
munities with the Irish Republic and Britain. Slowly but surely a less antagonistic relationship between the two islands—including membership of both in the European Union and the loosening of church power—is inching Ireland into the 21st century. An honest and inclusive re-examination of shared history such as Foster's can only accelerate the process.

PERSPECTIVES ON MUSICAL AESTHETICS. Ed. by John Rahn. Norton. 386 pp. \$35

What is the function of music? Should it act, as French intellectual Jacques Attali has suggested, as a mirror to the modern world and a prophecy of its future? Or should it respond to some loftier—if undefinable—aesthetic? Indeed, it may be fruitless to ascribe meaning to a medium so inherently subjective; what strikes one listener as pleasurable may send another shrieking from the room. Nonetheless, most of the essays in this volume, culled from the pages of the journal *Perspectives of New Music* and written by composers as well as theorists, grapple bravely with just such questions.

One difficulty with discussing modern musical composition is pinning down exactly what is being discussed. It was once a relatively simple matter to categorize music as baroque or classical or romantic, but such reliable signposts are much harder to come by in today's all-inclusive repertoire. As philosopher Michel Foucault points out in a dialogue with composer Pierre Boulez, "The evolution of these musics after Stravinsky or Debussy presents remarkable correlations with the evolution of painting." And just as Cézanne and Picasso pointed the way toward abstract expressionism, so too did Arnold Schönberg open the door for composers such as Philip Glass and John Cage (who in his famous 4' 33" [1952] added no sounds to the space in which the piece was performed—silence as music). Once the door was ajar, it became impossible to bar entry to any manner of composition, a phenomenon that composer J. K. Randall comments on humorously in his freeform essay, "Are You Serious?" Randall relates his impressions of a weekend festival of "spiritual expression through music and dance,"

a celebration of New Age music and its purported healing effects on the soul. Ultimately, the music leaves Randall cold: "I'm agog at the coupling of 1. find your true self & unblock your creativity & get in touch with the cosmos with 2. do exactly what I'm doing and saying as I transmit to you by rote what I got by rote from someone who got it from God by rote."

Other essays explore the narcissism of composition and performance, and of the self-conscious pressure of not repeating what has gone before. The hand-wringing exhibited by composers such as Milton Babbitt ("I try to write the music which I would most like to hear, and then am accused of self-indulgence, eliciting the ready admission that there are few whom I would rather indulge") makes one wonder how they ever manage to put notes on paper. Sometimes they do not. Babbitt has been a proponent of taped improvisation, essentially classical "jam sessions" that attempt to fill a space with sound in the hope that something worthwhile will emerge.

What emerges from these essays is the idea that the function of music is multiple and contradictory. Indeed, it's easy to feel a certain sympathy for the composer's task: to create music that brings self-satisfaction, breaks new ground, and remains accessible enough to gain entry into the symphonic repertoire (with enough attendant recording sales and airplay to keep one off the breadlines), while at the same time saying something significant about the human condition. Clearly, the impulses that drive composers are as varied as listeners' responses to their music, but it may be best not to overanalyze them. Comments such as these from David Dunn, noted for his experimentation with animal sounds, may make one long for the days when composers merely wrote the music, and left its interpretation to others: "There may be clues for our continued survival on this planet which only music can provide. . . . I'm much more interested in that than in being a composer."

THE OXFORD BOOK OF EXPLORATION. Ed. by Robin Hansbury-Tenison. Oxford Univ. 530 pp. \$30

