

“GUANTI: MAN & MUSICOLOGIST” BY DENIS GLOVER AND G. E. [GEOFFREY] FAIRBURN: SPEAKING UP FOR NEW ZEALAND MUSIC: A DECONSTRUCTION.

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Maestro Guanti recently passed through Wellington practically (and characteristically) unknown except to those who have scaled the keyboard of Academe (...) en route to Scott base on yet another musicological expedition, festooned with tapes.

But, in more knowledgeable corners of the Free World of Music, Deniso Guanti's is a name to conjure with.²

In 1969 discovering the true way forward for Western Art Music was the *cause célèbre*. Academe had, by and large, adopted the voice from the 1920s of Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School and subsequent advances made by such composers as Stockhausen and Boulez. The avant-garde dismissed Romantic tonality as old hat and instead ventured into a new and as Guanti's travel plans suggest, inhospitable world of atonality. By 1969 this search was supported by electronic technology and tape recorders. Academe also supported the harmonic world of composers such as Vaughan Williams and Aaron Copland, who accepted the need for change but acknowledging the role of the past, expressed for example through folk music, in determining the future, advanced freely along traditional lines. A schism had developed between the two groups, epitomized by the difference

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² Denis and G.E. Fairburn Glover, "Guanti - Man and Musicologist," *New Zealand Listener* 1969. 8.1

in serious Darmstadt and the seriously funny Hoffnung Festivals³. Broadly speaking, while the avant-garde appealed to the educated music connoisseur, an elite coterie, those working in a tonal language appealed to the amateur music-lover, the average concert-goer.

In 1969, the art music scene in New Zealand, encapsulated by events in Wellington, was at a crossroads. Local musicologists and musicians, unsure of their own voice, were searching on the one hand for a unique New Zealand voice independent of passing foreign influences and on the other hand for direction from the right sort of foreign expertise. Composer Ashley Heenan, for example, making something of a living from local radio and theatre looked forward to a time when

European influences and modes of thought will be thoroughly assimilated and given utterance in a distinct national idiom⁴.

Jenny McLeod, whose success with atonality at Darmstadt⁵ was equaled by *Earth & Sky*'s successful "fus[ion] of Maori chant with medieval organum"⁶, written for amateur and professional musicians and premiered in Masterton, the home of your average New Zealander. This fluency in many languages would give her local authority with both the average concert-goer and the elite coterie⁷. However, she also questioned the relevance of seeking foreign approval for something which had sprung out of the New Zealand environment.

I don't feel the country is isolated any longer, even musically; the international vocabulary is available, through records, and radio and scores

³ Three Hoffnung Festivals were held at the Royal Festival Hall in London in 1956, 1958 and again in 1961 after Gerald Hoffnung's death in 1959. His cartoons of musicians, conductors and choirs, exhibited first at the Festival of Britain in 1951 continued to amuse many in England and New Zealand.

⁴ Bruce Mason, "Mainly Music," *New Zealand Listener* 60 (1533), no. 28 February (1969a). 15.

⁵ *For Seven* (1966) was performed by Stockhausen's ensemble at Cologne, Darmstadt and Berlin. While in Cologne, an environment she did not particularly enjoy, Jenny McLeod "discovered" Richard Taylor's translation of the Maori creation poetry, in the *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1960) which she had taken with her on her travels. <http://sounz.org.nz/contributor/composer/1071> [accessed 7 April 2009]

⁶ Peter Platt, "Music and the Future Role of the Qeii Arts Council," *Ascent* Vol 1, no. No3 (1969). 43. Platt's inaugural speech as Professor of Music at Otago was published in 1959. Peter Platt, 1924-, *Music History as a Living Study : An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Otago on 20 September 1957* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1959).

