

## **New Music, Old Music, Newer Music: The Cologne Soundscape in the Late 1970s**

Mark Fitzgerald

There is something attractive about labels for historians, not to mention for concert managers and marketing strategists, and while there is much discussion of how we have left a “period of common practice” and now live in a period of freedom from various “tyrannies”<sup>1</sup>, it is quite extraordinary how many labels are used to group together the various musics from this period. Jostling together are the new romantics, new expressionists, minimalists, devotees of the new simplicity and of course some old fashioned modernists. The English composer Christopher Fox has recently posited a further “Cologne School” from the late 1970s, but whereas Cologne in the 1970s for most people would instantly suggest the names of the two recently deceased compositional rivals who attracted students from around the world to the Hochschule, Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928–2007) and Mauricio Kagel (1931–2008), Fox concentrates on a group from the younger generation of students who studied in Cologne at this period, some of whom would have been associated with the *Neue Einfachheit* group.<sup>2</sup>

Fox focuses almost exclusively on four composers, but if one also includes all names suggested to Fox by the composers interviewed for his article the result is the following list: Michael von Biel (b. Germany 1937), John Maguire (b. USA 1942), Clarence Barlow (b. India 1945), Claude Vivier (b. Canada 1948, d. Paris 1983), Walter Zimmermann (b. Germany 1949), Kevin Volans (b. South Africa 1949), Gerald Barry (b. Ireland 1952) and Chris Newman (b. England 1958). The four names selected to form Fox’s Cologne School are Barlow, Zimmermann, Volans, and Barry. Fox outlines the reasons for his selection as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> A term that can essentially be defined as the type of music not written by the composer using it.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Fox, “Where the River Bends: The Cologne School in Retrospect”, *The Musical Times* 148/1901 (Winter 2007), p. 17–42.

It is this consistency of artistic purposes [a sharing of compositional preoccupations] that convinces me, if no one else, that it is useful to group these composers together. It also confirms me in my decision to leave other figures out of the frame. When I discussed this article with Volans and Zimmermann they both mentioned the importance of Michael von Biel (b.1937), [...] but Biel's rather sporadic output demonstrates a sensibility closer to the New York School than to the Cologne School. Barry and Volans also mentioned Claude Vivier (1948–1983) but as Volans said, Vivier was “totally in love with Stockhausen and his method” so they “ignored” him. The American composer John Maguire (b. 1942) was another important presence in 1970s Cologne but his rigorously systems-based music is also quite at odds with the Cologne School aesthetic. On the other hand, omitting Chris Newman (b. 1958) has caused me much more anxiety. From his arrival in Cologne in 1980 Newman quickly became a key member of the city's alternative new music scene but, much as I like his gloriously gauche music, it seems to me that his Dionysian approach to composition is very different from that of my chosen quartet.<sup>3</sup>

So why does Fox make this selection and does it make any sense? For Fox a key link between these composers is the way in which they decided to appropriate existing musical material into a new context. These appropriations of material, which is frequently tonal or modal, were used without the elements of irony found in the appropriations of earlier composers' work.<sup>4</sup> Certainly with Zimmermann, Volans and Barlow the links are more profound than this statement might at first suggest but the selection raises a number of fundamental questions about the works of these composers, and the composers Fox chose to ignore.

The most basic common link between the majority of the composers from both short and long list is the fact that most studied in Cologne with either Kagel or Stockhausen. Barlow was the first of the chosen four to commence study in Cologne, originally with Bernd Alois Zimmermann (1918–1970) and then with Stockhausen.<sup>5</sup> Walter Zimmermann arrived in Cologne in 1970 to undertake courses with Kagel but divided most of his time between there and the Netherlands studying in the Institute for Sonology in Utrecht and the Jaap-Kunst Ethnology Course in Amsterdam.<sup>6</sup> Volans commenced studies with Stockhausen in 1973 and by 1975 had been appointed as one of Stockhausen's teaching assistants. On rejecting a request from Stockhausen to give up composition and become his permanent assistant, Volans enrolled in a course on electronic composition

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Fox, “Where the River Bends: The Cologne School in Retrospect”, *The Musical Times* 148/1901 (Winter 2007), p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the way in which Kagel uses Beethoven's music in *Ludwig van*.

<sup>5</sup> It should be mentioned that Bernd Alois Zimmermann's appropriation of pre-existing musical material and the trend towards a reduction in content found in his later works undoubtedly had an influence on the next generation of composers.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Toop, “Walter Zimmermann: A Portrait”, <<http://home.snafu.de/walterz/toopwz.html#shadows>>, (Accessed 15 October 2008).

and began to take lessons from Kagel.<sup>7</sup> Gerald Barry began his studies in Cologne with Stockhausen, but in order to preserve his scholarship after Stockhausen ceased to teach at the Hochschule, he then enrolled with Kagel, claiming an interest in music theatre. After a short time this feigned enthusiasm became a real one and theatrical works dominate Barry's subsequent output.<sup>8</sup>

It was inevitable that the strong personalities of both Stockhausen and Kagel would on the one hand generate extreme devotion and loyalty from some students, but also an equally violent reaction against their methodology from others. In addition the atmosphere in which these people studied was also a highly charged one. The aftershocks of the student riots in the late 1960s were still being felt in Germany and the activities of the groups such as the Red Army Faction were but the most extreme manifestation of a general sense of unrest caused by world economic and political developments. The harnessing of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School to political ends, the perceived lack of ability by the political establishment to come to terms with its National Socialist legacy and the gradual erosion of democracy through the emergency laws of the mid-1960s all contributed to the heightened atmosphere among students.<sup>9</sup> While art music might at first seem far removed from this ethos, existing in a rarefied world removed from expressions of rebellion and protest which were dealt with through the medium of popular music, it was at this time viewed in an intensely political light. On the one hand there was a hard questioning of what was seen as the bourgeois elitism of new music and on the other there was a welcoming of new music as something that undermined the conventions of the concert for the bourgeois concert-goer.

