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***The Audience Experience: A Critical Analysis of Audiences in the Performing Arts* edited by Jennifer Radbourne, Hilary Glow and Katya Johanson. Intellect Books, 2013, £45.00.**

Tim Rutherford-Johnson

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Metzger attempted to provoke a scandal by suggesting that Lachenmann had put words into Nono's mouth deliberately to alienate Nono's colleagues. Nono's absence, both in 1975 when he and Lachenmann were not on speaking terms and in 1992 when he was dead, is perhaps significant; as Lachenmann observed in July 1992, 'Metzger had fifteen years in which he could have asked Nono himself about this'.

It is hard to think of another example, in recent musical history at least, of a similarly sustained correspondence between two such major figures. The Boulez–Cage letters offer us a snapshot of a period in both composers' development, but it is only a snapshot, the shutter opening in May 1949 and closing in August 1954. The exchange of letters, telegrams and postcards between Lachenmann and Nono is no snapshot; instead it presents a complex, rich, many-layered narrative in which we can follow these two great composers as they steer between the cliffs of a 30-year relationship which, like them and their music, is by turns passionate, contrary and inspiring.

Christopher Fox

The Audience Experience: A Critical Analysis of Audiences in the Performing Arts edited by Jennifer Radbourne, Hilary Glow and Katya Johanson. Intellect Books, 2013, £45.00.

'But ... what do you get out of it?'

'You get opera. You put money in, you see, and opera comes out,' said Salzella wearily.

'There's no profit?'¹

The quantification of artistic value has become an obsession in these neo-liberal times. Contra Terry Pratchett's character Salzella, musical director of the Ankh-Morpork Opera House, arts funders, administrators and politicians are increasingly looking for something other than opera for their money, whether that be in the form of economic stimulus, social cohesion or surrogate education. This principle has become sufficiently normalised to draw in many of art's defenders, who argue against cuts in funding in precisely the same instrumental terms: the arts are worth sponsoring because they encourage spending, because they bring communities together, because they teach moral values, and so on. Finally, audiences themselves have also

begun to expect more from their arts, and seek some sort of concrete enlightenment, a social opportunity, or a holistic entertainment experience. Art for Art's sake can often seem a forgotten cause.

The terrain is certainly changing, whether for good or for ill. It is to questions like these that this collection of essays is addressed. *The Audience Experience* is a relatively slim volume, but its 11 chapters cover issues such as live streaming of the arts (e.g. the Metropolitan Opera's cinema transmissions), the role of amateur experience in listening to classical music, the role of venues, and audience engagement and participation. The book's focus is on all the performing arts, but opera and music, particularly classical, feature prominently. Contemporary music features only in passing, although many of the methods and conclusions could presumably be easily transferred.

Most of the essays are quite short, and several are summaries or abbreviations of previously published research. As an overview of the serious scholarly work that has been conducted in the field, this is of value in itself, particularly in an area of discussion that is typically dominated in the popular eye by arts commentators and producers (and critics), all of whom have a clear financial stake in the debate. Evidence of quantitative research in this field is encouraging, and its conclusions sometimes revealing. However, closer editorial attention could have been paid to how this work has been summarised. Chapter 1, for example (and ironically the editors' own contribution), promises a detailed discussion of one study that appears to have been lost in the cut. Lost too from this chapter seems to be a description of a table that summarises common attributes between three reports into audience experience. The meaning of several terms used on this table are left obscure, and two of the reports are hardly referred to again. One other editorial quibble cannot pass unnoted: Kim Vincs's chapter, 'Structure and Aesthetics in Audience Responses to Dance', is somewhat marred by a persistent confusion of 'textural' for 'textual'.

Several essays, especially in the first half of the book, give attention to the instrumental value of the arts described above. Although their tone is generally appropriately neutral, reading them in order one begins to wish for a critical perspective that confronts, or at least acknowledges, this ideological status quo. The number of essays in this book that discuss ways in which to engage with or improve the arts' instrumental value suggests acquiescence with that argument. But to

¹ Terry Pratchett: *Maskerade* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1995), p. 65.

accept its terms is to accept the logic of the neo-liberal free market.

