper, or Jimmy Barnes.

I've never heard Dio on radio, so I have no idea how good the group is. I've heard far too much of Cyndi Lauper on radio. I bought True Colours, and found mainly bland, synthesized, boring songs, with only one or two interesting performances. Cyndi can do a lot better than this. The best performance she ever gave is 'I'm Gonna Be Strong', from the Blue Angel album, on which she is the lead singer. This album was re-released after Cyndi became popular. I've never heard her 'I'm Gonna Be Strong' on radio; I knew that it existed because I saw the video clip on Night Moves long before Lauper became popular.

What's wrong with pop music today? In a word: synthesizers. I haven't heard a convincing drumbeat for years, except on records that are not played on radio. The people I like -- Green on Red, T-Bone Burnett, and k. d. lang, among many others -- are ignored by radio stations. The people who are played sound as if they all use the same computer program. No wonder I listen to 3MBS-FM and ABC-FM instead of any of the pop stations. *

WHO?

[During the early 1940s] Shelley Winters recalls that her father met Brecht playing open-air chess in downtown Washington Park one day and brought him home for the evening. Afterwards her mother said that he seemed like a nice man, and she wondered what he did: 'I think he is some kind of jeweller: when I asked him he said he made jewels for poor people.' Susan Sontag's parents knew many important musical figures, but she took their presence absolutely for granted and only later realized whom she had vaguely, not very interestedly known. There were many who knew Schoenberg as a ferocious tennis player who had something indeterminate to do with music, and it is recorded that one evening at Ira Gershwin's, a rich society hostess distinguished herself by trying to rope Schoenberg into the after-dinner entertainments with 'Give us a tune, Arnold....'

-- John Russell Taylor, Strangers in Paradise:
The Hollywood Emigres, 1933-1950, p. 210

LEIGH EDMONDS is a famous Australian fan who has been around even longer than I have. (He attended the 1966 Melbourne SF Convention; I go back only as far as the 1968 Melbourne SF Conference.) He has published many wonderful fanzines (Rataplan was nominated for a Hugo in 1985), organized conventions, written for fanzines throughout the world, won DUFF -- all the little things you do in between making a living. Now Leigh's income has dropped greatly as he and Valma Brown move from New South Wales to Western Australia, and he becomes a full-time doctorate student in Australian History at Murdoch University. 'The prospect is so exciting my toes tingle and I do a little jig of joy.' I felt the same way when I received this article, Leigh's first contribution to a non-Edmonds fanzine for some time.

'BOYS IN TOWN'
AND OTHER GREAT SONGS OF OUR AGE

In which
LEIGH EDMONDS
resists the temptation
to write about Philip Glass
for twenty pages

Valma and I moved up to stay in Eric Lindsay's house in the Blue Mountains for a few months before heading over to Perth to take up my new vocation as a professional university student. There have been many delights to the stay -- mainly the opportunity to get to know Sydney better and to have a rest between jobs. One unexpected joy has been the opportunity to listen to decent FM radio. Here in Sydney you can listen to goodness-knows-how-many FM stations, but only two or three are really interesting, to me at least.

But I suppose that I should tell you of the state of radio in Canberra first, just to fill you in on why Sydney is so nice. Down in Canberra they have two FM stations. One is the ubiquitous ABC-FM 'Fine Music Across Australia' (which no home should be without) and 2SSS-FM. Triple-S is dedicated to broadcasting sport, mainly horse-racing, but also anything else that even vaguely fits into the sporting theme. Why they need an FM station to broadcast race-calls that have come down a telephone line is beyond me, but that's Canberra for you. But to be fair to the station, when they started off they played some good rock in stereo when they weren't broadcasting sport (and since they didn't have too many ads I could put up with some sport in its place). I spent quite a few exciting mornings walking to work while they poured red-hot Eurhythmics music into my ears, but it all changed when they settled down and decided to go for 'middle-of-the-road' rock. A little while later we moved up to Sydney and my aural sensibilities were saved.

The first time I put on my headphones and swept across the dial there seemed to be so much to listen to, but very close together on the band are 2DAY-FM and 2MMM-FM, both good commercial rock stations. These days I spend my time switching between TripleM and ABC-FM, depending on whether I've had enough tedious classical music or whether I will scream if I hear Joe Cocker's latest hit single one more time.

The great thing about Triple-M is that they have imaginative programming. I guess that it is actually all worked out by computer because nobody would be able to keep in his or her head the number of tracks they play, especially on their 'No Repeat Thursdays' and other adventurous jaunts into the vast collection of rock that has built up over the past thirty years. For a while there I would listen to the station in the hope of hearing my favourite tracks being played (just as I used to with 3UZ, Melbourne, back in the late 'sixties), but

for the past month or so I have been less keen. This may be because I am getting jaded or because the ABC has been broadcasting Federal Parliament. More realistically, I think it is because they have taken James Reyne off the rapid-rotation lists and he only crops up once or twice a week now.

But the other day they played my all-time favourite hit single and it reminded me of a little project that I started on some time ago but never completed. A year or so ago I was down in Melbourne doing some research at the Archives and listening to the FM radio there. (TripleM in Sydney and EON-FM in Melbourne are owned by the same company so they sound very similar, except that they don't have Lee Simon doing the afternoon shift in Sydney and they don't have Uncle Doug [Andrew the Boy Genius, Warrick the Barking Traffic Girls and the Mighty Whitey] doing the breakfast shift in Melbourne.) The project was to list my favourite ten rock singles.

This is not as easy as it sounds, not by a very long way. There are two problems; the first is to remember all the singles that you've heard over the radio, the other is to decide which ones you liked the best. But after having thought on this for a while I've come to the conclusion that it is really impossible to do properly because moods change from week to week and from day to day. For example, there was a time, many years ago now, when I might have included The Troggs' classic 'Wild Thing', but that only shows you the state of mind I must have been in to think something like that.

And then Bruce lightly dropped the hint that he was going to be publishing a Music Issue of The Metaphysical Review . . .

What sealed me in my resolve to write this short article was not any desire actually to list my all-time favourite hit singles but the realization that I had stumbled across a marvellous psychoanalytical tool. All you have to do is list your ten favourites and that tells everyone (actually it will be the highly trained specialist who charges \$90 an hour, when I get the new course up and running) what sort of mental state you're in at the moment. For example, if somebody lists Everly Brothers songs and slips in a couple of old Phil Spector tracks at the bottom of the list we know that they are desperately depressed and that there is probably no hope for them. On the other hand, anybody who includes a good balance of AC/DC, Blues Rock and Devo cannot fail to be in perfect mental balance with his or her environment.

Since L. Ron Hubbard was probably the first 'clear' I suppose that I am now obliged to put my own psyche on this new couch of psychoanalysis and generate my own list of the all-time favourite hit singles. But before I do I suppose I should set the scene and point out that I am sitting at a table downstairs at Eric Lindsay's place, with old fanzines and computer magazines on shelves behind me and old copies of Amazing, Analog and F&SF before me. It is mid-February (when one has been unemployed for a few months one discovers that such rough approximations are all one needs to know about what the time is).

THE LIST

- 1 'Boys in Town' -- Divinyls
- 2 'Freedom of Choice' -- Devo
- 3 'Rain' - Beatles
- 4 'Hey Joe' -- Jimi Hendrix Experience
- 5 'Anarchy in the UK' -- Sex Pistols
- 6 'Fall of Rome' -- James Reyne
- 7 'Take Me to the River' -- Talking Heads
- 8 'Jailbreak' -- AC/DC
- 9 'Gloria' -- Them
- 10 'Of Hearts and Dreams and Tombstones' -- The Purple Hearts

If this were a really solid article for Bruce, the following fifteen pages would be taken up with detailed analysis of what is so utterly fantastic about those tracks that I had to

include them. But this is only a cheap imitation of a registered and certified Bruce Gillespie article, so I will simply comment that the reason I chose those handful of tracks would be self-evident to anybody who had half an ounce of musical sensibility stuck in between her two ears. (If you haven't heard all of these singles then you have my sympathies. You might find it difficult to find a copy of Number 10 these days; it was a little difficult to find in 1969 even, and you're not getting your hands on my copy now.)

Well, in a month's time we will be living on the West Coast, somewhere in Perth, where it is said to be sunny all the time, etc., etc. I wonder what my Top Ten listing might look like then. Perhaps you might find a Beach Boys single or two. Gack!

-- Leigh Edmonds, March 1988

brg This article was obviously designed to make me sit down for a week to work out my Top Ten Singles list. Leigh Edmonds has finally stopped the Endless List-Maker in his tracks. I'm defeated. Top Ten Albums, maybe. But singles? How could one get a list that came in under a hundred items?

