the required role of cold warriors, investing resources in effective propaganda” (p. 218). With its reliable, broad, and widely applicable approach, Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy promises to bring into dialog scholarship past and present, offering a new coherence to the study of mid-century musical diplomacy.

JENNIFER DelAPP-BIRKETT


Published in 2014, the late Bob Gilmore’s Claude Vivier: A Composer’s Life is the first significant biographical account of Claude Vivier to have appeared since the composer’s murder in 1983. Based in Montreal for most of his life, Vivier (1948–83) was a Canadian composer whose advocates have posthumously proclaimed him one of Canada’s greatest composers. His music was influenced by travels to Europe for formal studies and to Asia for informal sojourns. Despite composing in a wide range of styles, Vivier is generally known for his late period, which was considerably indebted to the spectral techniques of Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail. Other studies have dealt with Vivier’s biography obliquely (these include a journal issue largely dedicated to his collected writings and a chronology of his works),¹ but most offer only a cursory introduction to his life. Gilmore’s book is a meticulously researched and beautifully written work that guides the reader effortlessly through Vivier’s thirty-four short but prolific years. Indeed, it reads less like a dry laundry list of facts and dates than a favorite novel that one simply cannot put down. This gripping reading experience is due in equal measure to Gilmore’s writing and to Vivier’s rich musical and personal life.

Vivier’s life defies a complete biographical account. As Gilmore points out in the preface, we know the precise moment and circumstances of neither his birth nor his death. Born an orphan to still unknown parents, he was adopted by the Vivier family when he was two and a half years old. Starting out from that first point of biographical certainty, Gilmore has uncovered many previously unknown early biographical details. Most striking is his account of Vivier’s claim that he was raped as a young boy by his Uncle Joe and of his adoptive family’s victim-blaming and apathy: as his sister Gisele is reported to have said to Gilmore, “well, that’s life I

suppose . . . there’s nothing to be done . . . this sort of thing happens in families, no?” (p. 11). Many years later Vivier recalled that this traumatic event had “saved my life,” because he was sent away to boarding school and thereby separated from his adoptive family except during the holidays (p. 11).

Sexual violence would return to haunt Vivier at the end of his life. In January 1983 a prospective lover who had accompanied him back to his apartment in Paris stabbed him in the neck with a pair of scissors. The attack did not kill him, however. Clarence Barlow (who was present in the apartment that night) recalls that Vivier was not even bleeding, although the emotional trauma was evident in a letter sent by Vivier to his close friend Thérèse Desjardins the following day: “now I understand the horror of rape,” he wrote, and “death has been totally demystified” (pp. 218–20).

Less than two months later Vivier’s lifeless body was discovered days after his murder: he had been brutally stabbed to death on the night of March 7. Another prospective lover, the murderer had likewise been brought back to the composer’s Paris apartment. Beyond these sketchy details about Vivier’s first and final moments, however, many questions remain. Gilmore’s nuanced handling of these bookends of his life derives from a careful examination of accounts by his family, friends, colleagues, and, in the case of his childhood trauma, Vivier himself. His critical discussion of Vivier’s early life at the outset of the book sets the tone for the rigorous approach of the biography as a whole.

Perhaps most impressive is Gilmore’s total commitment to his methodology. Before this study, the narrative of all biographical information published since Vivier’s death was provided almost exclusively by Thérèse Desjardins, the president of the Fondation Vivier (initially called Les Amis de Claude Vivier). She was possibly the composer’s most trusted confidante, which has made her a rich resource for scholars. But while her intimate and unique knowledge of Vivier’s life and music is crucial to Vivier scholarship, multiple perspectives are needed to create a critical biography. Naturally, Gilmore also draws on Desjardin, but his account is enhanced by fifty-six interviews and conversations that he conducted over the course of twelve years beginning in 2002. The most significant additional accounts cited by Gilmore are those of Clarence Barlow (a fellow student of Karlheinz Stockhausen in the early 1970s), Walter Boudreau (Vivier’s classmate at the Conservatoire de Musique in Montreal), John Rea (a composer based at McGill University in Montreal from the early 1970s), and Gilles Tremblay (Vivier’s analysis and composition teacher at the Conservatoire). Gilmore’s meticulous sleuthing creates the multiplicity of perspectives that had been lacking in Vivier scholarship, which he then unpacks in a critical and comparative narrative.