There is a perceptible turn about midway through the book, testifying to at least some considered sequencing on the part of the editors. Some of the chapters that fall into this half are those that attempt to quantify and rationalise the aesthetic experience as just that. The chapter by Lois Foreman-Wernet and Brenda Derwin, 'In the Context of Their Lives: How Audience Members Make Sense of Performing Arts Experiences', is the first to change the terms of the debate, identifying a second trend in arts policy and research that responds to 'calls for the need to focus on arts experiences from the perspective of the individual. . . . This move recognizes the need to go beyond the use of traditional demographically oriented social science surveys that assess attitudes or participation, to a deeper understanding of how audience members actually experience the arts' (p. 69).

Two chapters in particular – Matthew Reason's 'The Longer Experience: Theatre for Young Audiences and Enhancing Engagement', and Lisa Baxter, Daragh O'Reilly and Elizabeth Carnegie's 'Innovative Methods of Inquiry into Arts Engagement' – emphasise the importance of extending the artistic experience beyond the life of the performance itself, and the value that can be gained in reworking and reliving our experience – 'the durational aspect to audiencing', in Reason's slightly jargonistic terminology. Indeed, Reason writes, 'the audience experience of a performance can be considered an ongoing, limitless and plural process'.

The means offered by these two chapters to achieve this prolonging include metaphor work, guided visualisations and structured online discussion. These methods, although no doubt valuable market research tools, and of course widely used in education, are not a practical option across the wider adult population. And anyway, how do such approaches square with an arts culture (at least in the UK) that is increasingly front-loading its productions to emphasise their 'wow' factor and immediate, theme park-like appeal? Is there, beneath this, an argument for that most old-fashioned of ideas – a healthy critical discourse in the arts pages of our newspapers and weekly magazines? One is left wondering whether the real value of a performance review lies not in reporting what happened for those who were not there, but in offering a prolongation of the experience for those who were. This is not a conclusion that is openly stated by any of the contributors to *The Audience*

Experience, but it is an interesting one to reach while reading a book that is quite openly focused on innovative, twenty-first-century strategies.

The target readership for *The Audience Experience* is certainly specialist academics and practitioners in arts marketing, as is clear from chapters that summarise recent techniques in gathering audience data, for example. However, there is enough here to interest a more general readership. This is a field of scholarship that is entirely new to me, and yet I was able to read several of the articles as introductions to the existing debates. These are some of the most pressing issues in the arts of our time, and as an accessible primer to some of the methods and theories that are available *The Audience Experience* may prove valuable to many.

Tim Rutherford-Johnson

Falling Up: The Days and Nights of Carlisle Floyd by Thomas Holliday. Syracuse University Press, 2012, €45.00.

Thomas Holliday's book is described as an 'authorised biography'. Authorised or not, from any viewpoint this is a heroic story of a truly remarkable individual, told in meticulous detail by an author whose sympathy and understanding derives from his own experience of his subject's field. To give your life almost exclusively to the composition of opera, music's most demanding and unforgiving art form, and to write all of your own librettos, requires the longest view of all. That explains why so few have done so; and Carlisle Floyd (b. 1926) is unique amongst them, choosing mainly American subjects, predominantly southern in content. *Susannah* (1955) has enjoyed over 800 performances and 300 productions (second only to *Porgy and Bess* in popularity we are told), and several of the other dozen operas have also been widely performed. But Floyd is hardly a household name like Bernstein or John Adams, or even Menotti. Only one opera, *Willie Stark*, has appeared on DVD (in a university production)¹ and three more can be heard on modern commercial CDs; but well over half his output is unrecorded or available only in historical performances.

As one reads Holliday's book (and it is a big book, in A4 'coffee table' format with dictionary-like double columns), Floyd's determination and

¹ Available on Newport Classic NVD22002