I don't know about this psychoanalysis deal (but I'll charge Leigh \$90 an hour for my trouble if he sends the money in advance), but his list shows, despite birthdates and other contrary evidence, that he is immensely younger than I am. The Age of the Pop Single finished about 1970, but Leigh's list contains six items recorded after then. After 1970, most pop singles are merely songs pre-released from and designed to boost the sales of albums. Before the mid-1960s, pop performers made their money from pop singles, not albums.

Let me go back to First Golden Age of the Pop Single -- 1956 to the end of 1963. Leigh has no items from that era. He says derogatory things about two of the great acts of the early 1960s -- the Everly Brothers (singers) and Phil Spector (producer). Much of Spector's best work, however, was during the Second Golden Age of the Pop Single -- 1964-1970.

Off the top of my head, so Dr Edmonds can have fun, are some favourites from the First Golden Age of the Pop Single. Best pop single ever: 'The Crowd' -- Roy Orbison (see first article in this issue). Some others: most of Roy Orbison's singles from 1960 to 1964; 'Shout', 'Sing' and 'It's Too Late' by Johnny O'Keefe, 'Oh Yeah Uh Huh' by Col Joye (that's the Australian content); 'It'll Be Me' by Cliff Richard; 'Guitar Tango', 'Kon-Tiki' and 'Wonderful Land' by the Shadows; 'Memories of Maria' by Jerry Byrd (so obscure I've never been able to find a copy); 'Walk Right Back', 'So Sad' and 'Crying in the Rain' by (of course) the Everly Brothers; 'Johnny B. Goode' by Chuck Berry; 'I'm Gonna Be Strong' by Gene Pitney, 'What'd I Say' by Ray Charles, and -- here are three to make you groan -- Skeeter Davis's 'End of the World', Brian Hyland's 'Ginny Come Lately', and Frank Ifield's 'She Taught Me How to Yodel'.

I'm beginning to admire the Edmonds capacity for restraint. I seem to have concocted a Top Thirty already. The Second Golden Age of Pop Singles? Most of the Rolling Stones singles during that time; a few of the Beatles singles; nearly all the Animals' singles; all the Simon and Garfunkel singles; Chuck Berry's 'You Never Can Tell' (1965) (my third-favourite single of all time); Jerry Lee Lewis's 'Lewis Boogie' (1964); 'Monday Monday' and 'Dancing Bear' (Mamas and Papas) . . . and lots of Phil Spector productions: 'You've Lost that Loving Feeling' and 'Hung on You' by the Righteous Brothers; 'Proud Mary' by Checkmates Ltd; and the second-best single ever, Ike and Tina Turner's 'River Deep -- Mountain High'. 'A Love like Yours' (also Ike and Tina Turner, also produced by Phil Spector, 1966) is also a favourite.

Of your list, Leigh, I like Numbers 1 (but isn't 'Elsie' much better?), 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10. I've never heard Numbers 2, 5 or 6. And I have a copy of 'Of Hearts and Dreams and Tombstones'. Top Ten Album lists next time? *

This episode of 'The Best of John Bangsund' is more recent than last issue's. It comes from a 1984 issue of The Society of Editors Newsletter, John's fanzine best known among non-fans. John showed in the Newsletter his own blend of personal journalism and attention to serious matters -- in this case, matters of concern to editors. The Society of Editors honoured John with a life membership in 1987.

A FEW BARS OF CAGE

by John Bangsund

(Reprinted with permission from the 'Threepenny Planet' column, Society of Editors Newsletter, March 1984.)

There's a book -- well, three actually -- that I should be working on at this moment, but instead I am enjoying a quiet morning with John Cage. Right now I am listening to Joshua Pierce playing two Pastorales for prepared piano. Not long after he started I thought That's odd: I wonder how he gets that effect. It was almost as though someone were standing about six feet behind the piano and banging a dustbin lid. The rhythm was fascinating, the sound interesting, but I couldn't work out how you could do it on a piano, however prepared. So I went and put my ear to the speakers, then walked into the next room, and sure enough, one of my neighbours is enjoying a quiet morning banging a dustbin lid or a drainpipe or something. It would betray total ignorance of all that John Cage stands for to get annoyed about this aleatoric accompaniment, but I was pleased that my neighbour was in tune, and am pleased that he has now stopped.

One day in 1958 I preached a sermon at the Newmarket Church of Christ -- someone else's sermon probably, but never mind -- on a text from Acts 12:16. You will recall that Herod had thrown Peter in prison, but an angel sprung him, and after he'd considered the thing he went to hole-up at his friend Mary's place, where his mates were having a prayer meeting. Well, he knocketh at the door, and this sheila Rhoda came to hearken unto who might be calling at this hour of night, and she was so tickled pink when she recognized Peter's voice that she rushed back to the meeting and said Hey, youse blokes, guess who's outside! And they said unto her, Thou art mad. Well, you can imagine the scene: a real barney, on for young and old, with chapter and verse flying about and Amen and Thus saith the Lord, you know how these Christians carry on. And all this time Peter is out in the cold, probably thinking there's something wrong with the organization when it's easier to get out of Herod's prison than into your cobbles' house. But did he despair? Not a bit of it. Verse 16: 'But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.' Mind you, in the very next verse, after he'd told them his amazing story, he decided to hole-up somewhere else -- 'And he departed, and went into another place' -- and you couldn't blame him after the treatment he'd had from these nongs. Anyway, there I am, preaching about steadfastness or something, illustrated by 'But Peter continued knocking!' And about the third or fourth time I said it -- you're way ahead of me, aren't you -- there's this bloke up on his roof, next door to the church, and right on cue he starts hammering. 'Better let him in,' says some wag in the congregation, and everyone packs up laughing and the entire homiletical effect is ruined. A few months after that I left theological college and returned to civilian life, but that's another story.

I never thought I would enjoy John Cage's music. But there was a time when I thought I would never enjoy Schoenberg's music, or Monteverdi's. I gather there are still a few people around who don't like Bartok, or Stravinsky, or even Rameau. It's easy enough these days to

decide whether you like these older composers, because their music is readily available on records, and if you listen long enough to the 'classical music' FM stations you'll eventually hear enough to form some sort of opinion. But the music of John Cage (who is only 71, younger than the President of the USA, and therefore still dangerously active) is not easily come by. I do not know, for example, how long we might have to wait before any of us hears his Branches for amplified cacti and other plant material. So what I am really saying is that I like most of the music of John Cage that I have heard.

I have about four hours of his music on tape, scattered here and there throughout the collection, and what I'm doing today is bringing it together on cassettes so I can listen to it more often. I must remember to leave 4 minutes 33 seconds blank somewhere: that's one piece of modern music that I can perform, and anyone can perform -- and as Stravinsky is supposed to have said (Harry Warner, too, probably), there should be a lot more of it.

This is not the view of the Brunswick City Council. Cage's ideas about chance, environment and indeterminacy in (and as) music lead you to, among other things, sound-sculpture; and among the composers and musicians who live in Brunswick is one of Australia's more inventive experimenters with sound and environment, Ros Bandt. I understand that she received a grant to create a sound-sculpture in one of the local parks, and that there was such a fuss made by the ratepayers about the unsightly and dangerous junk she erected that it was very quickly dismantled. Luckily, one supposes, no child fell off it or was mutilated by it, physically or spiritually. It says something about my relative awareness of musical and municipal affairs that I knew of Ros Bandt long before this sculpture went up but didn't realize that she was involved until after it came down, so I missed all the fun. Unless someone recorded it, but that seems unlikely.

Ros Bandt is not yet a household name in Australia. Apart from her work with acoustic environments (and the fact that she lives about three blocks from here), all I know about her is that she is a member of the group La Romanesca, which is based at the University of Melbourne, and which quite recently made a superb recording of the Seven Songs of Love by the thirteenth- or fourteenth-century Galician composer Martin Codax. No-one knows who 'Martin Codax' was. The edition of Grove I have says he was a Spanish or Portuguese thirteenth-century troubadour, probably a native of Vigo; his seven songs were discovered in 1914 in the binding of a fourteenth-century manuscript of Cicero's De Officiis. It is possible even that 'Martin Codax' is a mistake for 'Martin Codex' -- or 'Martin's Book'. But there is no mistake about the music: it is glorious. I don't know anything quite like it. It reaches out over all those centuries and says You aren't alone, friend: we felt as you do, here in Vigo, in our time. You don't have to know the language to know this: the music says it.

