**Darmstadt International Summer Courses for New Music**

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Summer courses (in German *Darmstadt Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik*) established in the wake of the Second World War (beginning in 1946) as part of the broadly defined German reconstruction project, in the small Hessian city of Darmstadt (Germany), a city that had suffered extensive damage from allied aerial bombing campaigns during the War. Under the leadership of its first director, Wolfgang Steinecke, the Darmstadt courses would go on, after a few years that marked a point of transition between pre-war and post-war music that featured music by, for example, Hindemith, Stravinsky, Krenek, Bartók or Milhaud, to become the hotbed of the most ‘advanced’ currents of the postwar avant-garde music scene. Other notable directors of Darmstadt after Steinecke’s death in 1961 included Ernst Thomas (1961-1981), Friedrich Hommel (1981-1994) and Solf Schaefer (1995-2009), and although each had his own aesthetic preferences reflected in the choice of instructors, performers and works performed, certain compositional constants prevailed, first and foremost, a taste for the unconventional. The courses, which took place every year, and then, beginning in 1970, every other year, include composition seminars, instrumental performance workshops on recent works, lectures, and concert series that were sometimes broadcast on the radio. Since 1952, the Kranichstein Music Prize named after the Schloss Kranichstein where the courses were originally held is awarded to outstanding performers and, since 1972, composers.

In its most vibrant years in the 1950s and early 1960s, the Darmstadt courses invited lecturers and performed works by most of the major figures of the post-war avant-garde born around 1925, including Luigi Nono, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Henri Pousseur, and functioned as an important dissemination tool of the latest techniques, aesthetic orientations and technical approaches of post-war modernist composition. Several events that took place at Darmstadt have become more than the stuff of anecdotal lore, forming critical parts of twentieth-century music history, including: Arnold Schoenberg’s invitation, and last-minute cancellation for health reasons, in 1951, when *Der Tanz um das goldene Kalb* (The Dance of the Golden Calf) from his opera *Moses und Aron* received its world premiere at the Courses just days before the composer’s death; or Karlheinz Stockhausen, attending the 1951 courses, who, hearing a recording (brought by French music critic Antoine Goléa) of Olivier Messiaen’s *Mode de valeurs et d’intensités* from the latter’s *Quatre Études de rythme* (1948), likened the piece to ‘star music’ and was likely inspired by the pointillistic textures of that work to compose his own *Kreuzspiel* (Maconie, 2005, p. 42).

The Darmstadt Courses are famous for championing serial music, including serialism of the integral or multiparametric variety, in which serial proportions are applied to musical parameters other than pitch, including durations, dynamics and timbres, although the predominance of the serialist aesthetic was certainly exaggerated by later accounts by composers anxious to assert their independence with respect to this style: in fact, Darmstadt concerts featured a mixture of serial works and those by twentieth-century master of very diverse stripes (Iddon, 2013, p. 103). Nevertheless, many significant lectures in the 1950s were devoted to a public working-out of serial compositional techniques, as well as, to a lesser extent, another related preoccupation, a fruitful reckoning with the music of Anton Webern, who had died in 1945 but whose works were just becoming known in the 1950s. Indeed, several important analytical lectures were given at Darmstadt about a single work by Webern, his Variations for piano, op. 27 (Borio and Danuser 1997, I: pp. 229-249).

Other notable moments in the history of the Darmstadt courses include John Cage’s visit to Darmstadt in 1958, considered a paradigm-changing event, a *succès de scandale* owing in no small part to the astonishing performances delivered by pianist David Tudor, that inspired some prominent members of the European avant-garde to incorporate Cageian-style indeterminacy into their own compositions. Pierre Boulez’s 1960 lectures on technique and aesthetics would go on to exert considerable influence on musicians of the day when he used some of this material in his first published monograph (Boulez 1963). Indeed, many of the lectures delivered by composers, musicologists and performers at Darmstadt were included in the official Darmstadt journal, the *Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik*, which was published from 1958; critics such as Heinz-Klaus Metzger played an important role in disseminating new musical ideas and propagating new trends in lectures journal articles (in such journals as the influential *Die Reihe*) or in his book series *Musik-Konzepte*.

Although some observers (including some of the attending composers themselves) spoke of a ‘Darmstadt School’ that would include such notable early attendees as Boulez, Stockhausen, Pousseur, Bruno Maderna and Luigi Nono, others vehemently opposed the assumption that any stylistic commonalities that could purport to unite the work of the diverse lot of composers who attended the courses over the years. Even in the unlikely case that it were possible to speak of a Darmstadt School, this School evolved extremely rapidly as the Courses would showcase year after year a variety of new compositional trends, including the open or mobile works of Stockhausen (Klavierstück XI) or Boulez (The Third Piano Sonata) in the late 1950s, the graphic scores of Sylvano Bussotti or Roman Haubenstock-Ramati in the early 1960s, the proto-spectral chanting and stylized rituals of Stockhausen’s *Stimmung*, performed at Darmstadt in 1972, the works of French composers like Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail associated with the Spectral School in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as well as the music of composers from Great Britain identified with the New Complexity such as Brian Ferneyhough, Richard Barrett and James Dillon throughout the 1980s.

For a time, the aura of Darmstadt took on near mythic proportions (Donin 2005), a myth that British composer Christopher Fox (who taught at the courses in the 1990s) ironically characterized in the form of a fairy tale:

Once upon a time a group of composers gathered in Darmstadt, listened to the late works of Webern and invented a compositional technique called ‘total serialism.’ With this technique they wrote music without tonality, melody, rhythm or harmony. This music was more modern than any other and so these composers were crowned Princes of Modernism and their palace was called Darmstadt. Other composers came to Darmstadt to become modern and any composer who refused to use the Darmstadt techniques was driven out of the palace. (Fox, 2007, p. 115).

Although it no longer occupies the central place in the cultural landscape that it once enjoyed, Darmstadt is still considered an important rite of passage for young composers and performers, and continues to showcase new directions in music. The 2014 edition, for example, featured the conceptual (and controversial) music of composer Johannes Kreidler (born in 1980). The combination of ironic scepticism, exaggeration about the supposed stylistic uniformity and underlying indebtedness to the Darmstadt moment in contemporary music is captured by a passage from a 1970 lecture delivered by composer György Ligeti:

I now return to the situation in the middle of the 1950s, 1957-1958, an essential moment at Darmstadt. We heard the usual serial pieces. Usually for flute. With wide intervals; it was a kind of jargon. The scores needed to look very complicated, it was a question of prestige [...]. Whoever wanted to fit in had to produce complicated pieces, and everything had to have an explanation. With furrowed brows we debated difficult questions, and we fully felt that we were part of a group. That feeling produced incredible momentum. Everyone knew that what was happening there was essential, at Cologne and at Darmstadt (Ligeti cited in Borio-Danuser 1997, vol. II, p. 370; our translation).

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