

N. Andrew Walsh, *Labyrinthus Hic Habitat Musica – Ergodic Scores of the Postwar Avant-Garde*, Wolke Verlag, 2 vols, 500pp, €48/Open Access.

N. Andrew Walsh's *Labyrinthus: Hic Habitat Musica – Ergodic Scores of the Postwar Avant-Garde* is devised as a puzzle for the reader to solve. In the 'User's Guide' of the book's foreword, the author provides a disclaimer, or more appropriately, a warning: 'it is nevertheless desirable to state here, as a hazard for which the reader should be prepared, that traversal of the text necessarily will encounter sections requiring nontrivial effort to read, and that some of which nevertheless will remain inaccessible' (p. xiv). Instead of providing a 'text passively received by a reader', this book requires the user to 'make decisions in the traversal and production of the text that entail manifest consequences for the use of the text itself, one of which is its own accessibility', which Walsh insists is 'less-hierarchical' (p. xv). The various minefields and puzzles of the text include but are not limited to:

1. A chapter titled 'Pauline Oliveros – To Valerie Solanas and Marilyn Monroe in Recognition of Their Desperation' that has been encrypted in numbers from 00 to 51 and requires a 'keytext' that 'was printed in limited numbers in a separate volume, of which copies may be obtained from the author upon request' (p. 348).
2. Footnotes written in the undeciphered text of the Voynich Manuscript, currently at the Beinecke Library at Yale University. Named after the Polish-American antiquarian bookseller Wilfrid M. Voynich, who acquired the fifteenth- or sixteenth-century Central European manuscript, the Voynich Manuscript's origin, language and purpose 'are still being debated as vigorously as its puzzling drawings and undeciphered text'.¹

This presents a quagmire for a reviewer. Solving a puzzle is a private affair that bestows personal benefit through the act itself. How does one summarise a book that vehemently asks for active engagement from each individual and defies coherence in the ordinary sense of a review? In defining 'ergodic' for the reader, Walsh even acknowledges the difficulty for a critic or analyst of ergodic literature. One of the four

characteristics of ergodic literature is 'transiency', which means that the reviewer or critic can't be sure that another reader has read precisely the same text. The other characteristics are aporia (inaccessibility), participation and the intrigant/intriguée relationship instead of author/reader, composer/musician. For Walsh, 'if meaning is to be experienced in the negotiation of the intrigue, it lies in the adoption of previously unknown modes of thinking necessary to traverse the event, and thus in deliberately following a path that is unfamiliar' (p. 21).

Thus, for this review, I will undertake a very unfamiliar path, but one that I hope will provide some insight into *Labyrinthus* and as well contribute to the collective knowledge of this book as ergodic score, as various musicians such as Frederic Rzewski, Cornelius Cardew and Ming Tsao have contributed to the history of Karlheinz Stockhausen's difficult-to-interpret *Plus-Minus* (pp. 114–21). Specifically, I will directly quote a selection of the passages in the book that cite (in footnotes, not included here) the Voynich Manuscript, meaning that these citations are simply written symbols whose meaning is unknown. There are 38 such citations (17 selected here), distributed pretty equally through the text, and I believe that the sentences that contain these citations give a sense of the content and tone of the book to the reader, who may then make a decision for themselves whether to embark on a *Labyrinthus* reading journey. Perhaps it will even be of benefit to Walsh to have a collection of sentences that he deemed worthy to cite the mysterious Voynich Manuscript.

I will say, however, that in preparing for this review, my travels in the land of 'ergodic scores' have been thought-provoking, confusing and absurd, and for those who have the time and patience, *Labyrinthus* is a kaleidoscopic, well-researched rebus possibly worth tackling: if one enjoys going down rabbit holes, this is the book for you, where the footnotes often overtake the main text in interesting tidbits. *Labyrinthus* is free to download on the Wolke Verlag website,² and the pdf version, contains hyperlinked text and citations, which are useful.

Translations undertaken by the reviewer are in brackets. German text was translated with the help of DeepL, and the decoding was done by hand through guesswork of common words to match the start of the 'keytext' with the 'codetext', followed by linear functions in Microsoft Excel.

¹ 'Voynich Manuscript', Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, <https://beinecke.library.yale.edu/collections/highlights/voynich-manuscript> (accessed 29 May 2023).

² www.wolke-verlag.de/musikbuecher/n-andrew-walsh-labyrinthus-hic-habitat-musica/ (accessed 30 May 2023).

