

**Christopher Mark, *Roger Smalley: A Case Study of Late Twentieth-century Composition***

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Over the last few decades, there has been an explosion of monographs dedicated to the music of individual post-war composers. In each case, the author attempts to consolidate research that is normally strewn across journals, proceedings, *festschriften* and even liner notes into a coherent narrative, in order to assert the importance of their subject. In this respect, Christopher Mark is no different in his *Roger Smalley: A Case Study of Twentieth-Century Composition*, honestly stating in his conclusion his belief that the music of Smalley is worthy of greater dissemination and study. Intriguingly, he also claims that his study can be used, as its title suggests, to clarify general issues in later twentieth-century composition: 'Smalley addressed concerns that were common to a number ... of composers, sometimes coming to similar solutions ... sometimes pursuing a more individual path' (p. xiii).

The study opens with the transcript of a 1999 interview of Smalley by Mark. This is not an exhaustive oral history, and Mark does not seek to clarify knotty biographical or compositional details. Rather, he allows Smalley to present a biographical sketch that frames the rest of the book like a 'cantus firmus' (p. xv). Smalley describes the passing influence of Maxwell Davies and Stockhausen during his apprenticeship in England, as well as his involvement in the new music group Intermodulation in the 1960s.

Smalley's move to Australia in the mid-1970s to become composer-in-residence at the University of Western Australia seems to have precipitated a stylistic shift, away from Moment Form, text pieces and conceptual purity toward a more comfortable relationship with consonance. While Mark attributes this change to Smalley's relocation, he acknowledges that 'it could be argued that the changes in his language could only have come about through the radical change in perspective that going to live on the other side of the world afforded.' Mark footnotes that 'it is a moot point whether migration to a different non-European country—for example, the USA—would have allowed this to the same extent' (p. 150). However, both Mark and Smalley note, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, that this stylistic change came about because of the inexperience of Australian performers and audiences, who were not taken by Smalley's earlier style. From the mid-1980s, Smalley began to rework the music of nineteenth-century masters, most notably Chopin. Raiding the music of the past was not new for Smalley (the *Missa Brevis* and *Missa Parodias* from the mid-1960s were based on the keyboard music of John Blitheman), but now he had sufficient skill for the development of borrowed material over longer spans.

After the interview, the book proceeds chronologically through various loosely defined periods of Smalley's output, starting with his earliest works and ending with the Oboe Concerto (1995–96). Mark offers insightful sketch analyses of many works, successfully relating these analytical discussions to the stylistic tendencies he has already outlined. While the analyses often seek to explain compositional processes, Mark is careful not to ignore the implications of

a work for the listener, taking Smalley's advice from the first chapter: 'don't get bogged down in musical technique for its own sake, and allow the music to go where it wants' (p. 6). Mark is also not bothered by Smalley's deviations from his pre-compositional schemes:

Musical works are valued not for the closeness of their correspondence to compositional theories ... they are valued for the quality of their invention and their internal cogency. It would make better sense to view such theories as enabling devices ... setting up 'rules' that it will be often more productive to break than to observe. (p. 96)

This statement could apply to much twentieth-century composition, and it neatly encapsulates Smalley's method, which requires strict schemes at the conceptual level in order to free his imagination in working out the details. In this respect, the analyses of *Accord* (1974–75), the Piano Concerto (1984–85) and *Chopin Variations* (1988–89) are the most successful, possibly because they are Smalley's best works. Mark does not progress simply from the beginning of the piece and breezily survey the major events. Rather, he often starts mid-work, or at the conclusion, using these parts to explain specific issues in Smalley's structural drama.

It is often the case with monographs of this sort that the author is seeking to assert the quality of a particular composer's music, often over that of others who have proved more popular. However, Mark is not afraid to discuss works whose realisation fails to match the quality of their conception. Sometimes this relates to the vexed issue of the Australian-ness of Australian music. Smalley is presented as naïve in his attempts to integrate Australian elements into his high-modernist style upon arriving in Australia in the electronic piece *Didgeridoo* (1974), with Mark noting that 'it is difficult to listen to the work today without questions of cultural exploitation and hegemony entering one's mind' (p. 117). In the composer's program note for *The Southland* (1988) he said in response to the question, 'do you consider your music to be distinctly Australian?': 'I have increasingly felt the desire ... to write something which would tackle the initial question head on by allotting to such indigenous or "traditional" materials a role of central importance' (p. 179). However, such attempts by Smalley have never been particularly successful, and it is clear that his style of composition—developed in the early 1990s—is far more relevant to the Australian experience in its tangled and problematic relationship with European tradition.

As the book progresses, references to the initial interview become less frequent, as do references to other compositional styles or even other composers at all. This is perhaps due to the general trend that composers settle down to more-or-less full-time composition after a long apprenticeship, as well as to Smalley's relative isolation in Western Australia.

Mark's first aim—to present a coherent examination of Smalley's music—can be judged successful by the end of the book. By only including analytical discussions that directly relate to Smalley's evolving techniques, he presents a clear picture of the composer's evolving language. However, Mark's other aim, to connect Smalley with larger trends in the compositions of his contemporaries, seems less successfully achieved. Aside from the discussion of the early influence of Maxwell Davies and Stockhausen, there are not many references to composition in the rest of the world after Smalley's arrival in Australia. Often if such a reference is introduced it is to distinguish Smalley's position rather than to relate it, for example, in a contrastive discussion of Ligeti (p. 215). This does not worry me—I would prefer to read a study that stressed the composer's individuality over their adherence to fashion. Indeed, as every broad

study of post-war music has shown, it is notoriously difficult to generalise compositional movements beyond the most specific (Spectralism, for example) or the most general (Neotonicity). In his conclusion, Mark summarises Smalley's position as best he can: the composer did not wish to write consonant music in the 1960s, but by the 1980s he did. However, he never abandoned his clear schemas and structures, not because he wished the audience to hear them, but simply because it was the only way he could compose.

Beyond a few trifling typographic errors, the book is handsomely produced. The smaller musical examples have been typeset clearly, and the larger and later works are reproduced from Smalley's exceedingly clear manuscripts. Mark's relationship with Smalley has enabled him to reproduce a number of helpful, interesting and thankfully legible sketches. There is a complete list of Smalley's writings and works, as well as a detailed index and bibliography.