There are two other things I know about Ros Bandt. She was one of the composers chosen to represent Australia at the Autumn Festival in Paris last year. And she is not mentioned in James Murdoch's A Handbook of Australian Music (Macmillan, 1983; paperback, 166 pp., \$A14.95). I must resist the urge to comment at length on this strange, absurdly overpriced, indispensable book. Therese Radic has been more than kind to it in the February-March 1984 issue of Australian Book Review. It's one of those many books that promise to give us so much that we need, and fall short by a mile. Most of what's in it is useful, but it isn't the book of that title we wanted. Since at least three members of the Society of Editors were involved in it, and are as sad about it as I am, I'll say no more about it.

What strikes me about the activities of people like Ros Bandt and John Cage, and so many other contemporary composers and musicians, is that while they are reaching out for the new and not-so-precisely-articulated-before they are also going back to the roots of our music, to discover and re-experience what it was about before, say, Sir Thomas Beecham, or Mahler, or Liszt, or Beethoven, or Handel, or Rameau, or Lully, tuned our ears toward their new, away from our collective old.

There are dangers in this attempt to get back to the old (and rewards, of course: how I envy those people who are only now encountering the music of Rameau, now almost universally

performed in something approaching an authentic style!). The greatest danger perhaps is that touched on by Albert Schweitzer in his monumental work on Bach when he said that 'age confers on all music a dignity that gives it a touch of religious elevation'. And so we hear the music of the troubadours -- lusty, longing, un-Christian songs -- as quaint and venerable, and put them on the shelf next to Palestrina and Lasso, because they sound similar. And yet they are as similar as Britten's War Requiem and Jefferson Starship, as Glass's Einstein on the Beach, Miles Davis in full flight and 'How Much Is That Doggy in the Window?'

But then, think of the way Joe Cocker sings 'With A Little Help From My Friends'. Isn't there an element of 'religious elevation' about that already?

Religion. From the Latin religio. Meaning, among other things, that which binds together.

Schweitzer attributes to Martin Luther the sentiment 'Why should the Devil have all the good tunes?' -- which I always thought John Wesley said, but that only goes to establish my very-English place in the scheme of cultural things. Schweitzer goes on to say that some of the Devil's tunes can't be tamed: despite Luther's and Bach's best efforts, those tunes were soon back in the gutter where they came from. Luckily, I don't attach any supernatural significance to sequences of notes (but am always interested to know that others do, or have), so I am fairly open-minded about the whole issue.

So when John Cage devotes his time and genius to a work for organ based on an old American collection of hymns, as he did in his The Harmony of Maine (1978), I do not look for religious elevation -- and yet I find it, as surely as I find it in Bach and Mahler, Haydn and Stravinsky, Charpentier and Messiaen.

Is that not an unexpected thing to find in the music of John Cage?

It's easy to make jokes about contemporary music. You could even say it's essential: it's our way of coping with it. But when a piece of music not yet six years old, by a difficult dead-serious quirky ageing American who goes in for stunts like amplified cacti, and pianists sitting silent on stage for 4 minutes 33 seconds, comes groping out of the loudspeakers and entwines your heart and spirit as Bach's Mass in B Minor and Mahler's Second Symphony did all those years ago when you were young and would let music do anything with you -- then, I say, then you are in the presence of God-in-Man, and let there be no more jokes until we have grappled with this mystery!

It's not the sort of grappling that can be done on paper, I can tell you that. I have done a fair bit in the way of attempting to write about music (most of it, thankfully, unpublished), and the more I try, the more I listen and the more I read, the more I am reminded of a character in Strindberg's novel The People of Hemso who needed a fiddle to say exactly what he meant. And if you didn't understand, all he could do was play it again.

I suspect that some such sentiment is responsible for the excesses of the minimalist school of composition.

And what has all this to do with the art and science of book editing anyway? To be frank: not much. But Jackie said I had to fill two pages this month, and here they are. That aside, as a person involved in publishing, and a person aware of the fabulously exciting things going on right now in Australia's music life, I am appalled at our publishers' lack of interest in music. We are supposed to be so good at identifying markets for books, too: it's what publishing is about, we're told. So where are all the books about Australian music-making?

-- John Bangsund, March 1984

LIVES OF THE COMPOSERS (2)

For Ros Bandt

Chance

Cage on for seconds will
page had it minutes thought
considered which nothing then love
a he observed 4 this
John written closely 33 Stravinsky

Silence

considered on closely minutes this
a which for 33 thought
John had observed then will
page he nothing seconds Stravinsky
Cage written it 4 love

Most

a on it then Stravinsky
considered written observed seconds thought
Cage had nothing 33 this
John he for minutes love
page which closely 4 will

Reveals

page on observed 33 love
John which it seconds this
a written nothing minutes will
Cage he closely then thought
considered had for 4 Stravinsky

Sound

John on nothing 4 thought
Cage which observed minutes Stravinsky
considered he it 33 will
a had closely seconds love
page written for then this

Punctuation

John Cage considered a page
on which he had written
nothing, observed it closely for
4 minutes 33 seconds, then
thought: Stravinsky will love this.

-- John Bangsund, 7 April 1988

A FEW MORE BARS

I sent a copy of that issue of the newsletter to Ros Bandt, care of the Music Department at the University of Melbourne. Four years later I started work as assistant editor of Meanjin, and was delighted to learn that 'my' first issue was largely devoted to music. Not only that: I would be working with a number of composers and musicologists, including Dr Bandt. How, I wondered, had she reacted to my article? Had she seen it even? I was a little apprehensive about meeting her.

I needn't have been. Ros mentioned the article before I did, and said she was delighted to appear in a piece about John Cage, particularly because she had written her Arts Honours thesis on his work. In an untypical onrush of gallantry, I produced a copy of 'Lives of the Composers (2)' and inscribed it 'For Ros'. She put it on a wall in her lavatory. I felt singularly honoured: the walls of Ros's lavatory are covered with musical memorabilia.

Ros very kindly did not point out the mistakes I made in 'A Few Bars of Cage'. From talking to John Jenkins, and with the assistance of his book 22 Contemporary Australian Composers and Ros's book Sounds in Space, I can now do that myself.

The sound-sculpture in Temple Park, Brunswick, called the 'Sound Playground', was dismantled because it had been extensively damaged by vandals, not because of any outcry from the ratepayers. While it remained intact it was much enjoyed by the children it had been designed for. My reference to 'unsightly and dangerous junk' was quite wrong: there's a photo of the Sound Playground in Ros's book, and it looks delightful. There is also a photo of it being recorded, so I was wrong about that too.

I have heard somewhere, since I wrote that article, that Beethoven said, to someone who said he did not understand a work he had just heard, 'Then I must play it again', and did so. I have been unable to find any version of this story in the books I have about Beethoven, but I don't suppose it matters: Strindberg's fiddler may have been a plagiarist, but so was Beethoven, and quite cheerful about it.

This footnote has taken me just over four hours to write, and a pleasant time it has been too, because most of it was spent reading about music. One of the books I consulted on the Beethoven/Strindberg matter is Jacques Barzun's Pleasures of Music, an inexhaustible source of delight. (Sadly, my copy is the shortened version of 1977, lacking the excerpts from fiction in the original 1952 edition and the 'Introduction full of wit and wisdom but no longer required in these days of total enlightenment about art and criticism' (Preface, p. x).) In my browsing I found a short statement by the Reverend Sydney Smith that, like so many of his short statements, says elegantly and fairly exactly what I feel: 'If I were to begin life again, I would devote much time to music. All musical people seem to me happy; it is the most engrossing pursuit, almost the only innocent and unpunished passion.'

-- John Bangsund,
9 July 1989

ROBERT DAY, who describes himself as a 'defrocked librarian', currently holds a minor clerical post in the British Civil Service. Once a more active fan than he is today (he was once a member of the Tyneside Gannets), 'I now live in splendid isolation in a small cottage in the heart of rural Warwickshire, where I build model aircraft, listen to powerful music and receive fanzines from Bruce Gillespie'.

NOW THE GREAT WORK IS ENDED....:
Thoughts on Completing a Cycle of
Shostakovich Symphonies

by ROBERT DAY

Ask anyone who knows, 'Name the greatest Soviet composers', and one name most likely to be mentioned is that of Dmitri Shostakovich. He lived and worked completely in post-Revolutionary Russia, and his composing career reflected many of the changing fortunes in Soviet artistic life.