'The attenuated hierarchy between the participants – evoking the rhizomatic structures of postmodernist philosophy – and the dynamic exchange between them, remains a phenomenon lacking description in systematic terms.' (p. 10)

'This further invokes the second aspect of the Labyrinth as discussed in Doob, *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages*, namely the tension between the creator of the labyrinth – who is usually presumed to know its structure – and the one who must negotiate the maze – who does not – built or planted by the former.' (p. 20)

'Certain aspects of the analysis, particularly those addressing independent agents, evoke the narrative sense of biography, while others follow the ecological or taxonomic perspectives of the natural sciences.' (p. 29)

'The Cornish School's radio studio was built in 1935 'in the midst of the old cherry orchard back of the School' with funds provided by Mrs. Eugene Fuller and her son, Dr. Richard Fuller (the latter of whom was president of the Seattle Art Museum, had patronized Mark Tobey with an annuity throughout the 1930s, and who 'showed an enlightened interest in Seattle's art life').' (p. 43)

"hat ihre Wurzel" ["has its root"] (p. 64)

'Between engagements and, as [Stockhausen] described it, with little paper on hand to sketch out project ideas for the course, he and Mary drew diagrams in the sand on the beach of the various musical forms he considered elemental to his 'meta-serial' thinking of the time.' (p. 109)

'Titled the "Experimental Outdoor Exhibition of Modern Art to Challenge the Midsummer Sun", the exhibition featured beached industrial machinery, a fifty-foot-long painting suspended from trees, a store-bought ball set all alone on the pavement path titled Work B, among others.' (p. 133)

'The title derives from Ono's childhood memories of eating grapefruit, and her belief that the fruit was a hybrid of oranges and lemons: seeing herself as a 'spiritual hybrid' of Japanese and Western influences, the fruit thus had personal significance.' (p. 149)

'Dzimbo, a different species than the National Zoo's other elephants, was housed in an enclosure with Nancy, an older African Bush elephant.' (p. 155)

'31 30 00 10 40 24 25 47 07 23 16 32 06 03 16 08 06 48 17 20 47 33 10 02 27 48 36 35 08 00 30 13 12 27 49 26 02 51 23 44 18 09 20 11 36 10 39 43 25 35 36 27 24 00 28 24 19 10 00 19 01 31 04 48 16 34 22 22 47 32 28 24 16 23 38 14 29 41 04 18 17 44 00 38 47 38 14 03 48 15 27 44 27 25 43 09 03 38 35 33 09 25 51 29 20 37 21 36 15 48 30 17 11 42 32 37 39 24 05 49 06 41 48 46 04 46 12 10 06 41 11 09 04 24 49 15 13 17 23 30 18 23 04 19 22 04 16 51 22 44 08 13 50 22 45 42 26 32 45 32 02 19 18 45 13 08 48 48 37 31 46 42 37 07 45 03 14 09 05 42 36 48 18 48 38

25 28 25 33 09 09 27 19 41 40 40 01 08 20 50 48 09 07 44 06 00 34 25 48 01 13 48 23 20 02 00 47 42 49 37 17 15 42 20 29 29 38 25 37 48 44 23 23 44 06 23 07 41 19 30 44 13 04 40 38 43 39 36 44 05 13 32 29 51 22 47

03 50 21 23 16 17 04 42 40 34 09 43 34 09 04 15 13 02 09 13 15 05 21 28 08 00 25 17 15 41 32 23 27 43 28 47 15 21 11 09 23 00 32 00 35 35 12 45 27 46 43 18 24 21 06 03 20 32 24 10 34 08 49 39 04 46 45 49 04 06 10 40 50 26 01 41 10 34 36 28 42 16 01' [Menroe's [sic] suicide became the allegory to the poetically inclined of the sinister underside of American (or, in the propaganda of the Soviet Union, the broader western-capitalist) society; and in the subsequent murders of prominent [sic] political civil figures, in the ferocious upheavals of the civil rights era, the depredation of the flower of the nation's [sic] youth in the killing fields of [sic] Vietnam, the concealment of despair beneath the mask of a 'blond bombshell' was the poetic harbinger of the doubts and mistrust Americans began to harbor about all they had been schooled to venerate as the promise of the 'American dream.']. (pp. 170–71)

'08 41 03 10 40 37 13 02 25 28 44 18 24 33 34 09 32 31 43 09 02 13 15 25 20 33 45 41 19 05 46 49 25 26 39 47 15 16 50 41 48 45 39 15 38 29 14 02 11 01 27 50 25 24 02 38 15 51 04 22 07 16 30 10 10 43 41 49 36 49 33 38 17 23 05 18 22 30 25 51 29 48 13 50 35 03 38 45 15 40 08 31 06 03 34 46 49 02 12 18 45 34 15 28 34 01' [Oliveros writes emphatically on the richness discovered by the attentive listener in everyday surroundings, and by extension the importance of reducing musical textures to their minimal constituents to reveal details of the individual sounds!] (p. 205)

'Pro Musica Nova was followed by two other noteworthy festivals, in Berlin and Munich; and John Cage – the featured guest in Bremen, whose simultaneous performance of Mureau with David Tudor's Rainforest was a landmark of both composers' work – would tour later that year with Merce Cunningham throughout Germany and Europe.' (pp. 220–21)

'See Joseph, "John Cage and the Architecture of Silence", citing László Moholy-Nagy in discussing van der Rohe's houses of glass and white planar surfaces for their ability to dematerialize and become part of their natural environment.' (p. 276)

"Probably Siegfried Behrend was imposing it." (p. 293)

