more Cage . . .

*Radio Happenings I-V* by John Cage and Morton Feldman. Musiktexte, no price stated.

*The Boulez – Cage Correspondence* edited by Jean-Jacques Nattiez, tr. and ed. Robert Samuels. CUP, £27.95.

*CAGE: Roaratorio: An Irish Circus on Finnegans Wake.* John Cage (reader), various musicians. Mode 28/9 (2 discs).

*Music for Four; Thirty Pieces for String Quartet.* Arditti String Quartet. Mode 27.

*String Quartet in Four Parts; Four.* Arditti String Quartet. Mode 17.

*NANCARROW: String Quartet No.1; IVES: Scherzo; FELDMAN: Structures; CAGE: Four; plus CARTER, YIM, LUCIER, YOUNG.* Arditti String Quartet. Disques Montaigne CD 782010.

*CAGE/TUDOR/KOSUGI: Five Stone Wind.* Takehisa Kosugi (amplified violin, live electronics, bamboo flute), Michael Puggiése (9 clay pots and tapes), David Tudor (live electronics); *CAGE: Cartridge Music* (realization by David Tudor, 1988). Kosugi, Puggiése, Tudor (phonograph cartridges and amplified small objects). Mode 24.

Since my Cage overview in *Tempo* 183 we have continued to be inundated with material, literary and aural: we can only be thankful, and attempt to absorb what we can. A few words, then, on some choice items.

The *Radio Happenings* have circulated in typescript for some years, but for those who have not yet come across it, this official publication will be greatly appreciated. What makes these conversations unique is the simple fact that Cage and Feldman knew each other well. So whereas in a standard interview they would be asked to explain basics, by an interviewer likely to be soon out of his depth, here the conversation can range freely: and it does, encompassing remarkably fresh discussion of both composers’ music, as well as material on others (Wolff, Varèse, Cardew, Stockhausen, Webern, and also many painters). They also get quite embroiled in ‘social issues’, but in Cage’s remarkable way, attempting to unify artistic and political endeavour. The second result of Cage and Feldman’s intimacy is that the *Happenings* display none of an interview’s haughty demeanour, replacing it with a conversation’s openness and volatility. There is minimal editing, and some useful notes (though not quite as many of the latter as there might have been).

The appearance of the Boulez-Cage Correspondence in English will also be appreciated (see the review of original edition in *Tempo* 178). In the context of a Cage review, however, it is only fair to point out that Nattiez writes his introduction as a member of Boulez’s party, with a superficial, and sometimes downright silly, attitude to Cage’s work. Essentially, Nattiez attempts to make the split between the two composers seem more inevitable than it was (at this time at least). He quotes Boulez on Cage out of context, which is bad enough; but on the last page we encounter the following: ‘For as far as responsibility goes, the opposition of Boulez and Cage rests essentially on the establishment of a fact that is rather forgotten by the advocates of chance: in the immediacy of improvisation, the musician can all too easily fall back on memory and stylistic cliche’. Why is it that more than 40 years after Cage first used chance, people still think that involves improvisation? This sentence is immediately followed by the quotation of a letter from Boulez to Nattiez supporting his proposition: clearly Nattiez is presenting Boulez’s view, not that of a third party. This caveat does not alter the main text, which is striking (despite Nattiez’s wriggling) for what Steve Sweeney Turner noted as ‘the two composers’ feeling of a common cause’.

*Roaratorio* will be known to many thanks to the BBC, who presented a live performance of it (including Cage reading and the Cunningham Company dancing) as part of the first night of the Proms some years ago. This release will allow those who remember the event to recreate it. For new listeners, it is a lavish and happy mixture of Cage’s sing-song voice reading, as beautifully as ever, his *Writing for a Second Time through Finnegans Wake*, with various folk musicians and a tape containing recordings of thousands of sounds mentioned in the *Wake*. It starts with a viola d’amore and goes on from there (‘Sir Tristram, voiler d’amores, fr’over the short sea . . .’). This is a well-presented set, promising a
rich listening experience.

As concentrated as _Roaratorio_ is lavish, we have Cage's complete music for string quartet, performed by the Ardittis. The music is, predictably enough, brilliantly played, the quartet turning their hand to any material with equal ease — and there's plenty of variety here, ranging from the well-known Quartet in Four Parts to its mirror-image _Four_ (his last quartet, and perhaps his most beautiful — slow, quiet, gently shifting notes, rather like Feldman's 'Three Pieces for String Quartet with the pedal down), via two more excitable works. The _Thirty Pieces_ are more varied than their luminous orchestral namesakes, the repetitive euphonious elements putting into relief more explosive material, while _Music for Four_ juxtaposes fragments of well-defined and distinct music that cover an equally large range, but with different kinds of delineation between types of music.

A different performance of _Four_ is also included on the Ardittis' new 'USA' disc, a compilation of pieces by a collection of major American composers (and some not so major). As regards the Cage, the performances differ only in length (this one is 20 minutes, as against 30 minutes on the Mode disc), and the coupling will decide which is bought. Alongside _Four_ we have Nancarrow's thrilling first Quartet, given with less superimposed blues than the Kronos offer, and showing his habitual accomplishment; Ives' _Scherzo_ (all 1'30" of it), also thrilling in its musical grasp and open-eyed exploration; finally, and by no means least, Feldman's _Structures_, beautifully tentative, like Guston's drawings of the same time (despite echoes of Webern). Less happily placed in this company are early, atypical quartet pieces by Elliott Carter, La Monte Young and Alvin Lucier, and a quartet by the young Jay Alan Yim, attempting to offer a programmatic description of the experience of looking at a Jackson Pollock. A dangerous thing to try to do.

