

# NEW VIRTUOSO MUSIC FOR PIANO

CONCERTO No.6 for piano and electronics (1970; IMI 164) by Josef Tal

The question of pianism and virtuosity in new music can only be answered by considering the artistic aims and objectives of today's composers. In the past, the creative spirit of the composers has brought forth from the piano time and again new sonoric possibilities, which had not been imagined before and which, just like other aspects of their compositions, have reflected their innovative artistic intentions. From Bach to Bartók, increasing demands have been imposed upon pianists and piano-makers alike.

In terms of this development, piano music seemed to reach, by mid 20th century, a certain confusion. Boulez' "Structures" have been written as absolute music: the compositional method was a result of purely serial considerations which had nothing to do with the specific characteristics of the piano. Although Cage had invented new sounds by preparing the instrument, he, at the same time, neglected most traditional piano techniques. His music therefore represents, in term of the scope of his sound-palette, an exchange of means rather than an enrichment thereof.

On the other hand, compositions written in the course of the past 25 years point clearly to new developments in pianism. It would appear that the love of the piano, rediscovered by composers who have long neglected the instrument, derives from the cumulative possibilities it offers. Although the piano cannot directly imitate a synthesizer or a percussion ensemble (two examples of typical 20th-century media), it can suggest their sounds and many more and, further, bring them together into a synthesis that is impossible on other single instruments. This feature of the piano, which enabled it to capture all the sonorities of a romantic orchestra in the 19th century, has once again become a source of attraction to composers.

In order to create a new, progressive pianism, contemporary composers have often invented complicated and finely defined notational methods, which are indispensable for the expression of their ideas. As in the past, virtuosity at its best – the technical skill coupled with the conceptual ability of the pianist – allows the composer's notation to be turned into sounds and take communicative meaning.

The medium of concerto for a solo instrument accompanied by means of a synthesizer has always preoccupied Tal, as it allegorically represents an important challenge to human communication: the attempt at a dialogue between Art, as keeper of traditions and natural emotions, and Science, as generator of new life-forms. The protagonists of each side have different linguistic practices and cannot comprehend each other without special effort. Analogically, there are great differences of musical language between the conventional instrument and the synthesizer.

The electronic accompaniment to CONCERTO No.6 was recorded on tape by the composer using a Moog Synthesizer at the Israeli Centre for Electronic Music. (Josef Tal had founded this centre himself in 1957 and had acquired the synthesizer as a result of his personal relationship with Moog during a study-tour of USA and Canada.) The score contains a read-out of the volume of both channels of the tape, printed above the piano part. This serves to enable distinction of coordination points between piano and tape. Through a system of "tolerant formations", the CONCERTO is constructed in such a manner, that the pianist, who cannot and should not play with the temporal precision of a tape-recorder, can re-synchronize his or her playing with the tape at specified points of the score.

The image displays three excerpts of musical notation for Josef Tal's CONCERTO No. 6. Each excerpt consists of a piano part (staves 1 and 2) and an electronic accompaniment part (staves 3 and 4). The piano part is written in a complex, atonal style with many accidentals and dynamic markings. The electronic accompaniment is represented by a series of irregular, jagged lines, indicating a synthesized sound. The excerpts show the interaction between the piano and the synthesizer, with the piano part often leading or responding to the electronic sounds.

The CONCERTO is a one-movement work. It opens with a long electronic prologue containing a gradually rising pitch with a complex, constantly changing overtone spectrum – a typically electronic effect. The piano then enters in dodecaphony, a musical medium equally typical of the pre-electronic age. The confrontation is clear. Yet, the initial material of the piano contains unexpected possibilities for bringing the two intellectual spheres closer together: the piano's repeated chords are later answered by beats on the tape of similar velocity; a double trill in the piano is seemingly complimented by a third trill, which is, in fact, a wide electronic tremolo.

The above are excerpts from an article published in Germany in the *Neue Musikzeitung*, October/November 1992.

The author, Jeffrey Burns, is a pianist who specializes in playing 20th-century music. He has recorded the following CDs: ACADEMY 8501-2 – G.Hummel; ACADEMY 8505-2 – M.Feldman, G.Ligeti, A.Reimann, I.Yun; ACADEMY 8506-2 – Josef Tal: ESSAYS I-III (1986/88/89; IMI 6598/6793/6818), ELSE – HOMMAGE (1975; IMI 383), together with Catherine Geyer, soprano; POOL 76013 – F.Zappa; POOL 76023 – P.H.Dittrich; POOL 76033 – Arie Shapira: POST PIANO, Josef Tal: CONCERTO No.6 for piano and electronics, P.H.Dittrich, L.Glandien, J.Kalitzke, G.Katzer.