⁷ Jenny succeeded Page as Professor of Music at Victoria University in 1971. Jennifer Helen McLeod, "Jenny McLeod," <http://sounz.org.nz/contributor/composer1071>. (accessed 29 March 2009)

by airmail, but many talented New Zealanders cannot be certain of their gift until it is measured and tested abroad.⁸

Alexander MacLeod⁹, editor of the *New Zealand Listener* wrote “Singing a Silent Song” in which he noted the increasing use of silence as a “revolt against [music] revolutionaries”. Cage’s “Silent Sonata”¹⁰ and Dr Schnebel’s work for conductor without orchestra, *Nostalgie* (1962)¹¹ were, McLeod reported, inspired by the thought that “sound could no longer be inflicted on concert audiences”. As MacLeod rather peevishly said,

To those who think the only way to serve the public is to give them what they like, here is the perfect democratic solution: if they don’t like silent Schoenberg they can have silent something else.¹²

The all-or-nothing scenario had become threateningly real to a conservative audience.

Douglas Lilburn, New Zealand’s only “serious”¹³ composer, due to his ability to conjure things local with such works as *Prodigal Country*, *Aotearoa Overture* and “Sings Harry”, a setting of Glover’s poem, was about to take leave from his position with Page at Victoria University to study recent developments in electronic music at Toronto with Gustav Ciamaga¹⁴.

Except then for Jenny’s incompletely articulated reservations, New Zealand musicians seemed primed to assimilate European tastes and by association foreign avant-garde. An interview with Guanti was timely.

Two foremost experts in the field, (we [Glover and Fairburn] modestly claim), who despite a technical hitch in their apparatus, assure you on their academic oath that, having been graciously accorded the unheard of

⁸ Mason, "Mainly Music." 11.

⁹ No relation to Jenny McLeod.

¹⁰ Properly known as 4'33"

¹¹ Paul Attinello, "Schnebel, Dieter Wolfgang (B1930) " in *Oxford Music Online* (2007).

¹² Alexander MacLeod, "Singing a Silent Song," *New Zealand Listener* 60 (1532) (1969). 5.

¹³ Owen. Compiler Jensen, "Music in a Cold Climate," review of New Zealand Composers. a series of twelve radio talks compiled for the YC Programme NZBC by Owen Jensen, *New Zealand Listener* 60 (1517) (1968). 11.

¹⁴ Works which originated in this creative atmosphere included 5 *Toronto Pieces*. (1963 and 1969), *Summer Voices* (1969), *Three Studies for Gustav Ciamaga* (1969) Philip Norman, 1953-, *Douglas Lilburn : His Life and Work*. (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2006). 241.

privilege of an interview which they are now permitted to make public for the first time, this is, stave and clef, a fair and accurate account of it.¹⁵ Denis Glover, New Zealander writer and our conjurer, founded The Caxton Press, which published *Islands* and *Landfall*, the first journals to deal exclusively with serious New Zealand culture. He was known for being proudly subversive and impatient with, among other things, pretense and officialdom¹⁶; a drinking and a betting man, he embodied New Zealand's iconic national character. Geoffrey Fairburn was an artist and writer, and the brother of ARD Fairburn¹⁷, known for his skeptical views on New Zealand culture. In the 1960s Geoffrey was reviewing cultural events for the Waikato Times.

Maestro Guanti, we report, is an ebullient little man (...) As a foreigner, he gives off to our ears, a faint whiff of patchouli; the scraps of cannelloni adding grace notes to his tartan velveteen waistcoat merely emphasize his universality – he could, in fact be your average New Zealander, car salesman, cabinet minister, university lecturer, insurance agent.¹⁸ Working hand-in-glove with Glover, Guanti is a hybrid, a synchrony, or simply a cacophonous pastiche. He also acts as a catalyst and a warning. By slight of hand and with an allusion to the tramp in “Sings Harry”¹⁹, Guanti embodies the socially aspirant New Zealander, who by straining to assimilate foreign idioms, risks making a mockery of his own.

He commands two languages fluently, with a musicianly [sic] disdain for syntax or grammar.

Enough of the man. We came straight to the nub.

“What, Maestro [Guanti], do you think of the modern movement?”

He plucked a pizzicato ruminatively on an armpit for several moments. “In musics is no other”, he announced.

“But,” we urged -----

“No such thing.” He cut in swiftly. “Boulez and Stockhausen say it, and now I repeat it --- fall down the opera house, give it to Sydney, unband the orchestra, strangle all vocalists, do away the audience. Sono finito!”