Into this heady mix was also thrown the complicated reception history of American music in Germany. From the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, America had given considerable monetary backing not just to the reorganisation of musical life and the support of new music in West Germany, but also to the promotion of American music as part of the re-education of the German populace. The result of this sustained policy was that American experimental composers received far greater support for activities in Germany than in the US and they also developed strong audiences in Europe while remaining relatively unknown in their home country.<sup>10</sup> While there was a strong anti-American backlash in the late 1960s and 1970s due to the US involvement in Vietnam and reports of race riots in US states, this did not really impact on the reception of American experimental music, partly because of the perceived subversive aspect of music by such composers as Cage, Rzewski, Feldman and Wolff.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Michael Dungan, "Freedom and Rebellion", *New Music News* (September 1997), p. 9–11 (10).

<sup>8</sup> Michael Dervan, "Bowers of Bliss, of Blood", *An Droichead* (Summer 1986) p. 4–6.

<sup>9</sup> See Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (eds.), *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977* (New York, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> For more on the American policy during this period see Amy C. Beal, *New Music New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification* (California, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> This perception was greatly aided by EMI's decision to market a recording of their music as "Music

In contrast to this Stockhausen divided opinion with some applauding his avant-garde tendencies and mystical side but other decrying his lack of interest in politics and his reactionary and even elitist approach to composition. Stockhausen's tendency to underplay the American influence on European culture formed a part of this perceived reactionary stance. This ranged from his rejection of links between compositions such as *Stimmung* (1968) and the music of La Monte Young to more generalised dismissals of America's contribution such as a 1981 interview in which he declared:

It was the French who triggered off the whole revolution of abstract expressionism with its Pollocks and Klines and dripping methods, all of which happened in a very short time in America, but which basically started, if you look back to its real origins, with Wols, a German painter who lived in Paris after the war, and who was the first to make paintings using drippings and scribbling and chance methods. And these paintings of Wols are closely related to certain paintings of Klee, only certain paintings, which also made use of similar aleatoric or tachistic techniques. So the claim that abstract expressionism is an entirely American phenomenon, which people try now to justify philosophically with talk about chance operations and the I-Ching and Zen Buddhism and so on—all this is only attempting to lay an American foundation for a European structure that had arrived ready-made.

As for an absence of tradition, what I encountered on my tour of America in 1958 was a musical life and intellectual climate entirely dominated by German and Austrian immigrants. [...] It was against the domination of music by powerful academic forces that small groups of intellectuals reacted, stimulated by abstract expressionism, dadaism and surrealism. That's how it was. So one shouldn't be under any illusions about American culture and its origins.<sup>12</sup>

By contrast Walter Zimmermann has never denied the influence of American composers (or perhaps we should say his perception of American composers) on his work. For Zimmermann and others like him "new music" had reached a point of crisis both in terms of language and also in its relation to the society in which it was situated. The new music was now in urgent need of reinvigoration to prevent it becoming an endless parody of itself. Clarence Barlow in the long semi-serious programme note for his *Fantasia quasi una sonata con Mantra di Stockhausen* of 1973 highlighted this issue describing how the piece was a product of the composer's circular trajectory chasing a series of fashions and changes in the avant-garde. The piece is described as being conceived in 1961 when the composer was 16 as a few bars in G minor, which he decided to turn into a sonata. However, at the same time his experience of music was continually developing as he heard

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before Revolution", an LP accompanied by an interview with Feldman and others entitled "Attempt at a Pre-Revolutionary Music" See Amy C. Beal, *New Music New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification* (California, 2006), p. 172.

<sup>12</sup> Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Stockhausen on Music: Lectures and Interviews*, ed. by Robin Maconie, (London, 2000), p. 141–142.

more chromatic and complex music which he wanted to imitate. His increasing use of chromaticism brought him into the world of atonality and he had to abandon the composition due to the increasing disparities in style between sections. Barlow then outlines how this decision was strengthened by his subsequent moves to serialism, total serialism and finally chance techniques with less and less compositional decisions made by the composer. By the 1970s, with a new acceptance of the idea that all music experienced is essentially music of our time and the realisation that the outcome of enforced originality is a behaviour more traditional than original, the composer could return to his abandoned sonata, the only change being the incorporation of thematic material from Stockhausen's *Mantra* which he had studied for a semester under Stockhausen.<sup>13</sup> The gulf between this and his original tonal music no longer matters as he is no longer caught up in a search for a perfect organic originality; in fact the gulf in essence does not exist.