At the time of the Revolution, Shostakovich was already composing, although only eleven years old. His rapid rise to pre-eminence amongst the composers of his day was followed by official disapproval, rehabilitation, and wartime artistic service that gained him the highest accolades. Indeed, during the war, Shostakovich was seen as the official music laureate of the Stalinist regime; another period of official displeasure started in 1948 and, though eased after Stalin's death, never really ended. Although never branded as a 'dissident', Shostakovich was nonetheless critical of the Soviet regime, and this caused his later falls from favour. After his death, his posthumously published memoirs were branded by the Soviets as forgeries, and his son Maxim (himself an accomplished pianist and conductor), defected to the West.

Despite working amongst, firstly, the artistic ferment of the Futurist era that followed the Revolution, and then under the more formal strictures of the later, repressive years, Shostakovich stayed with familiar musical forms -- symphonies, string quartets, concertos, sonatas, operas, and so on. The chamber and instrumental music belongs mainly to his middle and later years; his operas are mainly from his earlier years (indeed, it was his second opera, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, that caused his first clash with officialdom). Throughout his career, Shostakovich was called upon to produce film scores (e.g. *New Babylon*, *The Gadfly*) and 'patriotic' works (e.g. *The Execution of Stepan Razin*). Even the works that might, at first sight, be regarded as politically derived 'potboilers' are valid pieces of composition over which Shostakovich took proper care.

It is, however, with Shostakovich's symphonies that I am concerned. Twentieth-century symphonists of any stature are few and far between, and the cycle of fifteen symphonies by Shostakovich (a sixteenth was being sketched by him when he died) are arguably some of the finest music of this century, being rooted as they are in a society whose shifting fortunes could be said to be a microcosm of modern industrial and political life.

This is not to say, however, that all the symphonies are perfect. The first three are very obviously experimental in nature, the work of a young man. The Eleventh and Twelfth Symphonies are, at least at face value, merely political exhortations. Yet, taken as a whole, the symphonies of Shostakovich extended the symphonic tradition from the work of Mahler into the second half of the twentieth century; this alone makes them worthy of study.

This article arose out of my own interest in Shostakovich, an interest that started when I

heard the Halle Orchestra under James Loughran perform the Fifth Symphony in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, in 1974. It is not unfair to say that the Fifth made such an impression on me that immediately I set about finding out what I could about the man who could write such incredible music; and this process culminated last year when I completed my collection of the Shostakovich symphonies. Of course, I don't have every single recording of each symphony (only the Sixth is, as yet, duplicated); but I have heard enough to begin to reach some tentative conclusions about the man and his works.

I have drawn extensively on the reviews of various recorded performances of the symphonies that have appeared in the British critical journal The Gramophone, and also on Shostakovich's own memoirs which, as I said earlier, have been denounced by the Soviets as forgeries. Having read them (Testimony, 1979), my own opinion is not so much that they are forged, but rather that the editor (Simon Volkov) has allowed some of his own opinions to colour his presentation of the man. This does not, in my view, invalidate them totally as a source of information. It does mean, however, that they have to be used with care; and I have done so.

* * *

A short biography might not be out of place here. Dmitri Dmitrievich Shostakovich was born in 1906 into a middle-class but intellectually left-wing family in St Petersburg. His father worked with the distinguished chemist Dmitri Mendeleev and later became a successful engineer; his mother, Vasilyevna Kokulina, was a pianist. It was at her instigation that Shostakovich began to attend the Petrograd Conservatoire in the autumn of 1915. At the time of the October Revolution, Shostakovich was eleven, and was already composing works with titles such as Funeral March in Memory of the Victims of the Revolution and Revolutionary Symphony. His First Symphony was premiered in 1926 by Nikolai Malko, who championed much of his music and did much to help build his reputation. But in 1936, acting on orders from Stalin, the editors of Pravda denounced his opera Lady Macbeth of the Mzensk District as being artistically unsuitable for the proletariat, an accusation quickly reduced to the critical epithet 'formalism'. In the face of this displeasure, Shostakovich withdrew his Fourth Symphony before its first performance for fear that it would bring further displeasure down on him (it was not premiered until 1961), as such displeasure would probably land him in the Gulag. (In fact, Stalin had decreed that Shostakovich was not to be arrested; he was too useful to the regime. This order was never rescinded. But Shostakovich, of course, had no way of knowing that.)

In reply to the criticisms of his work, Shostakovich produced his Fifth Symphony, originally subtitled 'A Soviet artist's reply to just criticism'. The musical language of the Fifth, whilst more traditional than that of previous works, cannot be called 'populist' in any way; but it restored Shostakovich's reputation with the Soviet establishment.

During this period, Shostakovich began to move into the realms of chamber and instrumental music; then came war in 1941. The Great Patriotic War (as the Second World War is known in the Soviet Union) found Shostakovich besieged in Leningrad. There he worked on the Seventh Symphony, now known as the Leningrad. When work on it was well advanced, Stalin ordered Shostakovich airlifted out of the city to comparative safety in Moscow. The war years saw the completion of the Eighth Symphony, and the Ninth followed after the war.

However, at the 1948 Congress of Soviet Composers, Shostakovich was widely attacked because of his contacts with the West, which had grown up during the war years. Stalin in particular had been displeased that the Ninth Symphony had not been a large-scale celebration of victory. Shostakovich retired from public and music life to a great extent, and only reappeared when, after the death of Stalin in 1953, the triumphant Tenth Symphony, a great work of personal affirmation that introduced Shostakovich's personal musical signature D-E-C-B (in German notation, E is called Ess, and B natural, H, thus giving the first four letters of Shostakovich's name in its German transliteration, D.SCHostakowitsch), appeared. The D-S-C-H motif only occurs here in the symphonies, but in the chamber and instrumental music it recurs regularly.

The post-Stalinist era saw Shostakovich rehabilitated: Stalin was now denounced, and therefore his artistic views were rejected. Some of Shostakovich's works from the days before his first fall from grace were resurrected, including Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District -- retitled Katarina Izmailova -- and the Fourth Symphony. But the era of the dissident was dawning; and whilst Shostakovich took little part in the samizdat culture widely recognized in the West, nevertheless the premiere of the Thirteenth Symphony (Babi Yar), which deals with anti-Semitism and the murder of Jews in 1943, was the signal for further official displeasure. However, his international fame, his refusal to become involved with recognized dissident movements, and his deteriorating health seem to have prevented him being singled out for excessively harsh treatment. After the Thirteenth Symphony, all his works became increasingly concerned with approaching death, its inevitability and all-consuming power. Yet he continued to work up until the end: his last published work, the Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 147, was completed in the summer of 1975, and he was sketching a Sixteenth Symphony when he died (9 August 1975).

* * *

The First Symphony is a whirlwind of a work. 'Striking, temperamental... at the same time traditional and accessible', Volkov called it. Well, traditional it is. Accessible? I'm not so sure. Outburst follows outburst, tunes and fragments of tunes come and go; the whole thing makes a glorious noise. There can be no doubt that this is the work of an eighteen-year-old stretching all the rules of traditional tonal composition as far as they will comfortably go. There might have been a symphony before with a major part for piano, but if so, I'm not aware of it. In the First Symphony, the piano has a large part to play, and is often given the melody line before it is snatched back by the orchestra. At one point in the first movement, the main tune sounds like 'An Actor's Life for Me' played in a minor key.

The Second and Third Symphonies are different, and may be broadly lumped together. They are rarely heard in the concert hall, and equally rarely recorded. Both are still immature works, still experimenting with the possibilities the orchestra offers, and heavily influenced by Futurist thinking. Equally, the music of the time was required to play an important part in the shaping of the new society, and the propaganda value of the piece was more important than mere artistic considerations. Experiment and political commitment still went hand in hand; after all, who can properly define the ideological content of a purely abstract work like a symphony?

The Second Symphony was first performed in 1927, again under the baton of Nikolai Malko. It was not even announced as a symphony on the score's title page; instead it was inscribed 'To October: A Symphonic Dedication'. It is a single-movement work, split into three parts: an opening, darkly brooding part written without any reference to traditional strictures of key signatures, which is followed by a section where a solo violin, clarinet, and bassoon build up a variety of music strands which culminates in a blast on a factory whistle introducing the final, choral section.

(Incidentally, this is normally scored for horns and trombones in these more conventional times. We have 'authentic' performances of baroque and early classical music; John Culshaw had steerhorns made for Solti's premier recording of Götterdämmerung; could we not have 'authentic' Shostakovich with the factory whistle?)

The words for the Second Symphony are by Alexander Bezymensky:

We marched, and begged for work and bread...
...Oh, Lenin: -- you forged freedom from our torment...

