
Book Reviews

Burning issue of our time: What's at stake in modern music?

by David Goldman

Music, Mysticism, and Magic: A Sourcebook

by Joscelyn Godwin

Routledge & Kegan Paul, New York 1986
349 pp., clothbound \$62.50, paperbound \$14.95.

Attention, enraged concert-goers: If you ever suspected that modern music was a plot by devil-worshipping maniacs, plotting to overthrow Western civilization, Professor Godwin has written the book for you.

Early in 1985, the reviewer spent a weird winter's evening in Vienna, listening to a contrabassoonist play an original composition, accompanied by a recording of humpback whale songs. The contrabassoonist-composer taught at the Vienna Conservatory, home to a coven of strange mystics with ties to various freemasonic, Anthroposophic, Theosophic, and related cultists, with a special predilection toward number-magic. Chief of the little group is Prof. Rudolf Haase, a pleasant and scholarly old gentleman who, despite his serious contributions to Leibniz research, believes what he writes of secret numerological formulas known to the ancients, at the inner reaches of human consciousness—and perhaps much else, that he does not write about. Haase referred the reviewer to his principal English-speaking collaborator, the British-born Joscelyn Godwin, now at Colgate University; the reference was filed, until Godwin's book drew passing praise from a *New York Times* music reviewer.

In fact, Godwin has done a considerable favor to any future Inquisition against Satanist tendencies in modern culture, by including in his new *Sourcebook* the widest variety of Theosophical cranks, speaking of their inner visions of music. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, the Catholic Church's chief theologian and head of the office once known as the Inquisition, rankled some when he charged in a November 1985 speech, that modern music, rock in particular, revives the old Dionysian cult-ritual. Satan is merely the Semitic name for Dionysus, and Cardinal Ratzinger's charge implied that the musical avante-garde is a form of Satan-worship. By

letting the musical avante-garde speak for itself, in continuity with its forebears, Godwin has demonstrated that the Vatican has exercised the extreme of forbearance in handling the modernists, who are asking to be burned.

The book itself will disgust beyond words, any musician who has undertaken the rigors of mental organization and physical training required to perform classical music well. Its worst crime is to include a suspect source's (Bettina v. Arnim's) alleged conversation with Beethoven, and read into Beethoven's supposed remarks, agreement with crackpots who believe music brings them into contact with Madame Blavatsky's higher beings from the Astral Plane.

Godwin has published 61 brief excerpts of mystical writings, beginning with the ancient Greeks, and concluding with the dean of modern de-composers, Karl-Heinz Stockhausen. As what it purports to be, a source book, the work is incompetent, even fraudulent. Western music has been the subject of a bitter contest between musicians allied to the scientist-philosophers who created the well-tempered system, and the Dark Ages mystics who seek to throw music back to the moans of monkish chant or "natural" forms of folk-music. That is still the position of the Benedictines in the modern Church, who want to level the edifice of Western music, leaving nothing behind but the Gregorian chant or its popular equivalent.

Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa's follower, Franchino Gafforius, Leibniz's protégé Johann Sebastian Bach, and Friedrich Schiller's admirer Ludwig van Beethoven belonged to the first group; the Venetian school of Monteverdi, the French Rameau, the Italian Padre Martini, the 19th-century Romantics Liszt and Wagner, to the latter.

Unlike Haase, who has sought in his own books (not available in English translation) to adduce a specifically Pythagorean numerological current from the history of music (and other art forms), Godwin takes lunacy as his starting point. He has flung together whatever refers to dreams, madness, visions, and fits, from literature, correspondence, or diaries of musicians, or early Greek, Judaic, and Arabic writings. The most enraging of his inclusions comes from Clara Schumann's diaries, recording the descent into mad-

ness of her husband, Robert Schumann, no doubt from syphilis, which destroyed his body months after it destroyed his mind. Schumann's tragic death, coinciding with those of his great friends and colleagues, Mendelssohn and Chopin, extinguished the last generation of great composers, leaving the young Brahms alone, to stand powerless against the tide of Wagnerian irrationalism.

