

I arrogantly recommend... by Tom Bowden

 thebookbeat.com/backroom/2020/06/02/i-arrogantly-recommend-by-tom-bowden-3/

Stockhausen Serves Imperialism

by Cornelius Cardew

Primary Information

Essays on composers and composition by the British composer Cornelius Cardew, circa 1974, are more interesting for their tone of anguish, righteous anger, and drive to moral good than as slices of Marxist dogma, which both impels and drags down his discussions of what compositions “ought” to do, and which composers have “failed” to do so. John Cage is chastised for introducing into music bourgeois notions of anarchy, and Karl Heinz Stockhausen for bourgeois notions of mysticism.

Being a Communist in good standing, Cardew both quotes Mao on “correct” ideas regarding music and denounces his own previous works. (Such Maoist self-denunciations later became absorbed by capitalist corporations and academia, which renamed them “performance reviews.”) But with ideological rigidity comes blindness to see in oneself the faults one intolerantly points out in others. The assumptions Cardew makes—on any given point—go unexamined, and answers are known before (or without) being proven.

There is no joy in the music—intellectually or emotionally, via performing, composing, or listening—just the relentless shame at having not having connected with proletariat audiences, who tend to be put off by all the discussions that must occur before, during, and after each musical performance to assure it has been “properly” contextualized and understood, etc. As Brian Eno reportedly said at the end of a (non-Marxist) music conference a couple of decades ago, “So many theories; so little music.”

Facebook

Pinterest

Twitter