“—and the decadent tradition of the west consigned to the oblivion it so deservedly brought upon itself?”

¹⁵ Glover, "Guanti - Man and Musicologist." 8.

¹⁶ Gordon Ogilvie, "Glover, Denis James Mathews 1912- 1980," in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2007). URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/> (accessed 6 March 2009)

¹⁷ Geoffrey Earl Fairburn, *Growing up with Rex: A Memoir 1903-1923* (Hamilton, New Zealand: G.E. Fairburn, 1991).

¹⁸ Glover, "Guanti - Man and Musicologist." 8.1 - 8.2

¹⁹ Lilburn's setting of “Sings Harry” was premiered in 1953.

“E giusto! Is right!” he cried
“And what,” we suggested slyly, “of the universities?”
He laughed merrily. “Che differente! How you say it, a different horse colour? Naturellement, we have the professor. How else the student know what they not listen to?”²⁰

In March 1969 Richard Hoffmann, Schoenberg’s nephew and amanuensis then collating Schoenberg’s archives, was passing through New Zealand on a family visit. He took the opportunity to reiterate material from earlier articles “A Note on Schoenberg” published in *Music Ho* (1948)²¹ and “The New Music” published in the *Listener* (1957)²² which coincided with his lecture tour of New Zealand University campuses at the invitation of Professor Page. On this occasion, Hoffmann gave a radio broadcast “Schoenberg: Man and Musicologist” and published an article “Schoenberg: the Man of ‘Moses’ ”²³. Hoffmann asked “What would have happened to New Zealand music if Arnold Schoenberg had come here to settle in 1945?” Having already assessed the country’s beauty from his stamp collection, Schoenberg had enquired after the local cost of employing at least one servant. Schoenberg did not become a New Zealander, but settled in Los Angeles where he continued, as Hoffmann said,

uncompromisingly forging ahead, regardless of failure or success, along the road he knew it was his destiny to take.²⁴

Hoffmann’s presentation of a quote from Schoenberg reveals that Schoenberg had assumed a role not unlike that of Moses.

It would be impossible to prevent the young and gifted from emulating his style – ‘for in ten years every talented composer will be writing in this way, regardless of whether he has learnt it directly from me or only from my works’.²⁵

Despite enjoying a small but devoted audience the avant-garde hankered after the conservative concert stage. Without significant success, they had grown to despise those responsible for ensuring the survival of such monuments to tradition. Schoenberg had believed that at some metaphorical

²⁰ Glover, "Guanti - Man and Musicologist." 8.

²¹ Richard Hoffmann, "A Note on Schoenberg," *Music Ho* 7, no. 4 (1948). 5.

²² ———, "The New Music," *New Zealand Listener* 37 (940) (1957). 30.

²³ "Schoenberg: The Man of 'Moses'," *New Zealand Listener* 60 (1534) (1969).

11.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

time “when parallel lines meet”²⁶, he would gain recognition from these echelons. The real task of educating the new middle classes to appreciate Schoenberg’s true music had fallen, appropriately enough, to the Universities. Hoffmann and Frederick Page were his strongest advocates or disciples and as Glover would have it, his servants in New Zealand.

Since the mid 1930s and before he met Hoffmann, Frederick Page distinguished himself through his penchant for things risqué. As an undergraduate at Canterbury, he had instigated the performance of Orff’s *Carmina Burana*, performed and analyzed Berg’s Piano Sonata Op1²⁷, got offside with his lecturer Dr Bradshaw, who taught harmony according to the accepted authorities of the day such as Kitson²⁸ and the Bach Chorales, and got onside with Otto Frankel, a wartime refugee and Schoenberg’s associate. Page also kept up with events at Darmstadt and was accustomed to producing lists of avant-garde composers²⁹ with which to challenge critics of Schoenberg’s Modernity such as the arch-conservative L. D. Austin who was only too ready to rise to the bait³⁰. In the late 1940s, Professor Galway from Otago, being less vociferous than Austin, had, Page observed, been “visibly shaken”, by Page’s assertion that if it were not for Schoenberg, Vaughan Williams’ 6th Symphony would not have been written³¹. In his professional capacity at Victoria, Page would assess New Zealand student composers according to their assimilation of the avant-garde sound.³² In 1969 his list of twentieth-century classics included Schoenberg, Debussy, Berg, Webern, Ives, Bartók and Varèse. His list of “our contemporaries”

²⁶ The notion is entertained in Schoenberg’s *Style and Idea* (Williams & Norgate, 1951, 164-5) and forms the unresolved dramatic tension in *Moses und Aron*.

