

dishonoured until you spoke'), although he now feels compelled to kill the lovers to amend his honour.

The remainder of the opera was devoted to the inevitable aftermath of this revelation in act I. Indeed as director Michael McCarthy's programme note rightly stated, the opera focused on the internal world of unexpressed thoughts and emotions, rather than the melodramatic brutality and rage of the outward events. The music certainly communicated to the largish audience in attendance, and it is tempting to speculate that the language employed therefore seemed highly appropriate to this exploration of the unseen inner drama. Perhaps it was apprehended as such by patrons coming to Sciarrino's work for the first time? However, fluttering or breath sounds (and extremely quiet music) are found in much of Sciarrino's other music (cf. for example *Caprices* for solo violin, or his numerous works for solo flute/recorder). Therefore rather than the 'strange fragility' of the music being an ideal depiction of the characters' mental states (which lay behind the facade of the everyday respectability), perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Sciarrino has chosen his subject wisely.

The opera's scenes were divided either by darkness followed by sudden flashes, or by various short musical interludes: pseudo-medieval consort music in varying levels of distortion, searing dissonance, or fragile undulating/fluttering music, depending on the circumstance. Simon Banham's dark, sparse sets were imaginatively lit by Ace McCarron, and the predominantly black costumes were occasionally contrasted by an inevitable, but telling, use of red.

Tim Mottershead

Harry Partch *Delusion of the Fury* musikFabrik; Ruhrtriennale 2013

Return to paradise lost

Let us imagine we are approaching the shore of an unknown island, taking part in an expedition. With great surprise, we recognise that the island is inhabited. Strange-looking but seemingly friendly people step out of the woods; they wave to us and invite us to take part in a big celebration. A ritual is being performed in our honour with exotic music played on exotic instruments. The unfamiliar sounds accompany a narrative that we cannot fully grasp. Two men are fighting; the winner spares the life of

the loser. Then, in Act Two, a woman enters the scene: she seems to have lost a goat from her herd, she argues with a guy who is deaf and cannot help her; all of a sudden there is a big party going on and everyone is cheering happily. We are left stunned by the mysterious performance, by its energy and physicality, by the impact of its sounds and rhythms.

The island lies in the middle of the Ruhrgebiet, Germany's industrial heartland. Composer and festival manager Heiner Goebbels opens the Ruhrtriennale 2013 with a bombshell: in the Jahrhunderthalle in Bochum – a gigantic gas-fired powerhouse built in 1902 and now turned into a concert hall – Goebbels launched the European premiere of what might be called the opus magnum of US composer Harry Partch. His 1966 music drama *Delusion of the Fury* was, in many ways, the summation and acme of a life that willingly abandoned the musical tradition of the western world. For Partch, western music was stuck in a cul-de-sac. With its blind trust in the powers of the rational mind, the Occident had lost its contact with nature and forgotten how to experience sound in an unspoiled physical manner. Partch analysed the problem and solved it in the most radical way – by re-inventing music from scratch. He developed a 43-note tuning system based on the natural overtone series, designed and built his own orchestra with more than fifty different instruments, and composed a music for it that was supposed to remind the audience of paradise lost.

Partch has been somewhat of an insider's tip. Is this set to change? In order to perform his pieces, one needed his original instruments – instruments such as the 'cone gongs' (cut-off end pieces of aeroplane fuel tanks), the 'adapted viola' (with its fingerboard taken from a cello), the 'bloboy' (a miniature organ with a bellow that blows air into three pipes and four car horns), or a series of small percussion instruments such as the 'bamboo claves'. Up until now, there was only one complete set in existence, carefully tucked away in a university in New Jersey, which undoubtedly limited the possibilities for live performance, especially in Europe.

Commissioned by Ensemble musikFabrik, percussionist and instrument builder Thomas Meixner spent two years constructing a second set, the *conditio sine qua non* for the astonishing Bochum production. The musicians devoted months to getting to grips with – and then mastering – the unfamiliar instruments, countless hours to deciphering a hard-to-read manuscript, and more than fifty rehearsals by way of

preparation. Stage director Heiner Goebbels, a Partch fan for decades, shows great respect for his colleague's theatrical vision that the process of making music and the music that emerges is one thing, that what is seen cannot – should not – be discrete. Arranged on stage, the ensemble somehow becomes both stage and stage decoration in one. The musicians are as much actors, narrators and singers as instrumentalists, moving between their instruments as in a natural landscape; their costumes, made from rags by designer Florence von Gerkan, creatively refer to the times that Partch spent as a transient on the streets of the US during the Great Depression; a stream runs through the orchestra,

and black plastic balloons form mountain ranges above which a large, lone, white balloon finally rises in the background like a moon.

Delusion of the Fury is between all categories: between Pop and Avant-garde, between the archaic and the exotic, between genius and, well, ingenious amateurism. The European avant-garde needn't change course in light of the revelations of this evening; neither must the history of music be rewritten. Nevertheless, the audience was raving after 75 minutes, celebrating Harry Partch, the dedicated Bochum production team and the courageous Ensemble musikFabrik.

Raoul Mörchen

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CORRIGENDUM

Marc Blitzstein: His Life, His Work, His World by Howard Pollock. Oxford University Press, £39.95 – CORRIGENDUM

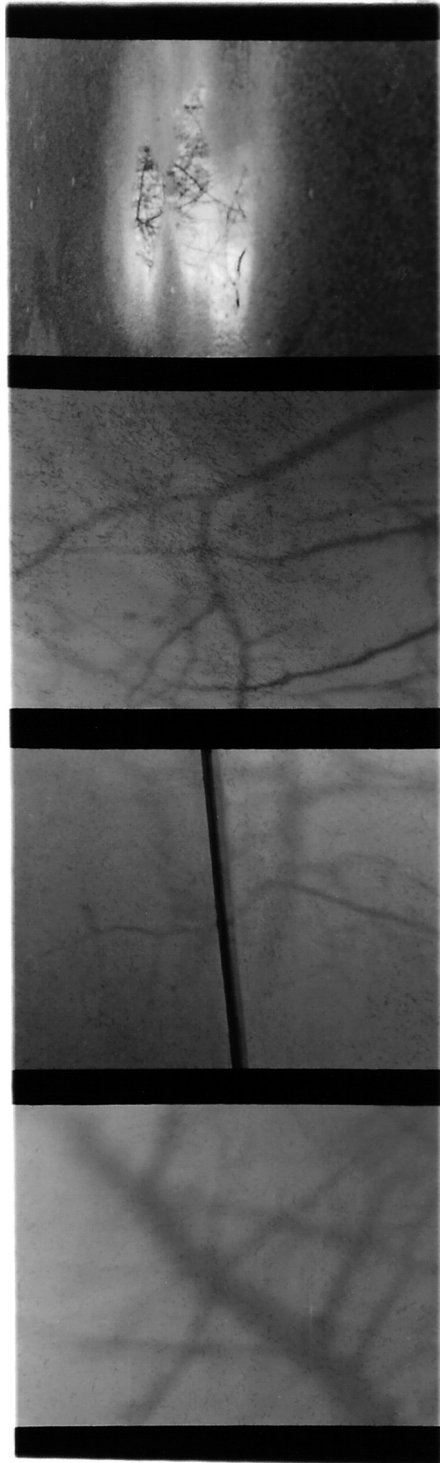
Rodney Lister

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We apologise for the misspelling of Howard Pollack's name in Rodney Lister's review of his book *Marc Blitzstein: His Life, His Work, His World* in TEMPO 266.

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