Godwin writes of Schumann's terrible last moments, "The musical hallucinations described here are so close to those of our visionary and mystical writers that one wonders whether Schumann had not penetrated, against his will, into realms with which he was not psychologically equipped to deal. Such experiences are quite common under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs, but to enter them without artificial assistance is the mark either of 'a certain ineffable divinity,' such as Pythagoras is said to have possessed, or of a loosening of the *doors of perception* which keep most people safely shut up in the world of the senses."

Aldous Huxley's drug-culture manifesto, *The Doors of Perception*, founded the hallucinogenic drug movement, and was adopted by the "progressive" rock bands of the 1960s, including the one which took its name from the book's title. Is there no lightning in heaven, that the spirits of Beethoven and Schumann might avenge the comparison to—Jim Morrison and Jerry Garcia?

Otherwise, the "sources" for Godwin's book include the leading lights of the past century's Satanist cults, including Rudolf Steiner, founder of the periodical *Lucifer* and the Anthroposophic movement; George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, guru to the mystical-religious current in Bolshevism; and assorted Theosophists of the Blavatsky stripe. It even contains detailed instructions (from a 19th-century French author) for the construction of a magical talisman.

Stockhausen's contribution, the last in the volume, is a real howler, and the one item that makes the book worth having. Along with Pierre Boulez, the 50-year-old German composer has dominated the postwar avante-garde of musical de-composition; and in the transcript of his rambling lecture to a Dutch cultural group printed by Godwin, he profiles himself as a New Age lunatic:

"Around 1950 one great world-age [the "Age of Pisces," or Christ] ended . . . and a new one [the "Age of Aquarius," or Lucifer] began. I am an artist who must play his role exactly on this borderline. . . .

"I also no longer practice religion in an orthodox way, and have left the Catholic Church. What I want to say is this: One sees the end of the traditional religions, and music used to be imbedded, everywhere in the world, in religion."

What replaced Stockhausen's Catholicism? "I have a sexual center, three vital centers, two mental centers, and a suprapersonal center," he reports. "If I can perceive that, I have come far enough to have awoken seven different centers in myself. And with different things I can bring each center into vibration. I can set my sexual center in vibration with a

certain sort of music, but with another music I can set my supranatural center in vibration."

In the excerpt, Stockhausen refers to his 1969 work *Stimmung*, in which (Godwin notes) "six singers, seated in a circle, sing with subtle variations the notes of a harmonic chord, interspersed with Divine Names from all cultures and with two erotic poems."

Otherwise, Godwin's scholarship, even in his own Astral terms, shows unacceptable holes. What of the Theosophist Wassily Kandinski, creator of abstract painting, and briefly the Bolshevik Culture Minister, and his decisive influence on Arnold Schoenberg, founder of atonal music? What of Igor Stravinsky's membership in Serge Diaghilev's circle of Parisian hashish-and-black-mass decadents? Or Bela Bartok's

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musical numerology? Or Hindemith's mystical obsessions? The story of 20th-century music, namely, its takeover by devil-worshipping, chicken-sacrificing, spirit-summoning madmen, has yet to be assembled in one place, from published, documentary sources.

As noted, Godwin's book will be of use to future inquirers. It also raises a troubling problem for the Church. A companion volume to the present work, *Cosmic Music: Three Musical Keys to the Interpretation of Reality* (West Stockbridge, Mass., Lindisfarne Press, 1986), includes the work not only of the Viennese Haase, but of the University of Cologne "anthro-musicologist," Marius Schneider; to my knowledge, Godwin is the only writer to make Schneider's work available in English translation. An explicit Dionysian in Ratzinger's use of the term, Schneider is also the dominant music-theoretical influence in the Benedictine Order; the Benedictines' most prominent music theoretician, Father Pellegrino Ernetti, has done little more in a series of mysticist volumes, than to popularize Schneider's work. Now that the Satanists are publishing their own manifestos, more or less in their own name, tolerance for the Benedictine version of the same thing is harder to understand.