²⁷ Frederick Page, "Some Twentieth-Century Pianoforte Music: No 2 , Sonata for Piano Opus 1. Alban Berg," *Music Ho* 2 no. 4 (1942). 3.

²⁸ C. H. (Charles Herbert) Kitson, 1874-1944., *The Elements of Musical Composition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936). ———, *Studies in Fugue* (London: Clarendon Press, 1928).

²⁹ The first of these appeared in print in the monthly magazine *Music in New Zealand* as a reply to conservative music writer L.D. Austin. Frederick Page, "Correspondence," *Music in New Zealand* 3 (9) (1933).

³⁰ L.D. Austin, "Is Modern Music Decadent," *Music in New Zealand* 3 no. 7 (1933), ———, "This Modern Stuff and Other Things," *Music Ho* 4.4, no. 4 (1946)., ———, "The Musical Climate: Letters from Listeners," *New Zealand Listener* 1957. 11.

³¹ Frederick Page, Thomson, John Mansfield and Janet Paul, *Frederick Page : A Musician's Journal, 1905-1983.*, ed. Edited and arranged by J.M. Thomson & Janet Paul. (Dunedin, N.Z.: J. McIndoe, 1986).101. Vaughan Williams’ 6th Symphony was composed in 1947, first recorded in 1949 and revised in 1950.

³² Frederick Page, "Some New Zealand Composers," *Landfall* 9, no. 1 (1955). 85.

included Stravinsky, Messiaen and Lutoslawski³³. He did not include those New Zealanders such as Tremain³⁴ and McLeod who were winning recognition overseas for their serial voice.

It was time for Glover and Fairburn to look the gift horse in the mouth.

“tell us about your own compositions”.

“Bene! Bene! Excellent!” he became animated. “First my early works, beginning this year” – and here he excitedly whipped out a slightly soiled envelope (since bequeathed by me to the as yet unplanned school of music in the University of Patea³⁵) and scribbled the opening bars below.

[Figure 1]

“Truly a cataclysmic utterance” we enthused, “More! More!”

The great man replied simply, “Is no more! Is all”

We freely admit we were visibly shaken by such musicological integrity.

Glover’s hand trembled as he tucked this immortal seed of an unknown work into the flyover of his rental pinstripes.

“More, More!” we begged. (...)

[Figure 2]

It was with awe that we observed in one rapid glance the staggering architectonics adumbrating in the few simple notes he feverishly dashed on the back of a well-used vice-regal invitation which Glover found in his side pocket. (...) But what of your latest work, Maestro, we urged, “What of that?”

“This only,” he said quietly. “The rest, the most – e silenzio”.

[Figure 3]

Tell us about us about other modern composers’, we begged (...)

‘is none’

Fairburn irrupted crudely, ‘you are not saying then that Stravinsky, Webern, Varèse, Lutoslawski, Penderecki, Dallapiccola, Piccolomini, – all these modern titans – are *Vieux Chapeaux*?’

‘As I hear it’.

(...)

³³ Specific works included Debussy *La Mer*, *Images*, Schoenberg’s *5 Orchestral Pieces*, Ives’ *Fourth of July*, *Central Park in the Dark*, Stravinsky, *Persephone*, *Symphony in C*, *Oedipus Rex*, *Threni*, Dallapiccola’s *Canti di Prigioni*, Webern’s *Second Cantata*, Boulez’s *Soleil des eaux*, Nono’s *Il Canto Sospeso*, Penderecki’s *St Luke Passion*. ———, “Alert at the Concert,” *New Zealand Listener* 60 (1541) (1969). 10.