Framed by a preface and two appendices, the book is organized into twelve chapters, each titled using a quotation by the composer followed by
a date range. Although the dates progress chronologically, the titles of the chapters assume a high level of specialist knowledge about Vivier. It would have been helpful for readers who are unfamiliar with Vivier’s statements about his music and life if the chapters had been given more generally descriptive titles, or if the titles had been clarified with more specific information. For instance, the title of Chapter 1, “‘The fact of knowing I had no father or mother’ (1948–67),” certainly captures Gilmore’s discussion of Vivier’s early life as an orphan and his adoption by the Vivier family. The title of Chapter 3, however, “‘To push my language further’ (1971–72),” could easily apply to almost any composer at any stage of his or her career. Gilmore’s chapter titles thus present a somewhat labyrinthine experience for newcomers to Vivier, especially if they are looking for information on a specific aspect of Vivier’s biography.

The book significantly contributes to our understanding of Vivier’s formative years at the Conservatoire in Montreal (Chapters 1 and 2), his “finishing school” experience in Europe from 1971 to 1974 at the Institute of Sonology in Utrecht and as a student of Stockhausen in Cologne (Chapters 3 and 4), his first years as a professional composer back in Montreal (Chapter 5), his travels across Asia and the Middle East from 1976 to 1977 (Chapter 6), the works directly following and linked to those travels (Chapter 7), and Vivier’s opera Kopernikus (Opéra—Rituel de Mort) (Chapter 8). Gilmore expertly weaves a rich autobiographical context for Vivier’s works throughout these chapters, especially for those inspired by his international travels.

Vivier visited Japan, Singapore, Bali, Java, Thailand, Iran, and Egypt during his 1976–77 travels. Gilmore examines his travel journals, which contain personal and logistical notes, language exercises in Indonesian, and, occasionally, musical sketches. Of considerable note is Gilmore’s revelation that there is no evidence that Vivier traveled to Bukhara or Samarkand in Uzbekistan, as some believe he did, or to Paramaribo, the capital of Suriname in South America. Vivier would later title works after these cities—Paramirabo (an intentional misspelling, 1978), Bouchara (1981), and Samarkand (1981)—and the fact that he titled other works after cities or countries that he had in fact visited, such as Shiraz (1977), Pulau Dewata (the Indonesian name for Bali, 1977), and Zipangu (the name Marco Polo gave to Japan, 1980), might well account for the misassumption. Gilmore’s work here helps not only to correct the record, but also to show how the composer’s interest in travel, actual or imagined, traversed his various stylistic periods as a recurring trope.

Chapters 9–12 are dedicated to Vivier’s late style and the final years of his life. Chapter 9 is one of only two places in the book in which Gilmore draws on his previous publications on Vivier, incorporating large portions of his 2007 Tempo article “On Claude Vivier’s Lonely Child.” Whereas the

previously published material used in Chapter 4—the discussion of Vivier’s studies with Stockhausen—is seamlessly woven into the narrative of Gilmore’s text, the material in Chapter 9 has a noticeably more technical tone that does not blend with the rest of the book. Here, Gilmore introduces Vivier’s use of spectral techniques in *Lonely Child* and covers quite a lot of ground.

Vivier’s approach to spectralism centered on highlighting a melodic line, typically presented over a drone in a lower voice, with microtonal harmonies derived from combination tones of the frequencies of the melody and bass pitches. Gilmore describes Vivier’s combination tone procedure—what the composer poetically called “les couleurs”—in technical detail, but provides an incomplete and unintentionally misleading description in both his 2007 article and the corresponding passage in the book (pp. 166–67). Here, Gilmore describes the algorithmic construction of the first couleur to appear in Vivier’s work, which contains five calculated pitches and appears in measure 24 of *Lonely Child*. Yet he describes the process only for the first three tones, \((a + b), (a + 2b),\) and \((a + 3b)\), where \(a\) and \(b\) correspond to frequencies of the melody and bass pitches respectively. These equations give the frequencies for the first three pitches of this couleur. Gilmore neglects to describe the algorithms for the final two pitches, instead writing, “and so the process continues, with two more, still higher, combination tones” (p. 167).