While Barlow was following this path through the new musics of Europe and America Zimmermann took a slightly more direct approach to the American aesthetic. American propagandists had spent much of the post-war era trying to remove the idea prevalent within Germany that American composers worked in a cultural wasteland with no tradition, seeing it as a negative judgement on their country's achievements. Paradoxically this idea was the very thing that attracted composers like Zimmermann to the experimental music of composers such as Cage and in 1975 Zimmermann decided to make a journey across America to interview as many of members of this American avant-garde as possible. While La Monte Young refused to be interviewed as Zimmermann had no money to pay him, Zimmermann did manage to interview 23 musicians and composers.<sup>14</sup> The title of the resultant volume *Desert Plants* indicates the stance of the author. To quote from the publicity statement:

Zimmermann also shows an open admiration for the American composers whose best model he sees in Harry Partch: a "desert plant" whose ability to survive in a cultural desert has made him all the more admirable.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Clarence Barlow, Programme note for *Fantasia quasi una sonata con 'Mantra' di Stockhausen*, 28 December 1973, reprinted in Clarence Barlow *Musica Derivata*, compact disc hat[now]ART 126 (2000).

<sup>14</sup> The full list of composers interviewed is James Tenney, Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, John Cage, Philip Corner, Jim Burton, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Robert Ashley, Alvin Lucier, Joan La Barbara, Pauline Oliveros, David Rosenboom, Richard Teitelbaum, Larry Austin, Charlemagne Palestine, Charles Morrow, Garrett List, Frederic Rzewski, John McGuire. He also talked to J. B. Floyd about Conlon Nancarrow and Ben Johnston about Harry Partch. Walter Zimmermann, *Desert Plants: Conversations with 23 American Musicians* (Vancouver: Aesthetic Research Centre Publications, 1976).

<sup>15</sup> Amy C. Beal, *New Music New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification* (California, 2006), p. 221. The statement was written by John McGuire.

The volume played an important role in cementing the reception of this music not just in Germany but also abroad—the young John Adams was one of those who purchased a copy.<sup>16</sup> The important qualities stressed by Zimmermann were independence, nonconformism, individuality and a stripping of music to its essentials. This could then be contrasted with the way in which young European composers seemed to imitate each other or their elders, the alliances or schools of composers that existed in Europe and the high complexity of much of the music. As with many of the best polemics it did not particularly matter if this was quite removed from reality.

Inspired by Cage to immerse himself in the writings of Meister Eckhart and Shunryu Suzuki, Zimmermann made his first important compositional breakthrough into a new style with a 65 minute work for piano called *Beginner's Mind*, a title derived from Suzuki's book *Zen mind, beginner's mind*.<sup>17</sup> Structurally the piece also follows the divisions of the book into three parts namely "Leave the old", "Clean the mind" and "Change your consciousness", to which he adds a prologue presenting five versions of the old mind that is to be transformed, based on his own improvisations at the piano.<sup>18</sup> Gradually the music is altered and transformed over the course of the work becoming simpler and deliberately naïve until it ends with the pianist singing the "Beginner's Mind Song" with phrases such as:

We must have Beginner's mind free from possessing everything  
When you are you, you see things as they are  
And become one with your surroundings [...]  
The future is the future the past is the past  
Now we should work on something new.<sup>19</sup>

The piece became something of a rallying cry for young composers with Volans writing a manifesto-style letter to Zimmermann. He pointed out that new music of any period should be, by definition, a challenge to the listener, a music that requires new ears, rather than a term of convenience for something that is in urgent need of rejuvenation. For Volans, if their music did not fulfil the official definition of "New Music" they should be "content" that they did not write "New Music", and instead he advocated a "music that

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222. It was typical of the period that young American composers had to find out about American experimental music in or via Europe.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Toop, "Walter Zimmermann: A Portrait", <<http://home.snafu.de/walterz/toopwz.html#shadows>>, (Accessed 15 October 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Fox, "Walter Zimmerman, the Piano Music", sleeve notes for compact disc Metier, MSVCD92057 (a+b), 2003, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4–5.

is 'a-historical' and 'local' of 'here and now', a music that is personal [...] organic and vigorous."<sup>20</sup>

The difficulties Volans was experiencing with new music were exacerbated by the contrast with other types of music he was encountering. Performances by groups such as Benjamin Bagby's *Sequentia* of medieval music such as that by Hildegard von Bingen not only displayed a great sensitivity to vocal colouring but also suggested the existence of an earlier non-canonical music which was not concerned with proportion in contrast to the highly wrought music of Stockhausen. He had also begun to undertake field trips to South Africa to study African music, which as a white middle class man he had never studied before. Returning directly from a field trip to a Cologne premiere by Stockhausen, Volans was struck by the difference between the African music, which while natural and uncalculated seemed full of life, and the Stockhausen, which despite the intense amount of calculation and concern about proportion, seemed sterile and the language dead. This was the final catalyst which drove Volans to change his musical language.<sup>21</sup>