³⁴ J M Thomson, “Tremain, Ronald 1923-1998,” in *Grove online*, ed. L Macy (2007). (accessed 29 March 2009)

³⁵ Patea – A rural township of New Zealand not unlike Masterton: second largest town in South Taranaki, though an important settlement during New Zealand’s Land Wars, in 1969 it was known primarily for its freezing works.

Fairburn recollected in time the advice of a foremost dilettante of the arts, Barouche Maison; when in doubt, talk fast and don't answer questions.

"But there must be some other moderns", Fairburn plunged on, tossing out names like milk biscuits. "What of the Russian, Beria, of Ligeti, what of Harpic from Titograd and Svengalic from Domodossola?" It was a veritable roll-call of the avant-garde. "What of Ives, Piston, Cage, Vaso da Notte, Broccolo, Grubelfinger?"

"I know them all (...) e nulla, is not nothing."³⁶

Fairburn adopts Page's propensity for lists, but as observed by Glover, takes his lead from Bruce Mason. Mason (aka Barouche Maison³⁷) was the music columnist for the *Listener* who would become best known for his *End of the Golden Weather* which toured the country and became the iconic New Zealand play. In May 1969, Bruce Mason³⁸ took Hoffmann's question for, as Glover saw it, a bit of a ride on the House of Parliament. Had Schoenberg taken New Zealand residency and benefitted from the healthy climate, he would, Mason proposed have lived into his 91st year (1965) and bestowed the nation with cultural pride based on foreign standards and something of an official voice. Rt Hon Peter Frazer, New Zealand's Prime Minister, who, Mason thought, was "most hospitable to the arts" would have been overheard to say that there was "nothing like a spot of Sprechstimme after a grueling day in the House".

[Frazer] might well have decided to give Schoenberg everything he needed (...) round a man of hugely creative powers (...) a whole native school of composers, the envy of the world, might well have grouped.³⁹

Mason's freewheeling and Fairburn's fast-talk dismantle Page's authority. Those from Academe might know that Piccolomini lived during the sixteenth century⁴⁰; Lavrentii Beria⁴¹ is remembered as one of the cruelest leaders in the Bolshevik regime; the name bears an uncanny resemblance to Berio, one of the tight-circle of Darmstadt-ian electronic composers⁴².

"Harpic" might refer to the popular movie comedian and harpist and pianist, Harpo Marx of the Marx Brothers, or a local brand of cleaning agent or the name given to a Russian cocktail drink. The fictional character Svengali was

³⁶ Glover, "Guanti - Man and Musicologist."

³⁷ Barouche Maison; translates as "house carriage".

³⁸ Bruce Mason, "Mainly Music," *New Zealand Listener* 61 (1542) (1969b). 15.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ William F Prizer, "Piccolomini, Niccolò," in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (2000). (accessed 29 March)

⁴¹ "Lavrentiy Beria," in *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia* (2009). (accessed 29 March)

⁴² The Darmstadt tight circle included Stockhausen, Ligeti, Maderna and Boulez.

an hypnotist and here a potentially bad-mouthed teacher who dominated his students; Domodossola, a town in Italy, could also refer to a doss house, a shelter to the homeless; Vaso de Notte - I'll leave to your imagination....

Guanti continues

“Basta! Che Buffo!”, he exclaimed, But I forget! What of Professore Feodoriko Fattorino and his, how you say it cereal musics? And not to forget, Professore Dougal Dilhorn?”

“Great fellows, great fellows,” we agreed heartily, “but too busy to compose. In any case they are unfortunately both absent from the country – either taking annual sabbatical leave or lecturing on you in your own country”.