The work ends with a melodramatic, shouted iteration by the chorus of the words

October and Lenin,
The new age and Lenin,
The commune and Lenin!

whilst a drum roll and tremolo strings from the orchestra softly underline this peroration.

The Third Symphony was composed two years later, and follows much the same pattern. The initial orchestral section is, if anything, more episodic. Snatches of melody occur in rapid succession; Michael Oliver in The Gramophone wrote:

repeated attempts to build a nobly affirmative theme of orthodox symphonic cast are savagely suppressed, culminating in the almost visible battering to death of a huge, writhing, serpentine melody...

Here the words are by Semyon Kirsanov, and they proclaim the importance of May Day to the proletariat:

Our May Day --
In the future there will be sails --
Unfurled over the sea of corn,
And the resounding steps of the corps.

New corps --
The new ranks of May,
Their eyes like fires looking to the future,
Factories and workers march in the May Day parade.

May Day is the march of armed miners,
Into the squares,
Revolution,
March with a million feet!

The first three symphonies, whilst not in any way immature, are nonetheless works of youth. Phrases occur briefly in them, especially in the Second and Third Symphonies, which Shostakovich requotes in later life; in particular, in the Twelfth. These works are essential for an understanding of Shostakovich's later development as well as the spirit of the times, and as such cannot be dismissed.

As for recordings, the recent Decca recordings under Haitink are recommended; in the case of the Second and the Third, Haitink's remains the only single-disc version.

* * *

The Fourth Symphony is generally seen as Shostakovich's most complex and possibly most introspective work, and also the work that owes most to Mahler. It is, in my opinion, his first fully mature work: for the first time, Shostakovich produced a work of sustained symphonic development of about an hour's duration. It is divided into three movements, the first of which recalls the orchestral movements of the previous two symphonies but in a freer and more rhapsodic form. Again, snatches of themes and ideas arise and die away, some never to be heard again. It is a movement that requires repeated hearings to allow the listener to resolve out of the kaleidoscopic mass of sound various recognizable episodes.

The second movement is sometimes described as a scherzo, though the marking for it is *Moderato con moto*. It is shorter and somewhat more orderly than a scherzo; indeed, in places it seems almost to quote directly a Mahlerian Ländler dance. This theme, and the one that follows, is subjected to a certain amount of exposition before being made the subject of an extended fugue. A final, simple coda using percussion instruments finishes the movement: this is the theme quoted again in Shostakovich's last symphony.

The third and final movement, though marked *Largo*, in fact consists of six different sections that succeed each other in much the same way as in the first movement. There is, however, a sense of progression in it, from the opening section, which is darkly scored, through sections of ever-rising elation to the final section, the climax of the work,

announced by two timpanists with a chorale from the brass laid over the top. A coda then brings the work to a close, the music dying away into the distance in a fashion very reminiscent of the ending of Mahler's Das Lied von der Erde.

Shostakovich later said of the Fourth (though under what circumstances I cannot say) that it was 'too long. There were too many imperfect, ostentatious elements in it, the shape was wrong, the construction shallow'.

That's as may be, though it remains true that a little judicious pruning here and there would have improved the work to some degree. However, as it stands the Fourth Symphony is perhaps Shostakovich's most radical work and gives some indication as to where his compositional skill might have led him had things proved different; as such, it is a most valid music work.

I have Eugene Ormandy's pioneering 1963 recording (as reissued in 1976), and this has the stamp of authenticity: he it was who gave the work its American premier in 1963, and he was long a champion of the works of Mahler and Shostakovich. Alternative recordings worth hearing are Previn's with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on HMV which, however, may appear to lack a certain presence (though technically it is superior to the earlier CBS recording), and the recent Haitink/London Symphony Orchestra performance on Decca, even more technically superb, but possibly deficient in the tension department. However, these are all nitpicking comments, and any of these three records may be recommended without hesitation.

* * *

The Fifth Symphony that followed was equally seminal, but for different reasons, which I've already outlined. It is a symphony at the same time triumphant and tragic; indeed, at its premier in Leningrad in November 1937 (under the direction of Yevgeny Mravinsky), many of the audience were reduced to tears. The work shows Shostakovich's triumph (outwardly) over human failings, (inwardly) over the mechanism of officialdom, and also the tragedy of the Soviet system -- in 1937 denunciations were common and Stalin's purges were at their height.

The symphony itself is Mahlerian, not only in content but also in format. The first movement progresses from a starkly tragic opening, through a sombre yet placid central section, to a suddenly incandescent and spacious finale. There then follows a dance-like Allegretto which has echoes of Mahler's 'St Anthony Preaching to the Fish', a most appropriate choice:

The sermon's forgotten! The sermon's a flop! All remain as before!

Of the deep, brooding slow movement, Sir Malcolm Sargent once said that he could see 'starving women with bones pressing through their skin' in it. And the final movement has the outward appearance of a victorious finale; but it is as Mstislav Rostropovich has said: 'Anybody who thinks the finale is glorification is an idiot.' The whole symphony works on two levels: the 'official' level, where the work means what it was supposed to mean, and the personal level.

I have kept my thoughts on the Fifth Symphony comparatively short, especially compared with those on the Fourth. There are two reasons for this: first, the Fourth is a more technical work, more open to musicological dissection, and second, the Fifth is a work that requires to be directly experienced. Even recordings are very definitely second best. My own recording is Previn's on RCA from 1976, and it remains a very good choice. It has recently been digitally remastered, and is now available at mid-price.

* * *

The Sixth Symphony was again premiered by Mravinsky in 1939; Shostakovich said it was 'criticized moderately'. It is a work that lies under the shadow of the mighty Fifth; this means that its virtues are often overlooked. It has a slow movement that many see as possibly Shostakovich's greatest such. But the whole work is almost lopsided; the slow

movement opens the symphony and is immediately followed by two scherzo-like fast movements. The first has a Mahlerian grotesquerie about it. The second starts with a delicate galop that gets increasingly rumbustious as the movement progresses, until the symphony rolls up to a full stop in an almost bombastic manner.

This eccentric ground plan has puzzled musicologists for ages. Michael Oliver, writing in The Gramophone, said that Shostakovich obviously had his own purposes for setting out the Sixth Symphony that way, and 'the only way those purposes may be served is to play each movement for all it's worth without worrying whether a finale or a slow intermezzo would have helped'. The two fast movements are the key to this work, being such a contrast to what has gone before; careful listening will reveal a manic quality of two-edged joviality; as if, had the work continued, it would have had to have dissolved into something horrendous and terrifying. The good-naturedness of the last movement in particular, as the work races to a close, begins to seem increasingly hollow.

And when Shostakovich says that, at the time of the premiere of the Sixth Symphony, he was already working on the Seventh, and 'knew what it was going to be about', this begins to make sense.

* * *

I think it is important here to discuss the meaning of the Seventh Symphony. It must be remembered that the subtitle Leningrad is an appellation of later years for propagandist purposes. Shostakovich was already working on it before Hitler put Operation Barbarossa into operation and invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. The official view is that the symphony represents the Heroic Struggle of the Peace-Loving Socialist Citizens of Leningrad Against the Fearful Onslaught of the Fascist Aggressors. (My own recording, of Soviet origins, reflects this.) The currently fashionable view, supported by Shostakovich's memoirs, is that it actually depicts the suffering of the Russian people under the yoke of authoritarian oppression. Yet, I ask, if this be the case, did Shostakovich's presence in Leningrad during its 900-day siege leave no impression on him at all? My contention is that it could not fail to do so; and the Seventh Symphony is the work of a man caught between two steamroller forces: the military might of Nazi Germany to the west and the all-pervading threat from the Soviet establishment. Shostakovich said that he wrote the Seventh Symphony through 'a great love of the man in the street... love for people who have become the bulwark of culture, civilization and life'. War from without and oppression from within are things that populations have to endure.

The symphony is written on a grand scale. The first movement opens with a broad theme of noble aspect; this is succeeded by a sweet tune in the flutes and woodwind: but then a third tune tiptoes in on plucked strings. This latter tune is developed in each section of the orchestra until it emerges in its full-blown form as a terrible juggernaut of a tune, flattening everything in its path. This is the infamous 'march' theme that was said to represent the invading enemy but which could equally be the unstoppable hand of the internal terror. The ostinato builds up to a climax, but when it dies away the second theme is still there; it has endured the onslaught.