At this point the various paths of Barlow, Zimmermann and Volans came together and they each began a search for what Volans had outlined in his letter: a music that would be a-historical, local and of the here and now. This meant for each of them a return to their place of origin to search for material which would be of use in the forging of this new music. Barlow returned to India and did extensive research into the use of heptatonic scales as a means to create computer-generated music with audibly comprehensible melodic, harmonic and tonal qualities. The result was *Cogluotobüsisletmesi* (named after the Indian bus company Barlow used on his trip) a 35 minute piece for pianist Herbert Henck which is constructed using four simultaneous streams of material resulting in textures so complex that a short-lived release on Wergo also contained a computer realisation of the work.<sup>22</sup> Volans returned to South Africa and over the following years produced a series of African-inspired works, originally intended to form a gradual process from straightforward transcription, through paraphrase, quotation as *objet trouvé*, assimilation à la Stravinsky or Bartok and finally to an "invented folklore".<sup>23</sup> Zimmermann, after time spent in Franconia, began work on a project entitled *Locale Musik*, made up of four groups of pieces for various forces. In these pieces the adaption of music can be very direct but over the entire cycle there is again a movement away from this approach to the extent that, for example, one percussion piece *Riuti* is described as a "transcription of Franconian

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<sup>20</sup> Christopher Fox, "Where the River Bends: The Cologne School in Retrospect", *The Musical Times* 148/1901 (Winter 2007), p. 31-32.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce Chatwin, *What am I doing here?* (London, 2005), p. 67.

<sup>22</sup> Christopher Fox, "Where the River Bends: The Cologne School in Retrospect", *The Musical Times* 148/1901 (Winter 2007), p. 34-36. A recording using four pianists has recently been released on Cybele Records SACD 960308, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Kevin Volans, "White Man Sleeps: Composer's Statement" <<http://www.kevinvolans.com/index.php?id=18>>, (Accessed 15 October 2008).

place names”.<sup>24</sup> The approach taken by the three composers was in direct opposition to that taken by Stockhausen in his *Hymnen*. Here national anthems and other assorted music from all around the world were incorporated through electronic modification into Stockhausen’s own musical language. Volans outlined the aesthetic basis all three worked on in an essay on his own *White Man Sleeps*:

My desire to explore the differences between African and European music was in stark contrast to that of the previous generation of New Music composers, who in their quest for a ‘world music’ in the 1960’s, succeeded in integrating the music of many cultures into one (usually electronic) Western music. I and my Cologne-based colleagues in the 70’s were interested in cross-fertilising techniques of different musical traditions to arrive at a new musical perception—one that went beyond Eurocentricity on the one hand and ‘hands off’ ethnomusicology on the other. Above all, we wished to avoid ‘local colour’—the essence of airport art. It was for this reason we all avoided the facile nature of electronic music, and in particular were careful not to introduce exotic instruments into Western music. We stuck to a Western instrumentarium on which we could explore new aesthetics, new techniques and (equally importantly) new colour.<sup>25</sup>

So far Fox’s idea of a united school of thought holds together but what of his fourth composer Gerald Barry? For Barry there was no field trip to Ireland to rediscover the country’s natural language. Indeed, if we are referring to traditional music, Barry would have been very familiar with it from his youth, his uncle being the noted concertina player Paddy Murphy. The closest Barry came at this period to citing an Irish tune is in a group of pieces that share a common pitch content, the ballet (now withdrawn) *Unkrautgarten*, *Diner* for orchestra, *Sur les Pointes* which exists in a variety of differently scored versions, Ø for two pianos and the central section of *Au Milieu* for piano. The pitches are derived from the tune *Bonny Kate* but two pitches are placed between each pitch of the original tune, not only making it unrecognisable but, more importantly, removing the very elements of intervallic content that might give it an “Irish” sound. Therefore rather than appropriating a local music, Barry reduces the Irish material to the status of any aleatoric group of pitches, without extra musical significance, that can be manipulated at will.

Barry’s decision may relate to a general distaste among younger Irish composers for what fellow composer Raymond Deane called the “Bord Fáilte aesthetic”—the idea of taking traditional music and placing it in an art music context.<sup>26</sup> The process was associated with the pseudo-Brahmsian fantasies of Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1934) and later with a host of less distinguished arrangers who had provided suites of orchestrated

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Fox, “Cage, Eckhart, Zimmermann”, *Tempo*, New Series, No. 159 (Dec., 1986), p. 9–15 (10).

<sup>25</sup> Kevin Volans, “White Man Sleeps: Composer’s Statement” <<http://www.kevinvolans.com/index.php?id=18>>, (Accessed 15 October 2008).

<sup>26</sup> Bord Fáilte is the Irish equivalent of Cedok. Raymond Deane, “Tailpiece”, *Soundpost* 13 and 14 (April/May and June/July 1983) p. 40 and 36.



Irish airs primarily for broadcast on national radio at a time of cultural insularity and insecurity. Also, by the 1970s with the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland, the use of such material could be taken as a political commentary and that type of direct political engagement is something that Barry has at all times avoided. By contrast Volans has always highlighted the importance of the political act in his “Africanising of Western music” during a period of political repression and has noted on a number of occasions that “the moment for writing this kind of work has passed along with the apartheid state”.<sup>27</sup>

With no local music to draw from in Barry’s output Fox chooses ‘\_\_\_\_\_’. This may not be local but for Fox it is certainly “derived”. According to Barry the piece originated in the rushing scale patterns that are a feature of climactic moments in Tchaikovsky’s orchestral music.<sup>28</sup> However, as with his use of *Bonny Kate*, the distance between possible original model and final work is so great as to make the starting point irrelevant. Indeed when discussing this piece, one-time collaborator with Barry, Vincent Deane comments:

It is possible to find in Barry’s scales—which are, after all, anonymous cultural artefacts—something of the *objet trouvé* beloved of venerable Dadaists like Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp, who poured elegant scorn on the individualist cult of the Artist by exhibiting, as their own work, mass-produced bicycle wheels and plaster statuettes.<sup>29</sup>

The other example Fox cites from Barry’s output is his use of the passing chords from Bach chorale harmonisations in his first opera *The Intelligence Park*. Again the process involved ensures the complete de-contextualising of the musical material. Large charts were constructed from these isolated chords which could then be read in any direction (forwards, backwards, diagonally) to construct a “unified” harmonic language for the work.

