

It is precisely because of this passion that he goes too far at times. For example, the last few pages in particular suggest the basis for a robust debate in which he might find himself having to back off a little. This may be deliberate in his attempt to 'correct the balance,' and thus if this highly readable and often entertaining book does put the case with a touch of bias at times this is no bad thing. The work as a whole contributes mightily to the literature on Australian music.

"Breaks" which precede each chapter are entertaining snippets of the author's life and travels in jazz; sometimes relevant, at other times mere recollections from his diary. A novel idea (no pun intended) but it hardly helps the cause to which he so wholeheartedly espouses to begin one of these with the wonderfully Australian 'On the piss far too much...' (p.77). One can just hear the elitists pouncing on that as evidence of a poverty of language in the jazz world. However, these recollections help to soften the heavier excursions into the more thought-provoking areas and thus will broaden the book's appeal. Indeed, they make a wonderful point about Bruce Johnson, a writer and scholar of intellect to be sure, but also a person who understands his subject from a deeply personal perspective.

His exploding of the myths surrounding the place of various musics in Australian culture has much relevance and, despite the book's uneven, pastiche-like structure and content (his 'collection of prismatic essays'), it helps to correct the pitiful number of literary works on music in Australia. It is unfortunate that it does not go beyond the 1950s, at least in the discussion of the actual music. Given the ground it attempts to cover, it seems eminently sensible that another 'volume' by this writer be considered soon.

The Select Bibliography reflects the diversity of the content generally. The notes on each chapter and the selection of historical illustrations are excellent.

TONY GOULD

Richard Vella (with additional topics by Andy Arthurs),  
*Musical Environments: A Manual for Listening, Improvising  
and Composing*

Sydney: Currency Press, 2000

ISBN 0 86819 544 8. 240pp. + 1 CD-Rom, ill.

Throughout the twentieth century the definition of music was extended to include virtually any sound. From the deconstruction of tonal functional harmony at the end of the previous century through movements such as serialism and minimalism to the multiple sounds of technology, there was (and still is) no more accurate description of music than Murray Schafer's famous definition, so beautifully developed in his book *The Composer in the Classroom* (Toronto: BMI Canada, 1965) that of 'an organisation of sounds which is intended to be listened to.'

The broadening of the realm of music, particularly over the last fifty years, to include any sound has allowed more people than ever before to be involved in its performance. The concept of the student, dutifully practising for hours on end, as the only way in which musical performance could occur has passed, with the advent of sound production equipment and a generally freer approach to the learning of music. Today, there are many people interested in

studying sound but who may not wish to go to the trouble of acquiring an instrument, a teacher or a technique, or any of the other aspects of musical learning once thought to be essential for a real understanding of the art form.

Richard Vella's book provides an ideal text for such people. It is the outcome of a general music education course run at Macquarie University in the early 1990s, which included humanities, economics and science students. Clearly the course was not designed for the specialist musician, indeed the author states that the book does not rely on an assumed knowledge or a required level of musical competency, and would thus be of use to 'students, lay readers...professional and amateur musician[s].' Further, he notes that many of the concepts would have relevance to people such as sound designers, architects, film makers and screenwriters.

*Musical Environments* is divided into two sections, titled 'Sounds in Space' and 'Sounds in Time.' There is an extensive Appendices section, titled 'Composition,' which discusses approaches and techniques used in the creation of a composition, and an accompanying CD that includes almost one hundred musical examples to illustrate the text.

The first section examines different applications of sound in space, which the author describes as follows: 'The reader is required to listen to the environment, explore making sounds in space, appreciate the migration of sounds around geographical space, experience the psychoacoustic sensations of register shift, delve into the nature of sounds in enclosed space, such as a violin's resonating chamber, and explore the sounds that can be made at different locations on an instrument, the body or a piece of material.' This section contains nine chapters which are grouped under three modules titled 'Tuning the Ears,' 'The Vibrating Sound' and 'The Vibrating Instrument.'

'Sounds in Time,' the second section, assists the reader in applying the knowledge acquired in the first part of the book. Again to quote the author, music in this section is discussed 'in terms of abstract perceptual models based on texture in which the placement of sounds within each model creates different listening strategies. These are analogous with the way individuals and communities express their relationships with each other and their environments.' There are four modules in this section, again each one with three chapters. They appear under the headings of 'The Musical Mix,' 'Listening Environments,' 'Homogenous Environments' and 'Heterogenous Environments.'

The book follows a learning 'formula' for each of the twenty-one chapters. This usually entails two separate discussions on the major topic, activities and listening examples which illustrate the text, and a summary. Questions are posed to reinforce an understanding of the discussion. Other chunks of text titled 'Special topics' are interspersed throughout each chapter, their purpose to provide a variety of information, including historical contexts, terminology and specialised technical knowledge, which can be read independently of the main text.

