

# REVIEWS

## REVIEWS WANTED

Canzona would like to publish more reviews, particularly of first performances of new works. The only problem is, there just isn't the time or resources to organise reviewers. Nor even sometimes is there any forewarning of impending premieres. Please take the following as an open invitation: if you know of a forthcoming performance of a new piece (or of a forthcoming concert of national interest) and you intend attending, feel free to review it. No matter if the same concert is covered by two reviewers - this makes for all the more interesting reading. Contact one of your regional committee members if you are in any doubt about a particular event.

## **gung ho 1,2,3D**

*Gung Ho 1,2,3D* (three of seven modules only). Music conceived and performed by From Scratch. One 12" EP (45 rpm) disc, HITM 004 (RCA)  
Reviewed by Peter Crowe.

This is the second disc issued to the public by From Scratch. There are ten minutes of music per side, and at 45 rpm there is very great fidelity. The choice of 12" format has allowed graphic packaging in a size sufficient for impact of photos, cover and inserted sheet explaining some of the visual aspects of the work - for *Gung Ho* is to be seen as much as heard, ideally. The recording is dedicated to Rewi Alley. The cover uses the Chinese ideogram for 'work together' (*gung ho*) inside the symbol of a triangle within a circle, and this pattern is used for the physical performance layout. The musicians are Geoff Chapple (who has published a biography of Alley), Philip Dadson (founder of the group and principal composer), Wayne Laird and Don McGlashan. The modules recorded here are the third (called 5,6,7), the central fourth (6,7,8) and the sixth (8,9,10). The instruments used are tuned PVC pipes, chimes, drums and drones. The now-famous PVC pipes, on two-tier racks of seven pipes each, spectacular and impressive like gigantic pan-pipes, derive from Solomon Islands boogie-bass bamboos.

As in most Austronesian circle dances, the players move from station to station during the work in anti-clockwise direction. Widdershins? Not so. Although Shorter Oxford defines this as "in a direction contrary to the apparent course of the sun (considered as unlucky or causing disaster)" it must be remembered this is the southern hemisphere. In the South Pacific, dancers sometimes explain their anti-clockwise preference (rule?) as a form of protection by the strong RHS moving on the perimeter over the weak LHS in the centre. The associations right to left are linked also with male/female, fast/slow, pure/polluted and so on. But it would be unwise to assume the visual symbolism of From Scratch performance works is, at this point of the group's development, a fully worked-out expressive code of their aesthetic and ideology.



The music may be appreciated as sculpture, but this is not meant in any synaesthetic sense ("seeing" sounds, "hearing" colours). The subtitles (names of the modules) nominate patterns or grids which are set in motion against each other. Listening is like watching them revolve in and out of phase. As a result, a higher degree of predictability, or possibly redundancy, is inherent at one level in this music than in the ordinary western repertoire. I am reminded of Levi-Strauss's remark "musical emotion springs precisely from the fact that at each moment the composer withholds or adds more or less than the listener anticipates on the basis of a pattern that he thinks he can guess" (*The raw and the cooked*, London, 1970, p.17). The phasing movements become, then, the structural pace of the music. This I hear as generally slow, whilst there is simultaneously a great deal of "surface" rapidity in some of the detail patterning. As in the first prelude of *The Forty-eight*, where there are 16 notes to be heard before a chord change (and where chord changes do not become established until after the downbeats), so we have here in *Gung Ho* a series of genuinely *toccata*-like studies. This form (or manner) is surely nicely symbolic for the noise and sight of work, of active labour, of industrious beating. Yet this kind of music becomes for me, because of what I perceive as structural slowness, mesmeric rather than "argumentative" or "narrative", sometimes intensified by *perpetuum mobile* passages. The music seems to require a submission to an experience of time operating on an elemental or even manipulable level. One's so-called frontal lobes might just as well be disconnected if the patterning can be completely foretold.

I am aware of a lack in the critical vocabulary or meta-language to discuss From Scratch's sculpture-like sound assemblies, and I caution myself with reminders of how different the experience of rhythm and tempo was when first encountering *Le Marteau* in 1959. There is more than meets the ear, so the reminder goes, at a first hearing. For instance, it is probably insufficient to speak of the phase differentials between patterns (e.g. 5, 6 and 7 at the same time) without examining in detail the subdivisions of each and the consequent proliferation of micro-grids. A record review is not, however, the place to attempt this. Suffice it to say that the major structural rhythmic designs are relatively simple and clear, especially in lower-order numbers, whilst the minutiae of rapid articulations and their counterpoints will be perceived differently by every listener. These counterpoints are like the sparkles and dazzles of slowly revolving cut gems under lights, where every one of an infinitude of points of observation (hearing) gives a different result. Some will hear a rhythmic *pyknon* here, others there. . . .

From Scratch has another achievement. Their works have considerable length, the span of monumental music. When wrestling with their new idioms, the early atonal composers produced a lot of very short pieces. It seemed to be difficult to write long works. I think From Scratch sometimes goes on for too long, by contrast, and if this is a result of setting forth patterns that will take ages to complete phasing, then attention might be paid to the speed and elaboration of the sub-patterns. Another area where development might occur is in pitch-relations or, dare it be said, melody?

This disc is in sum provocative and promising, beautifully recorded, well played, handsomely presented and a likely collector's item in the future. Copies may be obtained from PO Box 6298, Auckland 1, for \$7.50 post paid, or at \$6.99 from retailers.