This use of pre-existing art music as a reference point in Barry’s composition could be linked to the type of borrowing that is evident in music by Barlow and Chris Newman. Barlow’s trio *1981* takes three pre-existing pieces (*La Chasse* by Muzio Clementi, and the first movements of Schumann’s Second Trio in F and Ravel’s Trio in A minor) and statistically derives parts from these, starting with equal representation of each and changing

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<sup>27</sup> Kevin Volans, “White Man Sleeps: Composer’s Statement” <<http://www.kevinvolans.com/index.php?id=18>>, (Accessed 15 October 2008). Indeed, since the Kronos Quartet recording of *White Man Sleeps* became number one on the US classical and world music charts Volans has had to defend himself from accusations of musical colonialism. Similarly Zimmermann found himself accused of neo-Nazism at the première of his *Lokale Musik* for his rejection of internationalism in favour of use of nationalistic folk music. He found a rather unlikely defender in the person of Helmut Lachenmann whose own *Tanzsuite mit Deutschland Lied*, premiered in the same year, took a much more abstracted slant on the use of national material as an attempt to gain insight into the “landscape-oriented collective sensibility”.

<sup>28</sup> Kevin Volans, *Summer Gardeners: Conversations with Composers, Summer 1984* (Durban, 1985), p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Vincent Deane, “The Music of Gerald Barry” *Soundpost* (June/July 1986) p. 14–17 (16).

to fit a diagrammatical model, while similarly direct borrowing from Beethoven forms the basis of his *Variazione e un Pianoforte Meccanico*.<sup>30</sup> Newman's output includes a variety of approaches to the issues of derivation and history. Early works such as his first piano sonata mix historical styles: pre-classical, Janáček, Ives and what Newman describes as "homemade Beethoven". There is no attempt to be accurate or to parody; instead Newman describes it as "appropriation".<sup>31</sup> There also tends to be a deliberate undermining of the musical logic to distort relationships or make them covert. Later works demonstrate more direct appropriation such as the sixth sonata which combines Newman's own Symphony no 3 in the left hand and Beethoven's opus 90 in the right. These examples from Newman and Barlow are however, fundamentally different from the Barry in that Barry feels it a duty to transcend the borrowed material in some way, rather than letting it appear in a recognisable form—what Barry has referred to on a number of occasions as "borrowed glory".

An aspect of Barry's music could be linked more directly to Volans's and Zimmermann's through their shared interest in early music; Cologne in the 1970s was not just a leading centre for the new—it also had a thriving community for old music. The impact of Sequentia's performances on Volans has already been discussed above, but of equal importance was the ensemble Musica Antiqua Köln directed by Reinhard Goebel.<sup>32</sup> The extraordinary virtuosity and precision of this group coupled with their distinctive and quite abrasive sound was a revelation for composers. In conversation with Zimmermann Volans noted:

I think the precision with which, say, Musica Antiqua Köln play even straight crotchets, is very new. We haven't heard anything quite like this before. The incredibly strict control of tempo, to elicit a very precise dramatic or structural or emotional effect. Where a tempo change—it can be very small—is used to such great effect...In a new music we've been so saturated with tempo changes, so they have no meaning anymore, it becomes impotent.<sup>33</sup>

Even leaving aside works by Volans or Zimmermann using baroque instruments, it is a soundworld that is frequently invoked in the music of these composers, as can be seen in the vibrato-less string writing favoured by the composers or the high horn writing in pieces such as Barry's second opera *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*.<sup>34</sup> In addition works

<sup>30</sup> Clarence Barlow *Musica Derivata*, compact disc hat[now]ART 126 (2000)

<sup>31</sup> Chris Newman, "Chris Newman: Piano Sonatas", sleeve notes for compact disc Mode 201, 2008, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> It is worth mentioning in passing that the performers in the recording made of the first version of *White Man Sleeps* apart from Kevin Volans himself were Robert Hill, one of the harpsichordists with Musica Antiqua Köln and Magriet Tindemans from Sequentia. Compact Disc United 88034, 1994.

<sup>33</sup> Kevin Volans, *Summer Gardeners: Conversations with Composers, Summer 1984* (Durban, 1985), p. 105.

<sup>34</sup> This opera is based on an inversion of the plot of Handel's *The Triumph of Time and Truth*.

such as ‘\_\_\_\_\_’ from the late seventies exist in several different instrumentations as Barry attempted to write a music which was divorced from colour in the way much early music was—for example, English consort music which can be played on a family of viols, or a family of violins or even a family of wind instruments such as recorders. However each rescoring is seen by Barry as providing a different view of the material and is in essence a newly composed work, not an arrangement.<sup>35</sup> Ideas of structuring and clarity of line can also be linked to the influence of early music and Barry has compared his method of constructing music from blocks of material to the work of sixteenth-century composers of keyboard music.<sup>36</sup> Similarly the structural use of tempi Volans discerns in the performances of Musica Antiqua Köln underpins much of Barry’s early music, while tempo regularity is a feature of most of these composers’ work at this time.

