

Culture

Scarpia: A night to discomfort the critics: A triumphant reception for Henryk Gorecki's Third Symphony and a startling recital for massed Dansettes and projector

Robert Maycock • Wednesday 09 June 1993 23:02 •  Comments**Sign up to our free IndyArts newsletter**

Email



SIGN UP

☐I would like to be emailed about offers, events and updates from The Independent. Read our [privacy notice](#)

WHEN Henryk Gorecki stood up to acknowledge the performers of his Third Symphony, the entire packed Barbican audience rose spontaneously with him. The cheering raged on when he reached the platform, looking touched and only a little as though he might get used to the experience. I haven't witnessed another ovation like it for a composer, nor for any great public feat since that long- distant day when Graham Gooch completed an innings of 333.

What have they, or we, been searching for, that so much emotion can break out on finding it? Criticism, to its embarrassment, has been more concerned about putting down the piece (or its success) than trying to understand. Dawn Upshaw, the soprano in the concerts and on the hit record, got straight to the point in her interview last Friday: 'People need

that kind of hopeful, healing piece right now.' This has been a good week for seeing how the quest for wholeness has occupied artists, too. Sometimes they get there; sometimes they divert into an equally characteristic part of our consciousness, the condition of passivity.

ADVERTISEMENT

SCROLL TO CONTINUE WITH CONTENT

Take the Gavin Bryars Ensemble's QEH concert. Here's a composer who struck out on his own, two decades ago, after the minimalists and experimentalists had subverted the old avant-garde aridities but had not yet humanised their findings. Bryars was way ahead of his time in once again trusting frank, irony-free expressions of feeling; his classic piece from the period, Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet, was revived on

Thursday in one of the new versions he has lately made. Nowadays his slow, sad music is a confident and distinctive presence on a more accepting scene - heard at its purest here in the clarinettist Roger Heaton's eloquent playing of Allegrasco, which starts from a stream of Schubertian melody and gently, inexorably undermines it.

But with a whole concert that ran the gamut from adagio to molto adagio, the impact was infectiously depressing. Everything seems to be about quiet pain or trapped solitude. There's no rage, just a resigned acceptance. Even Jesus' Blood has subtly changed. When new, its endlessly recycled tramp's song had the force of a protest. Now the low-tech tape sounds like a historic article, cushioned in plush harmony; a dimension of nostalgia has crept in. There was none of that in his newest piece, A Piece in a Room Gambling, where an enthusiastic voice talks about card tricks over varieties of lyrical sorrow. The music gained from this foil to its own patience, making a sharp study in alienation.

With its pioneering interplay of film and recording and performance, Jesus' Blood is one source of the current Live Art movement. A distant descendant, Philip Jeck and Lol Sargent's grand-scale Vinyl Requiem, was running last weekend at the Union Chapel in Islington. Nine tiers of autochange record players occupied the rear wall. Three operatives went to and fro on their various levels, adjusting the output, while rapid projected patterns explored the imagery of waves, and of objects with a hole in the middle. At one point an all-seeing eye blinked through it, and a CD emerged briefly just before the end.

Far from being a random pile-up of noise, its 80-minute sound component was cunningly put together from the interactions of repeating grooves. Recognisable bits of favourite LPs soon disappeared, and rhythm led the way. It was a stupefyingly passive experience. But then, what this whole movement does well is to probe the state of silent reception (of television, or recorded music) that a growing part of life seems to be about. Granted, British creations like Vinyl Requiem often look pretty derivative of now-

dated American performance art. But they still go where others do not dare.

Promoted stories

Purplebricks Sells More Houses Than Any Other Estate Agent Brand

PURPLE BRICKS

Learn More

Sponsored Links by Taboola

Gorecki is another who risked all on simplicity before the musical world was ready. Cynics still talk as though the public were being exploited; and Gorecki might yet prove to be flavour of the year, given the place in our culture of what Bobby Baker on this page yesterday called 'the juxtaposition of spiritual search with shopping'. But then the cynics wouldn't have gone to hear Paul Daniel conduct the London Sinfonietta in a fine performance which the atmosphere of expectation transformed into an overwhelming event. Once the rituals of Easter provided the outlet for this collective purging of grief; now it's a symphony. It persuades people that beneath repetitive passivity there can exist a massive certainty. That's what they are looking for.

More about: [Cricket](#) [Graham Gooch](#) [Shane Warne](#) [Symphony](#)



Join our commenting forum

Join thought-provoking conversations, follow other Independent readers and see their replies

 **Comments** ↓

Promoted stories

Taboola Feed

The new fully electric Volvo EX90. Subscribe online today.

CARE BY VOLVO | Sponsored