Lilburn, seen here by Glover, as something of an absent-minded country boy, was indeed preparing to leave New Zealand, and while not as productive as he had been in Canterbury or as he would be after his return from Toronto, he had not abandoned the notion of a uniquely New Zealand voice. In March of 1969 Lilburn was giving an open lecture⁴³ at Otago University. Having a foot in both camps, Lilburn acknowledged that he had, “no grand conclusions to offer” to the “complexities of the contemporary international scene”⁴⁴. On the one hand, he believed,

the innumerable creative manifestations of our total way of life are (...) affirmations of our tradition.⁴⁵

On the other hand, he believed,

In preferring to search the unpleasant or unpalatable truths of his own experience, I think [the NZ composer] has the best chance of discovering the sources of his creativity, whatever larger thing may give validity to his choice of language.⁴⁶

Page, arguing from his office at Victoria in the heart of Wellington, was absent in a more figurative sense. Glover sees him pedagogically speaking as a little messenger boy in service to false prophets and mindless of the New Zealand product in a very real and purposeful sense. The result being that Glover and Fairburn our “the two foremost experts in the field” are unaware of local leading figures. As Guanti said,

⁴³ Douglas Lilburn, 1915- 2001, *A Search for a Language: Open Lecture 12 March 1969 at University of Otago* (Wellington, N.Z.: Alexander Turnbull Library Endowment Trust : New Zealand Composers Foundation, 1985).

⁴⁴ Ibid.22.

⁴⁵ Ibid.22.

⁴⁶ Ibid.22.

You never know, amico mio, as I do that to hear Paggio and Alexinski, play their silent sonata is to see it all?”

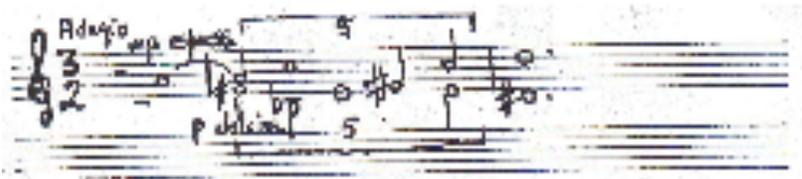
Shamed, a little confused, we confessed our ignorance. Who were these legendary figures? He shrugged contemptuously, “Forse, sono pedagogi. No matter are not important” He muttered and would say no more.

Alex Lindsay’s early career in the New Zealand Federation of Chamber Music, the New Zealand branch of the ISCM⁴⁷, his own String Orchestra and leadership of the National Orchestra was rewarded in 1959 with an MBE. Ten years later, the impact he made on the New Zealand music scene was, as Glover and Fairburn would have it, subsumed by Page’s dedication to Falstaff-ian⁴⁸ masters.

While the New Zealand voice expressed by Heenan, Jenny McLeod and Lilburn represented here by Fairburn and Glover, rubbed shoulders with that of Page, Hoffmann and Schoenberg represented here by Guanti, the difference between those who fawn and those who pontificate remains slight. However, the very existence of the skit and the fact that it was published after some 6 months of debate over the value of contemporary music suggests that the average concert-goer was, like Alexander MacLeod, prepared to stand up for what they knew and liked and no longer prepared to be patronized. While this skit might have its origins in the British comedy show, “Beyond the Fringe”⁴⁹ or in the Hoffnung Festivals, it is a uniquely New Zealand revolt against the revolutionaries. The cultural standoff is defused through having its absurdity highlighted.

The many voices in the skit make fun and nonsense out of an impasse in the development of a single New Zealand voice and indeed point to the implausibility of that notion.

Illustrations



⁴⁷ International Society for Contemporary Music

⁴⁸ Paggio is Falstaff’s page in Verdi’s opera *Falstaff*

⁴⁹ The comedians included Jonathan Miller, Dudley Moore, Peter Cook and Alan Bennett. Recordings of “Beyond the Fringe” were available in New Zealand in 1969.

Figure 1. Untitled

Source: Glover, "Guanti - Man and Musicologist." 8.3.



Figure 2: Untitled

Source: Glover, "Guanti - Man and Musicologist." 8.3.

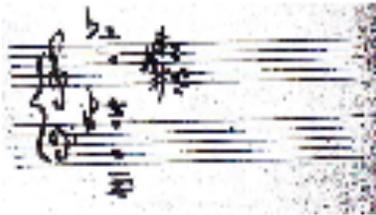


Figure 3: Untitled

Source: Glover, "Guanti - Man and Musicologist." 8.3.

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