Barry’s aesthetic also shares several traits with the music of Claude Vivier. Vivier did not return to his native Canada to find a local music but instead became fascinated by the east, his music being altered by a long trip across Asia and in particular by his experiences in Bali and Iran.<sup>37</sup> In some ways it is harder to make absolute comments on the direction Vivier was taking in his music due to his death in 1983 at the age of 34.<sup>38</sup> In terms of technique and structure Vivier was undoubtedly influenced by Stockhausen. In terms of language however, the emphasis on a single melodic line which is then coloured by other parts is reminiscent of the approach taken by other composers from this group as is the quasi-tonal chording used, though in the case of the later works this is inflected by quarter-tone usage in the melodic line.<sup>39</sup> The music is closest to that of Barry in an earlier work like *Shiraz* for piano from 1977 where, if one leaves aside its more rigorously mathematical approach to structuring, the four-part writing punctuated by unexpected silences and the chorale conclusion do not seem too far apart from the similarly virtuosic works *Au Milieu* and *Sur les Pointes* composed for Herbert Henck or Barry’s *Five Chorales from the Intelligence Park* for two pianos. Indeed Vivier’s lecture at the Feedback Studios in Cologne in 1982 with its reference to the need to hold on to the moment through pleasure and then transform this moment into art, into music is strikingly redolent of Barry’s com-

<sup>35</sup> This is similar to Volans’s idea, when discussing his reworking of *White Man Sleeps* for string quartet, that ‘the colour of the instruments, or the colour of the sound that they produce, is as important for the meaning of the music as the pitch, or the rhythms, or anything else. See Timothy D Taylor, “When we Think About Music and Politics: The Case of Kevin Volans”, *Perspectives of New Music*, vol. 33, No. 1/2 (Winter-Summer, 1995) p. 504–536 (519).

<sup>36</sup> Barra Ó Séaghdha, “Breathing Space”, *Graph*, 6 (August 1998) p. 14–17.

<sup>37</sup> Jaco Mijnheer, “A Journey into my very essence”, sleeve notes for compact disc Philips 454 231–2, 1996, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Vivier was murdered in Paris, his death bizarrely mirroring that of the protagonist in the work he was composing at the time *Glaubst du an die Unsterblichkeit der Seele* [Do you believe in the immortality of the soul].

<sup>39</sup> It was these complex aural textures in Vivier’s late works which so influenced Ligeti’s music from the 1980s onwards.

ments about his opera *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*.<sup>40</sup> There is also a shared interest in the static, not to mention ecstatic, approach taken in the music of Olivier Messiaen.

If the strict divisions created by Fox seem to come apart with further examination, a different point of departure can be found in a manifesto written in 1981 by Barry, Volans and Newman. Of course in the context of a German city where so many earnest manifestos were issued by various groups there is a certain element of satire about this particular manifesto but the detail is strikingly serious. Rejecting the term “New Music” as being far too loaded and carrying implications of everything from Schönberg to the latest from Darmstadt, after much thought the three composers settled on the title “The Society for Newer Music” for their organisation, or SNerM for short. The manifesto reads as follows:

The main aim of the Society is to promote work and activity possessing an understanding and knowledge of artistic freedom. Such work would manifest itself in a diversity of media and forms. Such work would not necessarily be bounded by any particular historical style. Such work would be distinguished by a certain recklessness, the consequence of true integrity. Such work would therefore be personal, would not excuse itself, would abhor security. Such work would necessitate a direct view of the world, stripped of sophistication and rooted in a sense of wonder. Clearly such work could draw freely from all available sources. The Society applauds diversity, quality and imagination. Such work is, in effect, indefinable. Gerald Barry, Christopher Newman, Kevin Volans.<sup>41</sup>

It strikes me that if one was to go about constructing a School (and that is not what I propose to do as these artificial constructs tend to block out the fundamental differences of composers), this manifesto contains the starting point. It emphasises the main concerns of each of the composers mentioned so far: the stripping down of material, the idea that all of history is theirs to work with as might suit their purpose, the rejection of security and the recklessness of approach in whatever medium chosen. To the issues outlined in the manifesto one could add a concern with colour, touch and texture which is found in each of the composer’s outputs, not merely as applied effect but as an integral part of the composition—colour is not something that can be separated from pitch organisation or formal structure. In addition to this there is a strong interest in virtuosity either in its more overt forms such as in Barry’s early instrumental works and Vivier’s vocal music, or in more covert forms as found in Zimmermann’s music and some of Volans’s work.

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<sup>40</sup> Astrid Holzamer, “Claude” sleeve notes for compact disc Kairos 0012472KAI, 2006, p. 14. Barry’s programme note for the opera focuses on the idea of pleasure: “When it comes one devours it and tries to hold it for as long as absolutely possible. Then it slips away and sighing for the past and future return [...] It’s as if protection from [Time’s] ravages would be the reward for the music and singing being brilliant enough. Virtuosity, magically, would create a suspension, and keep one safe.” <<http://www.oup.co.uk/music/repprom/barry/prognotesn-z>>, (Accessed 15 October 2008).