A dance theme opens the second movement; it is of courtly nature, but it hides another example of Shostakovich's debt to Mahler: a frenetic development section that provides the filling to the sandwich. The third movement is a great Adagio, almost religious in nature; indeed, it may have been this movement to which Shostakovich was referring when he spoke of the Seventh Symphony as his 'requiem'. (He also applied the term to the Eighth Symphony, which has a similar intense slow movement.) This slow movement gradually moves into the finale, which uses broad strokes to paint a picture of the Golden Age of Peace: yet within this picture, the music goes through a phase of struggle. Is the jubilation at victory spontaneous, or is it enforced?

* * *

The Eighth Symphony followed soon after. Composed whilst Shostakovich was evacuated to Kyubishev in 1943, it has much of the same layout and motivation as the Seventh; it is, however, if anything a deeper work. It opens with an Adagio movement of great simplicity and breadth; a swaggering, pompous march follows as the second movement. The third movement opens with a rapid toccata rhythm in the strings, which is developed extensively before a second episode, packed with fanfares and drumming, bursts in, passes through rapid development, climaxes, and fades away to leave the original toccata rhythm as before. The final movement is serene and tranquil, but nonetheless sombre for all that.

Shostakovich often spoke of the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies in the same breath; they were conceived on the same terms and have much of the same intention underlying them. However, the lack of any obvious 'victory' theme at the end of the Eighth led the Soviet establishment to criticize Shostakovich harshly, saying 'He gave us a victorious symphony when we were invaded; now we have victory, why does he give us a tragic symphony?' Of course Stalin was expecting a victorious Ninth Symphony, which Shostakovich felt unable to deliver. Between them, the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies are possibly the most moving examples in all music of the suffering of peoples from institutionalized violence of any sort.

A note on recordings: the recent Haitink/Concertgebouw issue from Decca, though it has superior digital sound and the benefit of Shostakovich's own thoughts on the subject, does not necessarily surpass Previn's account with the London Symphony Orchestra on HMV, recorded ten years earlier.

* * *

The Ninth Symphony was first performed in 1945, again under the direction of Mravinsky. In no way is it a 'victory' symphony, and it is easy to understand why it angered Stalin so much: its five movements are squeezed into about half an hour, it is quite lightly scored, and it has none of the trappings of a major work -- no soloists, no choirs, no broad themes; in fact, it is a rather slight work.

This is not to denigrate the Ninth; it is a product of its time. In it Shostakovich depicts some of his own personal happiness that the war is over; but there is no rejoicing at peace, because there was no peace in Russia for those in disgrace. The Ninth Symphony sounds like what it is; the work of a man who has been expected to produce a 'victory' symphony but who cannot. All the bitter irony is still there.

Shostakovich had to wait until the death of Stalin to produce a 'victory' symphony -- the Tenth -- and then it does little more than to show what had happened in the past, and -- through the first appearance of D-S-C-H motif mentioned earlier -- point out that 'I, Dmitri Shostakovich, have survived'. The Tenth Symphony is a far greater work than the Ninth; it is on a broader and much more generous symphonic canvas.

The Tenth Symphony has a grandly conceived opening movement, though Shostakovich felt that he had failed in this movement to write 'a real symphonic Allegro'; but it is the second movement that grabs the attention -- it whirls along at a savage pace, the strings and woodwinds helping build the movement up to an awesome, terrifying climax. Shostakovich has subsequently told us that this movement is a portrait of Stalin, and the intensity of the music suggests that Shostakovich put all his personal feelings about Stalin into it. The following slow movement is a Mahlerian development of some of the themes from the first two movements, underlining the central message of the work -- the suffering that Stalin was responsible for. It is not usual to find a slow movement scored along grotesque lines; but here, themes from the rest of the symphony are twisted into stately dances and dark episodes. The final movement appears jovial, and it bowls along at a fair pace; but at what seems to be its height, Shostakovich scrawls his musical signature across the orchestra like a vandal spraying his name across a hoarding. A more sombre episode follows, reminding the listener of what has happened so far, both musically and politically, and warning of what might still happen. But the 'jovial' themes come back, and the symphony closes, for possibly the only time in the Shostakovich canon, on a note of very guarded optimism -- with plenty of 'buts' added.

* * *

The Eleventh and Twelfth Symphonies are, outwardly, historical works; the Eleventh is subtitled The Year 1905 and the Twelfth The Year 1917. Given that the 1905 uprising, which the Eleventh Symphony commemorates, was abortive, one might expect the Twelfth to be the greater work; but it is not, and the reasons why show that Shostakovich had not totally accepted that post-Stalinist Russia was vastly different from what it had been.

The Fortieth Anniversary of the October Revolution was celebrated in a big way by the Soviet Union. On 4 October 1957, Sputnik I was launched; on 30 October Shostakovich's Eleventh Symphony was premiered under Nikolai Rachlin in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire. It may seem odd that the work for that occasion commemorated an earlier uprising; but it was just a year since the Hungarian uprising had been put down, and it was doubtless this event that Shostakovich had in mind when writing the Eleventh Symphony. In writing this work, Shostakovich drew on revolutionary songs of both the late nineteenth century and of the 1905 uprising; and in the light of the Hungarian uprising, the song he quotes at the beginning of the second movement seems most appropriate:

Oh, Tsar, our little father!
Look around you;
Life is impossible for us because of the Tsar's servants,
Against whom we are helpless...

Various themes recur throughout the work, especially the symphony's motto, first stated softly by the timpani soon after the opening; it forms the basis of the climax of the second movement, and returns throughout the rest of the work.

The first movement depicts the snow-covered square in front of the Winter Palace in St Petersburg, whilst the second, '9th January', depicts the events of that night, when the Tsar's troops guarding the Winter Palace fired on a crowd of unarmed demonstrators. This movement uses the song-material mentioned earlier, including 'You Fell as Victims', which was sung by Lenin and his followers in exile when they heard about the massacre. This movement, because of the inclusion of so much non-symphonic material, is the weakest, technically speaking, of the four; generally speaking, it is only the intensity of Shostakovich's inner vision of the tragedy he was depicting that holds it together.

The third movement, 'In Memoriam', is one of the very few Shostakovich slow movements actually marked Adagio. It is a funeral dirge to fallen heroes, quoting an elegiac melody from the opening of the work and also the motto theme. Finally, the work comes to a crushing conclusion with the final movement, 'Tocsin', which ends with bells and the whole orchestra declaring, in a tone of flaming vehemence, that the guilty will be punished.

Soon after the Eleventh Symphony was completed, Shostakovich wrote:

Creative activity is fruitless unless the writer, artist or composer has very close ties with the life of the people. Only he who feels their heartbeats and the spirit of the times can truly express the thoughts of the people; no big work of realistic art is possible under any other conditions.

In that the Eleventh Symphony depicts contemporary events in the guise of historical commemoration, this becomes glaringly obvious in relation to that work.

A note on recordings: the best alternative to the Haitink is Paavio Berglund and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra on HMV. Some reviewers have felt that Berglund has the measure of the work better than Haitink in terms of the felt intensity of the music; but either is acceptable.

* * *

In his memoirs, Shostakovich hardly mentions the Twelfth Symphony, *The Year 1917*, at all. Where he does mention it, it is only to describe it as being 'a complete success in... depicting the benefactors of history in music', inasmuch as Shostakovich intended the Twelfth Symphony to have a musical portrait of Lenin in it. However, for once, it was not the intent of the music that was lacking, but the material. Let it not be forgotten that Shostakovich was a committed Communist, despite his being so often at odds with the Soviet hierarchy. (Let it not also be forgotten, if this seems contradictory, that the proper Marxist definition of the post-Trotsky Soviet state is 'state capitalist', and even now the Communist Party does not anticipate achieving full and total Socialism in Russia before the year 2000.)

Indeed, the first two movements of the Twelfth are most fine; for, unlike the Eleventh Symphony, it does not attempt to portray historical events in music. Instead it aims to give atmosphere and impression. Thus the first movement, 'Revolutionary Petrograd', is energetic and tuneful; and, what is more, in sonata form. The main tune here is hymn-like in nature, and it recurs in subsequent movements, especially in the finale where it forms the structural basis of the whole piece. (I do, however, wonder why one of the secondary themes in the first movement sounds like 'Hail to the Chief'.)

The second movement, 'Razliv', refers to the place north of Petrograd where Lenin was hiding on the eve of the Revolution. This, too, has its basis in chorale-like themes and recurring motifs from the first movement; this builds up tension until the listener feels that the symphony must be about to culminate in some vast, crowning dome. Instead, as the music moves, firstly into the third movement, 'Aurora' (the battleship that moved up from Kronstadt in the hands of the sailors' soviet to shell the Winter Palace), and finally into the final movement, 'The Dawn of Humanity', it becomes obvious that Shostakovich has become musically exhausted; 'Aurora' sounds like nothing so much as the 'Battle between the Hero and his Critics' in Richard Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*, and 'The Dawn of Humanity' takes the hymn theme from the first movement and turns it into a repeated, tub-thumping sledgehammer of a piece.