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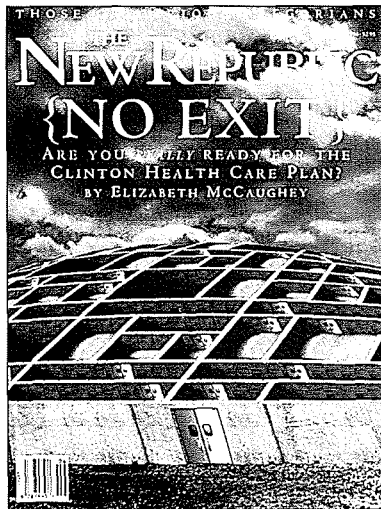
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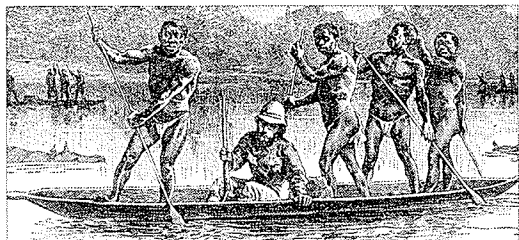
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ogy is proof that you cannot destroy the allure of good travel writing, not even by the kind of overexposure the genre has received in recent years. Hansbury-Tenison's collection sticks to the subgenre of travel writing with the best dramatic possibilities: first-person period accounts of explorers, all of whom struggled to visit far-



flung and unreported places or underwent astonishing ordeals, and often both. Hansbury-Tenison, himself a gold-medalist explorer with the Royal Geographic Society, suggests in his introduction that "explorers are quite different from travelers," since their curiosity impels them not toward other cultures per se but toward extremes of novelty, danger, and privation. He also acknowledges that his explorers' sense of accomplishment in reaching exotic places was heightened, far too often, by complete obliviousness to the people who actually inhabited them: "Time and again the European explorer, as he 'discovers' some new land, makes a passing reference to his native guide."

None of this interferes, fortunately, with the selector's editorial gusto; nor with the reader's ability to appreciate these hundreds of accounts for their better qualities. They're mostly of easy browsing length and are arranged by region and chronology, so that you can trudge through Asia repeatedly from Marco Polo's day to Sir Edmund Hillary's (and discover few changes apart from mode of locomotion). There are a fair number of self-caricaturing British imperialist types, from the British Jesuit William Gifford Palgrave in 1862 fulminating against camels—"from first to last an undomesticated and savage animal, rendered serviceable by stupidity alone"—to Lady Florence von Sass Baker, wife of an explorer, writing home to her stepdaughter from Africa in 1871 for more handkerchiefs: "The whole country is in a state of the wildest anarchy. . . . We shall have to support some

tribes and subdue others before any hope [of] order can be entertained."

But the moxie and ardor of these explorers comes through, too, along with an old virtue that doesn't always get its due these days, sheer physical bravery. This is especially true of the classic South Pole accounts that Hansbury-Tenison wisely places at the end. Though endlessly anthologized, this sequence remains thrilling: Roald Amundsen reaching the Pole in 1912, Robert Falcon Scott devastated to arrive a month later and learn he's been beaten, the agonies of Scott and his men on the attempted return march ("no idea there could be temperatures like this"), their gruesome deaths, and the horror of the next team when its members find Scott's diary. Scott was especially concerned that posterity know of the grit with which one companion handled his imminent death from frostbite and gangrene: Lifting the flap of the tent in a raging blizzard, he remarked, "I am going outside the tent and may be some time."

Science & Technology

HIGHER SUPERSTITION: *The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science.* By Paul Gross and Norman Levitt. Johns Hopkins. 328 pp. \$25.95

It's hard to imagine deconstructionists, Afrocentrists, and radical feminists and environmentalists taking any cues from Christian fundamentalists. Yet the latest target in the academic Left's war against a white, male, Western worldview is science. So say Gross, a former director of the Woods Hole Marine Biological Laboratory, and Levitt, a professor of mathematics at Rutgers University. And while creationists merely tried to replace evolutionary biology with Genesis, a growing element within the academic Left is seeking to disavow science completely, labeling it another tool of cultural oppression.

For most of this century, Gross and Levitt argue, scientists were natural allies of progressive thinkers, and often at the forefront of movements for racial and sexual equality or global ecological responsibility. But since postmodernism began to infect the academy in the 1960s, the search for objective truth has become the worst