<sup>41</sup> The manifesto was published in a number of German and Irish journals. A copy of the original is held in the library of Trinity College Dublin, TCD MS 10666.

There is also a clear focus in all composers' works on what Zimmermann would call "non-centred tonality".<sup>42</sup>

The other fundamental link between these composers brings us back to the reception of American music in Germany. Many commentators have been quick to link music by composers such as Volans or Barry with minimalism—in other words with the music of composers such as Steve Reich. However, according to Volans, Zimmermann felt Michael von Biel was the composer who showed him the way out of serialism.<sup>43</sup> Von Biel studied with Morton Feldman and John Cage before returning to Germany where he became a member of the Fluxus group. Von Biel was also highly influenced by the music of La Monte Young and was one of the names quickly linked to the term New Simplicity.<sup>44</sup> While Zimmermann himself acknowledges the influence of American music it is not the new wave of 1970s minimalists such as Reich and Glass he refers to but the earlier New York School: the diatonic works that Cage wrote in the late 1940s such as the Suite for Toy Piano or the String Quartet, and even more frequently, the work of Morton Feldman. In his 1984 lecture at Darmstadt Zimmermann discussed the issue of America influence:

I always read in concert programs of my music that I am a "Connoisseur of American Music" etc. I am not at all interested in a Mimicry of American Music, but learned from several American composers how to find one's way of expression in isolation. Something what [*sic*] is lost here [...] For me it is very difficult to find the alternative to expressionism in German music. Is it lost? Did it never happen? Maybe Brahms late piano pieces were the last glimpse...and that is very sad. Still I have the need to establish something, you might call it lyric, but again this is labeling music, where it should be free of labels. So that makes it very problematic for me to get through the Ferienkurse with all that "Beckmann Musik" around. That why it's very helpful to have Morton Feldman here, because he is showing us for a long time that there are other ways.<sup>45</sup>

Zimmermann was responsible for inviting Feldman and others to Cologne and held a portrait concert of Feldman's work in his Beginners Studio.<sup>46</sup> He also published a series

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<sup>42</sup> Zimmermann described this concept to Volans saying "I try to wander between tonalities and keep all the tonalities in balance to each other, so that no tonality is really... too much grounded. There's no preference [given] to any of the tonalities. But at the same time it avoids to be atonal." Kevin Volans, *Summer Gardeners: Conversations with Composers, Summer 1984* (Durban, 1985), p. 95.

<sup>43</sup> Christopher Fox, "Where the River Bends: The Cologne School in Retrospect", *The Musical Times* 148/1901 (Winter 2007), p. 40.

<sup>44</sup> Unattributed interview and sleeve notes for compact disc Cybele CD 960.306, 2006, p. 2–13.

<sup>45</sup> Walter Zimmermann, "Lecture given on 24 July 1984 at the Internationalen Ferienkurse für Neue Musik in Darmstadt" <<http://home.snafu.de/walterz/toopwz.html#shadows>>, (Accessed 15 October 2008).

<sup>46</sup> This was modelled on Johannes Fritsch's earlier Feedback Studio, with which Zimmermann, von Biel, Barlow and Volans among other were associated.

of interviews with Feldman in 1985. Barry has also acknowledged his interest in and deep admiration of Feldman's music and repeatedly uses the same types of comparison to abstract expressionist art when describing his music that Feldman used.<sup>47</sup> Volans has written about Feldman consistently and his interview collection *Summer Gardeners*, described as a sequel to *Desert Plants*, prints a lecture given by Feldman at Darmstadt as well as a revealing interview from which the following is extracted:

You know, when I went back to South Africa I found this wonderful pianist and piano teacher, Isabella Stengel, who has the most exquisite cantabile. And she made me suddenly aware to what extent "touch" has disappeared as a concept in piano playing in Europe. She voices chords in a way...that would make you faint, too. And in many ways I feel you [Feldman] represent that tradition of touch. In composition. And that's a concept that has all but disappeared in composition in Europe, too. We, (and I think I speak for many) have been trained as musical architects, or structuralists or conceptualists, so it's not surprising that when you talk about registration and instrumentation, that some people don't think you're talking about composition.<sup>48</sup>

Another aspect of Feldman's music is highlighted by Volans in a 1984 Darmstadt lecture:

Unlike Westerners, who automatically begin measuring the proportions of a piece of music, and who have a certain expectation of change (which naturally can be met or thwarted), many African listeners seem to regard music in the same light as natural events. Like birdsong it can be neither too long or too short, like the clouds, neither well nor badly proportioned. Variation and inventiveness are admired, but not in terms of temporal necessity [...] The only Western music in which I find no anxiety about changes is the late works of Morton Feldman. The music proceeds with such effortlessness and unpredictability that it unfolds as a powerful image of a natural event. In common with African music, nothing is forced, nothing is demonstrated, everything is affirmed.<sup>49</sup>

The ability to compose music which unfolds over large time spans without seeming to be structured in any overt way and the emphasis he placed in lectures on Stravinsky and the importance of colour were of immense importance to these composers as they tried to find a way to renew their musical language. In addition the way in which Feldman reduced the content in his later works, despite their great length, can be linked to the

<sup>47</sup> In a recent interview Barry cited Feldman as the most significant of recent composers (National Concert Hall Dublin, pre-concert talk, 6 February 2009).