The first chapter sets the style for the entire book. This section, titled 'What is Music?,' begins with that perennial question and is answered with a host of definitions from throughout history from Samuel Johnson to Sid Vicious (of The Sex Pistols notoriety), including that of Schafer given above. Activity 1 suggests that two or three people create a conversation representing different points of view by selecting from these quotations. The listening examples which complement the discussion are a 1985 composition by Alistair Riddell, *Black Moon Assails*,

the sounds produced by a computer linked to an old piano's sound board, and Graeme Leak's *The Sink*, performed with kitchen implements. The accompanying questions are directly related to the text, such as 'Can you name a piece of music which does not have a melody?' followed by a large list of suggestions for further listening. These range from Beethoven's *Pathétique* piano sonata to the Beatles' *White Album* and Stockhausen's *Gesänge der Junglinge*, as well as Australian indigenous and electronic music. The module ends with improvisational tasks, such as one for exploring the range of the human voice and its capacity to produce moans, buzzes, hums, screams, throat and 'salival sounds.'

The two chapters that follow, and which complete the first module, are grouped under the title 'Tuning the Ears.' There is discussion on the listening process and how different groups of people might respond to particular music. The reader is directed to listen to three examples of music connected in some way with water, with more questions for consideration in order to help develop analytical skills.

Module 2, titled 'The Vibrating Sound,' is involved with the description of sounds and music. There is discussion on musical elements such as loudness, registration and timbre as well as more complex sound such as the harmonic series. There are lovely examples of 'sound' poetry and the reader is continually challenged to listen, to experiment and to question. Module 3, 'The Vibrating Instrument,' is concerned with how sound is produced (there is useful material on aerophones, chordophones and the other three 'phones' of instrument classification), instrumental technique in its many forms and the concept of sound sculptures and installations, among a range of topics.

Part 2, 'Sounds in Time,' follows the same format as the first section. The titles of the four modules give an indication of the material that is presented but they barely summarise the considerable depth of the discussion. 'The Musical Mix' discusses articulation, layering, blending while 'Listening Environments' includes musical spaces, aural depths of field and listening strategies. 'Homogenous Environments' includes discussion on textural sound such as density, hierarchical textures such as melody and drone, and 'spatialised' textures such as counterpoint, while the last module, 'Heterogenous Environments,' includes topics as diverse as analogue and digital editing, an analysis of a work of Webern and indeterminacy. The listening examples in this final section reflect the diversity and detail of the whole text with artists including Olivier Messiaen, Gunther Schuller, Frank Zappa, Belá Bartók, Herbie Hancock, John Coltrane, Iannis Xenakis and Jimi Hendrix.

The detail in the book is one of its most impressive features. Almost two hundred pages are devoted to discussion, listening, improvising and composing tasks, questions to be answered and lists of recordings. The accompanying CD includes a large amount of Australian contemporary 'classical' music (for want of a better word), examples of sound composed by the author to illustrate points in the text, and works of well-known classical composers. Probably due to copyright regulations the author has included little contemporary popular music on the CD, although great artists of this genre are cited extensively in the examples for further listening.

For a short period Richard Vella was the head of music at La Trobe University, some years before its untimely closure in 1999. This institution was a leader in contemporary music-making through its founding head, the late Keith Humble, and his successor Jeff Pressing, who is

prominent in Australia as an improvising pianist. La Trobe's music department was well known for its free music-making—its sound-making room complete with car parts was a legend amongst tertiary music schools—and the improvisation and composition tasks to be found in *Musical Environments* reflect this spirit. It is within this area of the book that I have my only reservations.

The type of improvisation task, of which there are almost seventy, involves music-making of a very free nature. Most of these suggestions for improvisational activity require the performer to explore the sound spectrum in a way that is not limited by musical 'rules' in any conventional way. This is an obvious starting point for people without musical skills and, indeed, is an activity I employ with beginning improvising students, both specialist music and generalist primary teacher trainees, to name just two groups. But from my teaching experience there comes a time when students seem to want their improvisations to have a stronger emphasis on the elements of rhythm, melody and harmony than is to be found in the creative tasks in *Musical Environments*. However, bearing in mind that the book is aimed at people without 'an assumed knowledge,' this criticism might be seen by some as a little unfair.

Notwithstanding my (very small) reservation, the book is a wonderful introduction to the pleasures inherent in creative performance. On its back cover it is described as a 'ground-breaking guide' to the world of sound and music and it is undoubtedly so. Indeed, if we are serious about music as an ongoing and living language we should all promote this book. It deserves to be widely used by people of all ages and levels of experience.

Ros McMillan

**Warren Fahey, *Ratbags and Rabblerousers: A Century of Political Protest, Song and Satire***

*Foreword by Eric Bogle*

Currency Press, Sydney, 2000

ISBN 0 86819 634 7. pb., 389pp., \$32.95 incl. GST.

As Warren Fahey admits, most of the sets of words reproduced in *Ratbags and Rabblerousers* as 'songs' were previously published by him in *The Ballads of Bob Menzies* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1989). A polemically designed narrative threads the verses into garlands offered to the gods of the old left in both cases. No music appears in either book, though tunes are named where parodies have been tacked on to pre-existing melodies. The problem with this is that many of the original tunes have disappeared, not only from common usage, but from memory and the library shelves. Warren Fahey, a celebrated performer and collector, has been publishing Australian songs in this and the usual melody-with-words-and-chords format for many years.

In 1970 he formed the Australian Folklore Unit 'to collect, research, write about and popularise Australian folklore.'<sup>1</sup> Three years later he began a year-long field search which resulted in a significant collection of songs and stories now housed at the National Library of

<sup>1</sup> G.B. Davey and G. Seal (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Folklore* (Melbourne: OUP, 1993).