'Notable are two general aesthetic principles not explicitly prescribed in the score: first is the intromission of video recording equipment into the stage space, explicitly made a part of the performance event; and second, the references in the performance instructions and Einführungstext to the word-root 'cross' is translated into explicit cross imagery in costume and stage design.' (p. 306)

"Die Aufzeichnung ist nur ein Kern, aus dem die Musik erwächst, in ihr sind alle wechselnden Aufführungsvarianten virtuell enthalten, während die jeweilige Aufführung nur eine einzige Variante zu Gehör bringt." ["The recording is only a nucleus from which the music grows: in it all changing performance variants are virtually contained, while the respective performance brings only a single variant to ear."] (p. 311)

'In contemplation of the revolutionary arts the philosopher of music is most adequately comparable to

the humble gardener, who does not expect to live to see the seedling grow into the forest, but nevertheless abides in faith of the natural world and the nobility of labors for the benefit of the future: we submit here, for any who might stand at the threshold however far in the future from the present era, that this labyrinth is complete, that at its heart resides the promise of transcendence we have set forth, that the hazards of which we have warned may be overcome through courage and perseverance – but that although the steps taken to reach and surpass the challenge it represents have been yours alone, the summit attained is all of ours to share, together.’ (pp. 335–36)

Julie Zhu

10.1017/S004029822300058X

John Miller, *The Modern Brass Ensemble in Twentieth-Century Britain*, Boydell & Brewer, 2022, 220pp. £65.

In the concluding ‘envoi’ chapter of *The Modern Brass Ensemble in Twentieth-Century Britain*, John Miller introduces Septura (a London-based brass ensemble founded in 2013) and cites the liner notes on their 2014 album *Music for Brass Septet*. Founders Matthew Knight and Simon Cox describe their approach as a ‘counter-factual history of brass chamber music’. Citing a canon of Romantic chamber-music composers (Brahms, Bruckner, Mendelssohn and Schumann), they ask: ‘what if these works of art had been written for brass?’ (pp. 146–47).¹ As Miller is quick to point out, transcriptions are not new to the brass ensemble repertoire, and have been common practice since the mid nineteenth century (p. 147). The most recently founded group covered in *The Modern Brass Ensemble*, Septura would be an anomaly in Miller’s book if it did not engage in at least some form of arrangement or transcription practice. What makes Cox and Knight’s framing compelling, though, is the creative anachronism that such a ‘counterfactual history’ suggests.

If the debates surrounding authenticity in historically informed performance taught musicology anything, it was that *all* musical performance is to a certain extent ‘counterfactual’.² The overarching celebratory tone of Miller’s book resides in his enthusiasm for brass chamber writing – be it historical reconstruction, arrangement or newly composed – that pushes boundaries. *The Modern*

Brass Ensemble provides musicology with a much needed, thorough survey of a body of twentieth-century music unduly overlooked by much of the mainstream academy. From the perspective of new composition especially, Miller prompts the reader to seek out an array of fascinating compositions. To name just three examples: Gunther Schuller’s confronting *Symphony for Brass and Percussion* (1950), Thea Musgrave’s taught and colourful *Variations for Brass Band* (1966) and David Lumsdaine’s *Looking Glass Music* (1970), for brass quintet and tape (an intricate and beautiful score, to my knowledge unrecorded).

An immediately striking quality of this study is the enormous quantity of repertoire, composers, players, institutions, technologies and trends that Miller – in part informed by his own active performing career – manages to accurately cover in a relatively short space. One consequence of this abundance of information is that *The Modern Brass Ensemble* has a somewhat encyclopedic quality, especially in its earlier chapters, which could benefit from slightly more expansion in some places. In particular, Miller’s introduction might have presented an opportunity to connect some of the fascinating thematic strands that persist throughout the book into a more sustained argument. Two such themes include:

- 1) the tendency of ensembles (like Septura) to invoke the Romantic string quartet when grappling with the question of what constitutes a desirable chamber style; and
- 2) the extremely common and long-standing tendency among brass ensembles to perform transcriptions of early music.

The string-quartet comparison arises in almost every chapter (pp. 1, 23, 46, 52–57, 67, 78–79, 120, 139). Chapter Six even sees an account of conductor and trumpeter Howard Snell, upon forming an ensemble of conical-bore brass band instruments (cornets, flugelhorn, tenor horn and euphonium), being ‘attracted to the homogeneity that he explained was epitomised in Schubert’s String Quintet in C major, D 956’ (p. 120). Given early music’s somewhat indirect relationship with the Romantic string quartet, these two themes could be held in productive tension as a means towards understanding how brass ensembles have made sense of their own place in history.

Miller’s first six chapters are in chronological order and fall broadly (albeit not explicitly) into two sections. Miller’s central object of study is the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble (1951–83, hereafter PJB), to whom Miller principally attributes the popularisation of British brass chamber

¹ Matthew Knight and Simon Cox, liner note, Septura, *Music for Brass Septet*. 2014, Naxos, 8.573314.

² Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *The Modern Invention of Medieval Music: Scholarship, Ideology, Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).