

cliché-ridden communist salon music, and my admiration for his early works, that I didn't know what to think. How could I feel real remorse at the death of a man who had betrayed me by renouncing all the compositions I like to pursue songs and piano pieces that I considered both naive politically and weak compositionally? All that was really clear was that any critic who claimed to be reporting on new music was obliged to write a memorial article of some sort. Cardew was, after all, at least as important in the evolution of experimental music as LaMonte Young. But the emotions were conflicting, the facts were complicated, the ideas were hazy, and I kept putting it off.

It is now five months after the accident. The emotions are still conflicting, the ideas are still hazy, the facts are still complicated, and it still isn't easy to put them all into place. But I am finally getting my article together, and other musicians are finally getting a memorial concert together. Perhaps that event, at Symphony Space on May 25, will clarify a few things as well as raising some money for Cardew's family.

Since I had only two brief meetings with Cardew myself, I have sought out the opinions of those who knew him better. There are many of these. Cardew was so active in experimental music activities that almost everyone in the field knew him and his work, and since his death I have been encountering a number of personal reactions. Without attempting to document the quotes precisely, let me just paraphrase some of the comments I have been hearing.

"He was a better pianist than a lot of people now realize. He used to play those Stockhausen piano pieces brilliantly in the '60s, when he was still interested in them."

"He was Stockhausen's assistant around the time when Stockhausen produced *Carre*, and he was responsible for the wonderful details of orchestration in that piece. He had a wonderful ear."

"He really practiced what he preached, really identified with the working class, and never used political banners to call attention to his music or to improve his standard of living the way some communist composers have."

"He ate beans a lot, and following communist principle, he owned almost nothing personally. Things are going to be very tough for his wife and children now that he's gone."

"I knew him when he was a guest artist at SUNY Buffalo, where he once prepared a dinner for a large group of people and refused to eat anything himself."

"We shouldn't perform his early pieces anymore. He renounced them, and it would be ghoulish to play them over his dead body."

"It's our obligation to present the renounced works along with the others. Once pieces are published and performed and put in libraries they are publicly available anyway, and individual composers don't have anything to say about it, especially after they're dead. Besides, listeners have a right to make up their own minds about what is good and what isn't."

"I heard a concert with AMM Music one time when Cornelius suddenly broke into a completely straight version of 'Loch Lomond,' singing in a fine tenor voice and

adding all the conventional harmonies at the piano. The other three players just faded out and let him sing for a few minutes, and then the improvising continued. Some people would say 'That isn't free music. That's a traditional Scottish ballad.' But the point is that AMM Music was so free that a player was even free to break into 'Loch Lomond' if he felt like it."

My own favorite Cardew piece is Part VI of *The Great Learning*, a collection of pieces for various ensembles using texts by Mao Zedong. The score to Part VI involves only a couple of hundred words of explanation, a few sentences of text, and some numbers, and it is as elegant as it is simple. Scored for a cappella chorus, it asks each singer to sing fragments of the text on notes of their own choosing. Each fragment is repeated a specific number of times, one breath per note. When performed by a fairly large chorus, the result can produce amazing semitonal harmonies and lovely choral textures, even with amateur singers and no rehearsal. In the beginning everyone sings the same words, but as the piece goes on, the fast breathers move ahead of the slow breathers, meaning that several chunks of text are then heard at the same time. The ending can be quite poignant as the fast breathers finish and drop out, and the music tapers off. The piece often ends with a solo, as the last and slowest singer patiently completes the final lines.

*The Great Learning* is not the sort of piece that is done very often. Aside from the newness of the musical ideas, most college or professional groups seem worried about how they will explain why they are performing a text by the terrible Mao Zedong. Actually, the lyrics are philosophical in tone, with no death-to-the-bourgeoisie invective. Still, the piece presents a problem in the West, considering the attitudes toward Chinese communism in most communities. But perhaps this problem, this offensiveness, is one of the strongest things about the piece. Unlike most experimental music of the '60s and '70s, *The Great Learning* really challenges cultural assumptions, really does offend the bourgeoisie. If this has meant that there have not been a whole lot of performances, it has also meant that there has been a special excitement in those performances that have taken place in havens of experimental music in Europe and America. I have heard the piece several times myself. It has been published by C. F. Peters and reprinted in Michael Numan's *Experimental Music*, and I think it will be around for a long time.

Cardew himself was a little like *The Great Learning* when he was around. His life had some of that same elegant simplicity, and he too was direct and a little offensive. He never wrote music that society already wanted. He was always moving ahead, working for change, insulting the social order. He never compromised. In the materialistic environment that dominates the arts today, even in the experimental field, no one talks much about such principles. Cardew not only talked about them, he followed them. In fact, it is hard to think of any other composers of this period who sacrificed so much for their principles as Cardew did. Perhaps we could also say that the last full-blooded avant-garde musician is dead. ■