But how else could it have ended? Although, as I said earlier, the Eleventh Symphony is the more deeply felt piece, nonetheless a work dealing in any way with the October Revolution has to end on some sort of victorious note. Michael Oliver in *The Gramophone*:

it is Shostakovich trying his damndest to complete a colossal design and failing. Had he been Schubert, maybe he would have left it unfinished; but it has seldom seemed a grander failure.

It is generally accepted that this work is a bit like a revolutionary poster, and that the only way to play it is straight, blasting into it for all it is worth. My own Melodiya-originated recording does that; so does the recent Haitink on Decca and a recent CD from Rozhdestvensky directing the USSR Ministry of Culture State Symphony Orchestra. Of this release, it is best to say two things: (a) make sure you are on good terms with your neighbours, as this is not a work that will stand any pussyfooting around with low volume; and (b) be prepared for poor value for money. It is a JVC/Target release, and there are no fillers. Forty minutes on a CD is not, in my book, very good.

* * *

The Thirteenth Symphony, premiered by Kiril Kondrashin in 1962, was the cause of Shostakovich's last clash with Soviet officialdom; but for once not because of the musical content. It is a four-movement choral symphony which sets poems by the celebrated Soviet poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko; and it was these poems that so incensed the Soviet hierarchy. In particular, the first movement, 'Babi Yar' (from which the symphony takes its name) caused the greatest furore, as the poem implies that anti-Semitism is alive and well and living in the USSR.

How vile that,
Without a flicker of a vein,
The anti-Semites proclaimed themselves
'The Union of the Russian People'!

As may be guessed, the orchestral accompaniment to such a poem is sombre and brooding, with a tolling bell to complete the creation of atmosphere.

The second movement, 'Humour', is no less critical.

Czars, kings, emperors,
Rulers of all the earth,
Command parades.
But humour, humour they could not.

This is another of Shostakovich's grim, Mahlerian 'scherzos' (for scherzo it is only in form); a small clarinet and a solo violin provide the minimal orchestral colouration here. The last three movements are intended to be played without a break; Shostakovich said of the Thirteenth Symphony that it started out as a one-movement work and, as we say, 'just grew' into a symphony. The third movement, 'At the Store', sets a poem depicting the stoical fatalism and great endurance of Russian women -- again, Shostakovich writing for the ordinary citizen in the street:

They endured everything,
They will endure everything,
Everything on earth is within their power,
So much strength has been given them.

A ponderous theme in the lower strings suggests the shuffling of feet in a queue; again, the movement's orchestral scoring creates the necessary atmosphere.

The fourth movement, 'Fears', reintroduces the tolling bell, as the poem speaks directly of the fear of repression, of the informer, of the knock at the door; whilst the sardonic final movement, 'A Career', suggests that genius asserts itself regardless of the hurdles placed by others, and therefore speaks, by association, of those who seek advancement by adhering to the party line and informing on colleagues. It has the same scoring as the fourth movement; then the strings return, pizzicato, at the finale. At no stage in this 65-minute work is there one moment of levity; the symphony is one massive statement of protest about times past and present.

* * *

The Fourteenth Symphony, first performed on 29 September 1969 by Rudolf Barshai and the Moscow Chamber Orchestra in Leningrad, marked a major symphonic departure for Shostakovich. Like the Thirteenth Symphony, it is a choral work, though more nearly a song cycle with orchestral accompaniment; however, those orchestral forces are on a far smaller scale than Shostakovich used in any other symphony, consisting merely of strings and percussion. In subject matter, too, the emphasis has changed. Shostakovich's deteriorating health forced him to look inwards, and in this most personal of symphonies he sets to music eleven different poems on the subject of death.

In his memoirs, Shostakovich denies that illness gives any spur for writing about death, but says that artists should bear it in mind at all times. He also writes that he wished to protest against violent death, and for this reason the Fourteenth has poems in it about people awaiting execution, in prison, and so on. But it must be said that the personal interpretation and the political interpretation, as in the Seventh Symphony, cannot be mutually exclusive; both must be kept in mind.

To comment on all eleven songs would become tedious; whilst each has its own little

embellishments to suit the wording, there is no denying that the overall effect is sombre. The essence of this symphony lies, however, not with its sombreness but with its stark simplicity. The austere nature of each piece allows the theme of the inevitability and power of death to be outlined vividly, whilst the trappings and diversions of life are depicted by the embellishments to offer a little diversion which, no matter how real they may seem at the time, are but transitory in nature.

A word on recordings; the poems in the Fourteenth Symphony came from a variety of languages, which Shostakovich used in Russian translation. Some recordings have the poems revert to their source languages, but this changes the phrasing of the words, which is of great importance. I recommend only recordings that perform the whole work in Russian.

* * *

Increasingly in his later years Shostakovich turned to the voice, setting many writers' most intense poems; in particular, the cycles of verses by Michaelangelo (Op. 145), Marina Tsvetayeva (Op. 143), and various 'English' poets (Op. 140). But for what was to be his final symphony, he turned back to a purely orchestral form.

But what a form! A four-movement symphony, with the tempi all planned out and interlocking -- first movement Allegretto, second Adagio, third Allegretto and fourth Adagio-Allegretto-Adagio-Allegretto. A symphony packed with quotations -- Rossini's *William Tell* Overture, the 'Fate' leitmotiv from Wagner's 'Ring' cycle, a timpani rhythm identical to 'Siegfried's Funeral March' from *Gotterdammerung* -- and self-quotations from the Op. 107 Cello Concerto, the First and Second Symphonies, and most particularly, the Fourth Symphony. The closing section of the whole work is a development of the percussion passage from the end of the Fourth's second movement.

The Fifteenth Symphony has turned out to be Shostakovich's *Enigma*; it seems so odd to have so many borrowings from other composers, especially such well-known borrowings as that from *William Tell*. Certainly, the question 'What does it mean?' has been asked more of this work, even before the publication of the composer's memoirs, than any other. Shostakovich himself has been little help here; he refers to the Fifteenth Symphony only once in his memoirs, saying that it is based on motifs from Chekhov and on variations on sketches he made for an opera based on Chekhov's *Black Monk*.

But then, the sleeve note of the premier Soviet Melodiya recording, conducted by Maxim Shostakovich and presumably based on Shostakovich's own thoughts, puts forward a fantastic, *Nutcracker*-like programme for the first movement -- a toy shop at night, where the toys come to life and a pompous little soldier struts about to the *William Tell* Overture! This is either pure fabrication or Shostakovich being directly sarcastic. Fabrication seems attractive -- Shostakovich did not write programme music of his own devising; the whole story seems entirely out of character -- and such sarcasm, with obvious political overtones, would be a harking back to the days of the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Symphonies.

A better clue is a reported comment that Shostakovich said the first movement represented 'childhood games, absolute carefreeness', and when this is considered in the light of the speed at which the first movement flashes past, an explanation begins to emerge. The second movement is a funeral march, the final movement quotes the Fourth Symphony, the pivotal work in Shostakovich's development which points the way to what might have been.

Let me offer my own explanation.

It is, again, death.

Consider; the first movement gallops along without a care in the world but, like childhood, is soon done. The second movement is a funeral march; not, perhaps, for the man but for the child. As the third movement opens, fate is invoked -- perhaps, after all, we are predestined to follow our courses in life to our ultimate ends. And as we approach that end,

we ponder on what has gone before and how (we think) we might have done things differently.

It is said that a dying man's life flashes before him. Did Shostakovich depict that fleeting image in music? I am reminded of Goethe's Faust: 'Verweile doch! Du bist so schoen...' ('Stay! Thou art lovely...').

* * *

So here we are, at the end of our symphonic journey through Soviet Russia, as perceived by the mind of Dmitri Shostakovich. We may never know how the Sixteenth Symphony would have turned out -- an apotheosis like Mahler's Ninth? How can this man, whose consistent quality of vision and courage to speak through his medium, be best summed up?

I feel that Shostakovich encapsulates soviet life: the surface glory of 'All Efforts to Attain the Target of Six Million Tons of Grain', the heroic past and the terrible suffering of the people at so many different times and at so many different hands. But what is more, Shostakovich was there. He was a child of the Revolution; he knew of the Petrograd of 1905 and was able to paint it in music later; he saw death in the streets, trucks full of soldiers, shooting. The first movement of the Twelfth, for all the symphony's failings, truly does depict 'Revolutionary Petrograd'.