<sup>48</sup> Kevin Volans, *Summer Gardeners: Conversations with Composers, Summer 1984* (Durban, 1985), p. 123.

<sup>49</sup> Kevin Volans, "Dancing in the Dark" <<http://www.kevinvolans.com/index.php?id=19>>, (Accessed 15 October 2008).

intense focus found in works by these composers throughout their career. In particular one could single out Zimmermann's *Von Nutzen des Lassens* (1985) or works by Barry such as *Sur les Pointes* (1981), *1998* (1999) or *L'Agitation des Observateurs, le Tremblement des Voyeurs* (2003). Volans has declared in a number of recent interviews that he would like to achieve a composition with no content, the equivalent of a blank canvas and in his sixth string quartet the material is reduced to two chords that are exchanged between a live and a taped quartet.<sup>50</sup>

Of the group of composers, Vivier is the only one whose music does not seem to have a direct connection to Feldman, though it strives for its own type of lyricism and contains other points of connection with the rest of the group. John Maguire, whom I have not really discussed, seems to me to fall outside the group for a number of reasons. His interest in electronic music sets him apart from the rest of the group and the process-type music he composes seems to be linked more strongly to the later minimalists such as Reich than the earlier New York School. However, taken together the Newer Music Manifesto and the aesthetic ideas raised by the New York School seem to underpin not just the music from this period of the late 1970s and early 1980s but also seem to inform much of the music written by these composers since then. Perhaps Barry highlights the most important connection between these artists during this period when he says:

It was a passionate time. We were lucky. We were very involved. Aesthetic decisions/concerts had a life or death quality.<sup>51</sup>

It is this life and death quality, a refusal to compromise and an intense focus that the best of their work still has today.

**Neue Musik, alte Musik, neuere Musik:  
Die Klangpalette von Köln am Rhein in den späten siebziger Jahren  
des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts**

Zusammenfassung

Der englische Komponist und Musikwissenschaftler Christopher Fox publizierte im Jahre 2007 einen Artikel, in dem er die „Kölner Schule“ als eine Gruppe von Komponisten beschrieb, die sich vor allem aus Persönlichkeiten zusammensetzte, die in den siebziger Jahren bei Karlheinz Stockhausen studierten. Diese Studie überprüft die Kriterien, die

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<sup>50</sup> Bob Gilmore, "Wild Air: The Music of Kevin Volans", *The Journal of Music in Ireland* (Nov-Dec 2006) p. 21–29.

<sup>51</sup> Christopher Fox, "Where the River Bends: The Cologne School in Retrospect", *The Musical Times* 148/1901 (Winter 2007), p. 28.

Fox zum Zweck der Bezeichnung einer Zusammengehörigkeit von Walter Zimmermann, Kevin Volans, Clarence Barlow und Gerald Barry und Zugehörigkeit zu einer Schule verwendet hat. Er stellte wichtige Zusammenhänge nicht nur unter diesen Komponisten, sondern auch im Bezug auf deren Zeitgenossen, wie zum Beispiel Claude Vivier und Chris Newman, fest. Der Autor analysierte das Manifest „der Gesellschaft für neuere Musik“, konzipiert von Volans, Newman und Barry, und machte auf die Tatsache aufmerksam, dass dieses Manifest verschiedene charakteristische Züge dieser Komponisten deutlich machte, unbeschadet davon, dass es ursprünglich als eine satirische Kritik der in Köln am Rhein vorherrschenden Atmosphäre verfasst wurde. Damit verbunden schlug der Autor eine umfassendere Definition von ästhetischen Positionen der oben genannten Komponisten vor. Schließlich betonte er die grundsätzliche Bedeutung der Musik von Morton Feldman und weiterer Komponisten der New York School für die Entwicklung von kompositorischen Möglichkeiten der genannten jungen Komponisten in Köln am Rhein.

**Nová hudba, stará hudba, novější hudba:  
Zvuková paleta Kolína nad Rýnem na konci sedmdesátých let 20. století**

**Shrnutí**

Anglický skladatel a muzikolog Christopher Fox publikoval v roce 2007 článek, ve kterém vymezil „Kolínskou školu“ skladatelů, která je tvořena především osobnostmi, jež v sedmdesátých letech studovaly u Karlheinz Stockhausena. Tato studie prověřuje kritéria, s jejichž pomocí Fox seskupil Waltera Zimmermanna, Kevina Volanse, Clarence Barlowa a Geralda Barryho do rámce společné školy. Sleduje důležité souvislosti nejen mezi těmito skladateli, ale také mezi jejich současníky, jako jsou Claude Vivier a Chris Newman. Autor rozebírá manifest „Společnosti pro novější hudbu“ napsaný Volansem, Newmanem a Barrym, aby ukázal, jak tento manifest, ačkoli byl původně napsán jako satira na převládající atmosféru v Kolíně nad Rýnem, osvětluje mnohé charakteristické kompoziční rysy těchto skladatelů. Na základě toho autor navrhuje komplexnější definici estetických postojů výše jmenovaných skladatelů. Posléze zdůrazňuje stěžejní význam hudby Mortona Feldmana a dalších skladatelů newyorské školy pro kompoziční orientaci těchto mladých skladatelů v Kolíně nad Rýnem.