If this were true and the process continued, we would expect the first three algorithms to extend to \((a + 4b)\) and \((a + 5b)\). However, these final two calculations result in 1224 Hz (E\(_b\) – 29 cents) and 1420 Hz (F +28 cents) respectively, which do not correspond to the top two pitches in Vivier’s score, F and B. Applying the correct method, where both the \(a\) and \(b\) variable can take a coefficient, closer approximations for these two higher tones may be given by \((2a + 3b)\) and \((3a + 3b)\), which return the pitches F\# –14 cents (approximately F) and B\(_b\) +40 cents (approximately B). Thus Gilmore’s description is correct as far as he takes it, but breaks down where he says, “the process continues.”

Gilmore’s inaccuracy has significant implications in several passages that follow. In discussing Vivier’s subsequent works Gilmore points out that Vivier also used the combination tone method that he had used in *Lonely Child* in Prologue pour un Marco Polo (p. 182), *Wo bist du Licht!* (pp. 182, 184), and Bouchara (p. 190). Since no technical descriptions are given, the reader must refer back to the erroneous description of Vivier’s technique in

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Lonely Child, receiving a skewed image of the technique through association. Further, even if Gilmore’s description of Vivier’s technique in Lonely Child were accurate, these other passages would still be misleading. Indeed, Vivier deployed his combination tone technique throughout his final period, but he often used diverse combination tones across his works. Thus he did not necessarily use the same procedure to calculate the pitch material for every instance of les couleurs. Additional oversights regarding Vivier’s use of his combination tone technique include the incorrect identification of the technique in Samarkand as overtone sonorities (p. 191), and the omission of it from the discussion of Trois airs pour un opéra imaginaire (1982) and Glaubst du an die Unsterblichkeit der Seele (1983), both of which contain an abundance of combination tones.

Together with his research on Vivier’s early years, Gilmore’s final two chapters contribute perhaps the greatest amount of new information to our understanding of Vivier’s biography as a whole. He clears up important chronology regarding Vivier’s final work, Glaubst du an die Unsterblichkeit der Seele, a chronology that is often misconstrued in program notes and performance reviews, perhaps for sensationalized marketing purposes. At the end of Glaubst du a narrator describes how a man named Claude is stabbed through the heart, after which the score stops abruptly without a double bar line—an eerie premonition of Vivier’s actual murder. (Vivier famously wrote his own text.) Too frequently, however, attempts are made to suggest a relationship of causality between the first, nonfatal attack on Vivier of January 1983 described above, this final work, and his death, in that the end of Glaubst du is commonly referenced as Vivier’s response to the first attack. Yet Gilmore shows in Chapter 11 that Vivier had actually enclosed the text used in the score in a letter to Desjardins dated January 24, 1983, exactly one day before the nonfatal assault (pp. 216–19), thereby dispelling the myth that the text of Glaubst du was written as a reaction to the attack. Even so, the close timing of the letter and the attack, together with the fact that Vivier was eventually murdered by stabbing, is certainly unnerving.

The final chapter deals exclusively with Vivier’s murder, providing a great deal of information about his murderer, Pascal Dolzan, who was caught some months later and ultimately sentenced to life imprisonment. While most scholarship avoids even mentioning Dolzan by name, Gilmore weighs in on this controversial topic and provides much-needed context. Gilmore relates that Dolzan had actually committed two other murders on February 15, and draws directly from Dolzan’s comments to the police to cast the three murders as hate crimes against homosexuals. Importantly, despite the correlations with the ending of Glaubst du, Gilmore argues that Vivier was an unwilling victim and did not have a death wish (pp. 226–30). He points to Vivier’s planned future projects, and to the fact that his career was gathering strength with new contacts in Europe, as indicative of the composer’s will to live.
Twelve years in the making, this biography was meticulously researched and prepared. Its most significant strengths are the biographical, contextual, and musical details of Vivier’s life that emerge through Gilmore’s critical analysis of the many interviews he conducted. By recording such firsthand accounts of Vivier’s life in what Gilmore calls the black hole of twentieth-century history—that is, the era of the telephone, between the letter and the internet—this biography will likely remain unmatched in Vivier scholarship because there simply is no other documentation. Gilmore has thus laid an indispensable foundation for generations of Vivier and late twentieth-century music scholars to come.

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