Composers have written in the past on heroic themes; but few have ever been so close to events, and this is the essential thing, the very kernel upon which any understanding of Shostakovich the man, and his music, must be based. Never before has any composer been so directly involved with the turn of history, so caught up in the flood of events that he has had to set them down in music. The optimistic days following the Revolution, the Stalinist purges, the Great Patriotic War, the Cold War era; and always the iron hand of internal repression. Shostakovich was there; and he put his personal experience into his symphonies.

One can ask no more of a true artist.

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A postscript

Recently I came across an article in *Classical Music* (14 November 1981) in which Robert Hartford offers an alternative explanation of the Rossini quotation in the Fifteenth Symphony.

Hartford had been reading George Bernard Shaw's *The Perfect Wagnerite* (his Marxist analysis of *Der Ring des Nibelungens*) when he happened across reference to Wagner's Francophobe farce, *Eine Kapitulation*. In it Wagner has a chorus, led by Victor Hugo, dancing a can-can around the altar of the Revolution, singing

Rep-u-blic, Rep-u-blic, Rep-u-blic-blic-blic!
 Rep-u-blic, Rep-u-blic, Rep-u-blic-blic-blic!

and so on. There can be no doubt, even from the printed word, what tune Wagner had in mind.

The point is that Wagner, a revolutionary who had manned barricades in 1848-9, was now mocking the French for following the same revolutionary path some twenty years on. The play is full of contempt for failed revolutionaries, and a little self-mockery is included: a theme that would be equally applicable to Shostakovich.

I have already pointed out that Shostakovich was fond of quotation and allusion, both to his own works and others'. The possibility exists, then, that Shostakovich came across this Wagnerian oddity, either at first hand or, more likely, through the Shaw piece, and wrote the quotation into the Fifteenth Symphony as a final message to the Soviet authorities.

If this be so, then it would be the most esoteric of all the quotations in Shostakovich's music canon. I, personally, am not yet prepared to overturn my own view of the Fifteenth for this theory: yet I cannot yet dismiss it out of hand. Truly is Shostakovich's last symphony becoming his Enigma.

-- Robert Day,
 November 1987

brg You can't keep me out of this discussion. The editor gets to put in his bit before the readers get a chance.

I've picked up my copies of Shostakovich symphonies in a haphazard way (mainly through the now-defunct World Record Club) and have usually found that Russian conductors and orchestras do better with Shostakovich than anybody else. The best Fifth I've heard, though, is on a set of records that DG put out 20 years ago. It's by Witold Rowicki and the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, and might someday be re-released on CD, although I wouldn't bet on it. Some of the Melodiya recordings are now appearing on CD... one day, one day.

Re. the quote from William Tell Overture. Isn't it possible that Shostakovich knew the Western connection with the piece of music, and rather fancied himself as 'the Lone Ranger of Russian music'?

Thanks, Bob. This is just the key to the Shostakovich symphonies that we've never had. Now Elaine suggests a grand project of playing them in order from 1 to 15. What about a sequel on the string quartets? *

YES-MEN TO A MADMAN

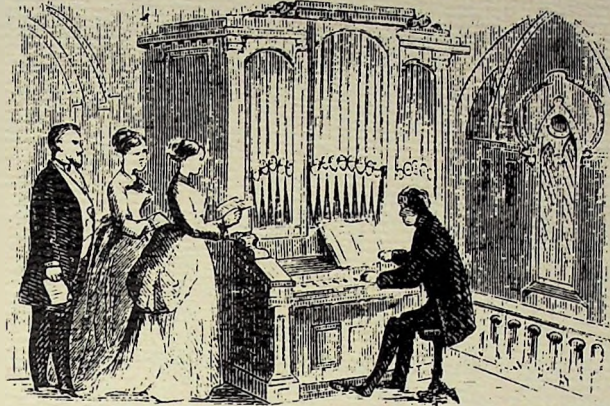
Once Stalin called the Radio Committee, where the administration was, and asked if they had a record of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23, which had been heard on the radio the day before. 'Played by Yudina,' he added. They told Stalin that of course they had. Actually, there was no record, the concert had been live. But they were afraid to say no to Stalin, no one ever knew what the consequences might be. A human life meant nothing to him. All you could do was agree, submit, be a yes-man, a yes-man to a madman.

Stalin demanded that they send the record with Yudina's performance of the Mozart to his dacha. The committee panicked, but they had to do something. They called in Yudina and an orchestra and recorded that night. Everyone was shaking with fright, except for Yudina, naturally. But she was a special case, that one, the ocean was only knee-deep for her.

Yudina later told me that they had to send the conductor home, he was so scared he couldn't think. They called another conductor, who trembled and got everything mixed up, confusing the orchestra. Only a third conductor was in any shape to finish the recording.

I think this is a unique event in the history of recording -- I mean, changing conductors three times in one night. Anyway, the record was ready by morning. They made one single copy in record time and sent it to Stalin. Now that was a record. A record in yes-ing.

-- Dmitri Shostakovich, as told to Solomon Volkov,
Testimony (1979), p. 148



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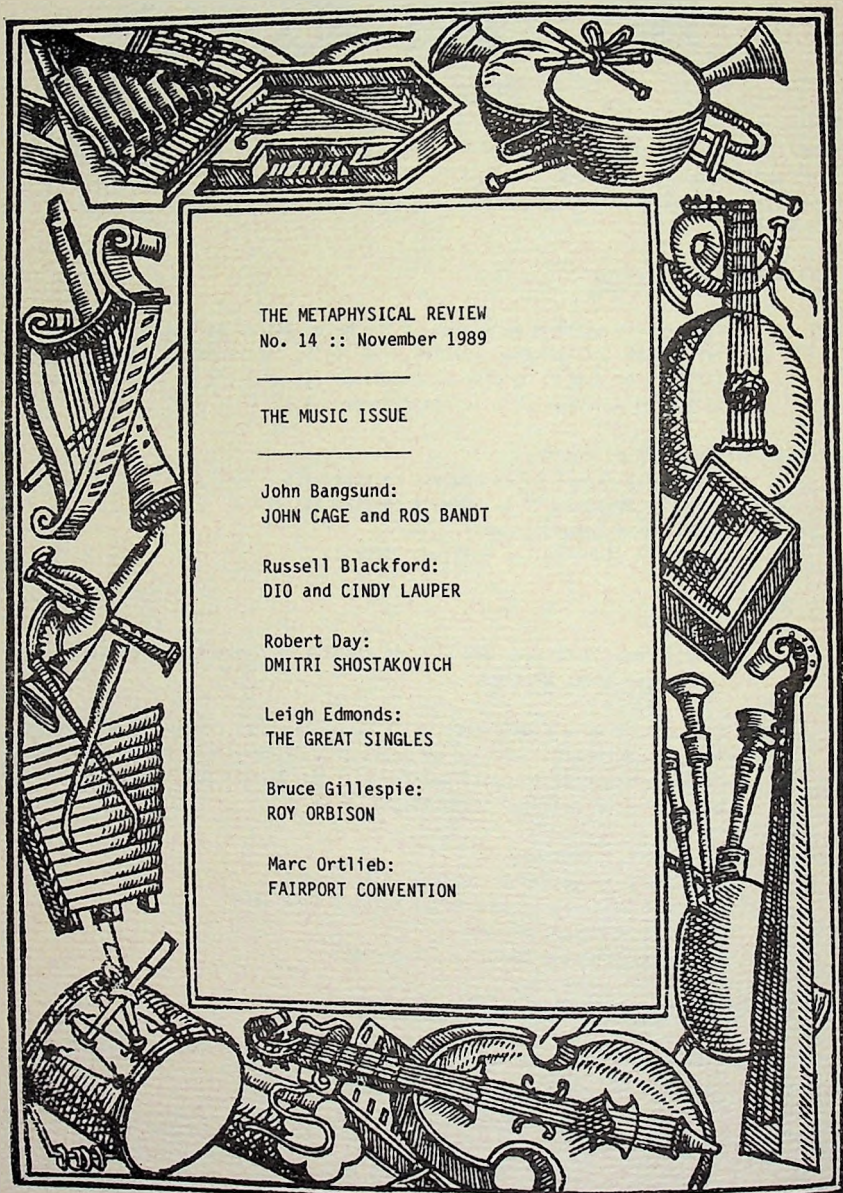
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