

Dear Editors and fellow readers of *Context*,

With a firm grip on authorial intention and much else besides, Ian Shanahan apparently knows why he does what he does and insists with almost Orwellian undertones that all other composers do likewise and 'come clean about it'<sup>1</sup> (inferences of Thought Crime?). From the vantage point of the highest moral ground and the right side of the confessional stall, Mr Shanahan offers us his 'brief diatribe', and truly in keeping with the *Collins Dictionary* we are indeed presented with a 'bitter, violent criticism', a 'denunciation' no less—but hardly in keeping with the Latin origin of this word—'*diatriba* or learned debate'.<sup>2</sup>

Mr Shanahan hopes not to create the 'overall impression of being some kind of bigoted crackpot'; alas his self-professed 'fulminations' establish very little else. Any persons not subscribing to the laws of musical composition according to Mr Shanahan are described variously as 'culprits', 'compromisers', 'defilers' and plain old 'dishonest'. Shanahan vents his spleen with a torrent of lukewarm, self-styled pejoratives such as 'pseudo populists', 'other imitative types', 'turncoats', 'self aggrandising "artists"' and 'unethical hacks'.

**Just who are these people? Do they really exist? What music have they actually written?** For reasons of his own, Shanahan does not seem to want to tell us or share the insights of his musical scholarship at an accountable level. Throwing stones from a safe distance, Mr Shanahan does not analyse one single piece of music written by any person other than himself. His is a solitary burden, carrying a large stone tablet of absolute musical truths carved by himself with full authorial intent.

Mr Shanahan and doubtless other composers/ 'Shamans' (—is there any space reserved for 'Shawomen' in Shanahan's pantheon of 'reverent', 'sacramental' composers?) seem to be oblivious to the concept that it might be difficult to actually eliminate the self (his self especially!) from the act of interpretation, understanding being consequently from the point of view of the person who understands.

Shanahan's house of musical ideas is a big, old house where all the rooms are locked, never to be opened (for fear of what waits inside)—except for one tiny room: guess which one?

Happy new ears, Mr Shanahan!

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member of the 'paradoxical' public

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations derive from Ian Shanahan, 'The Malaise of (not just) Australian Music', *Context* 2 (Summer 1991), pp. 34-37.

<sup>2</sup> *Collins English Dictionary* (Sydney: Collins, 1986).