A further release in the Mode 'John Cage Edition' has been the highlight of this crop of discs. It contains a new realization of _Cartridge music_, which is a good thing in itself, but also, and more substantially (55'-odd) a work which would best be described as a collaboration between Cage, Tudor and the Japanese Fluxus improviser Takehisa Kosugi. Cage defined time brackets for the three players, and wrote a part for the percussionist, Michael Pugliese. He leaves Tudor and Kosugi to fill their brackets as they see fit. In this sense it is very much a concerted effort, Tudor's contribution sounding like Tudor and Kosugi's sounding like Kosugi. Not only is there this splitting of the creative responsibility, but each person deals with it in a different way. As mentioned above Cage writes out a part (Jean-Jacques take note), while the music suggests that Kosugi improvises, while Tudor lies somewhere between the two. What I find most astonishing about this recording is the unique vitality of the sounds Tudor produces. Working with recordings of earth-vibrations (as distinct from earthquakes), Tudor makes noises which could be described as a cross between pitched static and the noise of bubbles bursting. This may not sound particularly prepossessing, but believe you me, he invests these sounds with energy like you have never heard before. It makes Sonic Arts sound like a school outing, and I recommend it wholeheartedly.

_Schatt's_ tone clock theory, briefly, holds that just as the three basic diatonic triads (I, IV, V) complete the diatonic scale, so too do chromatic triads make up the chromatic aggregate. Twelve distinct intervallic triads, transposed and combined four times, with the exception of the diminished triad, form the twelve-note scale. The levels of transposition necessary to form the scale also outline a separate triad, which he terms the 'steering' triad. Neatly assigned to 'hours', these triads form a 'clock' of possibilities, which offers a means for generating harmonies based on distinct intervals.

_Schatt characterizes each triad as a tonality with a metaphorical resonance; thus it is possible to connect the system with dramatic action, as in opera, with combinations and confrontations that
mirror extra-musical development, as shown in the lucid analytical essays on his operas Monkey and Reconstruction (based on Che Guevara). Yet the subjective nature of any choice of harmonies is not the weakest link in the tone clock’s mechanism – which is, rather, that the restriction to triads is itself artificial and unnecessary. Where diatonicism requires triadic structure for its language of consonance and dissonance, while atonality and serialism, which avoid tonal implications for aesthetic purposes, allow pitch-sets of any size, Schat’s rationalization of the triad as unit is based on a spurious geometric analogy of three-dimensionality.

The tone-clock theory appeals to a mystical escapism, in its partial ordering of chaos, which thus avoids a vast area of complex possibilities. It is odd that a composer with such a vivid social and aesthetic conscience, as is shown here in a compelling selection of imaginatively written (and fluently translated) essays, should seek to don such rose-coloured theoretical glasses. It is these more wide-ranging essays which display a questing artistic spirit willing to grapple, in entertaining literary style, with seminal social issues. Indeed Schat’s identification of society and music is the most polemical aspect of his ideas. Yet, while criticizing tonality’s ‘regime of the triad’ and serialism’s ‘administration of notes’, Schat’s chromatic universe nevertheless falls short of symbolizing a harmonic Utopia. Rather, it is a partial glimpse into a far richer universe of possibility.

Malcolm Miller

Swiss Contemporary Composers. Amadeus. No price or author given.

The format of this book is straightforward in the extreme: it’s a catalogue of composers, arranged alphabetically; each entry carries a photograph of the composer in question with his or her signature, a brief biography in German, French or Italian, always with an English translation, and a list of works, divided by category and including pieces as recent as 1993. As such, then, it’s a guide to virtually all the serious composers in Switzerland, recent and living, and will be immensely useful to anyone who wants to know what is going on there.

But for all its 470 pages (and with two or three pages per composer it gets round a fair number of them – 191, to be precise), it’s not exhaustive and some of the gaps are rather odd. There’s no indication in the introductory material to suggest the grounds for inclusion. Swiss Contemporary Composers says the title – so these are living or recently dead musicians? No, Othmar Schoek is in here (d. 1957), as is Willy Burkhard (d. 1955) and Ernst Boch (d. 1959) – as they should be. So why not Fritz Brun (d. 1959), described by Harold Truscott in one of his memorable throwaway lines simply as ‘the great Swiss symphonist’? (Thanks to Truscott, discussing Schmidt, word has got out that Brun’s Fourth Symphony is in E major – and there are nine others to explore.) And why not Volkmar Andreae (d. 1962), friend of Busoni and composer of a rich, well-stocked catalogue? Do you have to be Swiss-born? No, for you’ll find Arthur Honegger (b. Le Havre) and Vladmir Vogel (b. Moscow). So why not Czeslaw Marek, another friend of Busoni (and inheritor of his piano bench) who settled in Zürich in 1915 and became a Swiss citizen in 1932? Although the introduction, by Jean Balissat, President of the SUISA Foundation for Music, offers the caveat that ‘a publication such as this does not pretend to be exhaustive’, these are important omissions and they undermine the authority of the whole. And this is the third edition of the book, so they’ve had time to get it right.

Another depressing effect of this book, for the best reasons, is that it underlines how much music there is to hear, and how little likely any of us is to hear it. Even skimming through the work lists makes you shake your head in mild desperation. What, for random example, does Luc Balmer’s Symphonic Suite for strings sound like, or any of his four big choral works? (He’s another Busoni pupil, now 95 years old.) What about Emile de Ceuinick’s Te Deum, written in 1965? François-Xavier Delacoste’s Concertino for viola and orchestra? Renato Grisoni’s Sinfonia Italia or his Sinfonie Elvetica? Mani Planzer’s Evolution 2 for flute and clarinet or his Suite catalane for wind orchestra? I’ll probably never know. To rub salt in the wound, Balissat’s Introduction reveals that a similar publication is in preparation, dedicated to composers whose main output is for chorus.

Martin Anderson