



Jonathan Harvey of *Vagues, Chemins, le Souffle* (1970–72) (p. 81), and the common ground between Grisey and Harvey – spirituality, properties of sound, close listening – is surely worth exploring (Grisey’s work has an epigraph drawn from a Hindu text). Even more, it would be good if the resurgence of interest in Grisey on the anniversary of his death prompted more performances of his music.

Caroline Potter
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John Snijders, *Ixion*. Marmalade Publishers of Visual Theory, 248pp. £24.99

An immediate impression of *Ixion: Morton Feldman, Notation, Performance Practice and Jackson Pollock* is prompted by its dust jacket: a balanced juxtaposition of minimal serif text upon a monochrome lemon. The positioning of ‘Marmalade/Publishers of Visual Theory’ on the front cover communicates the bent of the book and the approaches that Snijders will take in approaching Morton Feldman’s pioneering yet relatively unnoticed work *Ixion* (1962).

Ixion, in Snijders’ estimation ‘the first example of a purely graphic notation for compositional and performance purposes’ (p. 32), does not maintain the same position in public consciousness as works by some of Feldman’s contemporaries, such as his friends within the ‘Cedar Street Tavern’ crowd: John Cage, Jackson Pollock and co. This being said, *Ixion* dominates in David Cline’s *The Graph Music of Morton Feldman* (2016), though mostly from a music analytical perspective. Snijders, first and foremost a performer, though also an expert on contemporary visual arts and an art collector, is thus well placed to provide pragmatic and performance perspectives in addition to those we might conceive as more traditionally ‘analytical’.

Snijders is an arresting storyteller; a skill honed through teaching ‘performance practice’ and one which draws you into this slight and charming pocketbook. Opening with an anecdote from Middelburg, Netherlands, in July 1985, Snijders recounts his first interaction with Feldman wherein the composer was drinking heavily while offering suggestions to the musicians rehearsing his *Trio* such as ‘too loud!’ and ‘more sexy’ (p. 11). This humorous opener is revealing of much that is to follow: the exceptionality of Snijders’ experiences working with seminal composers and performers of ‘classical

music’ post-WWII, his ability to time and proffer these appropriately, and the challenges concomitant with interpreting Feldman’s musical philosophy and material scores.

Several difficulties arise upon approaching the performance of *Ixion*. These include the removal of a bar-like structure, indeterminacy of pitch and lack of metronome mark. Snijders consults a diversity of sources (choreographies, essays, interviews, letters, and recordings of various qualities) in shaping his exploration of the work, despite their scarcity and frequent unreliability. For example, Feldman’s chronology is often erroneous while his musical musings often lack philosophical grounding – note his references to ‘living thinking’, ‘dead thinking’ and ‘pre-thinking’ (p. 19). Snijders navigates these issues that affect conceptualising and playing the work by putting performance considerations front and centre.

While the title of Snijders’ inquiry is *Ixion*, not *Ixions*, the piece exists in two versions: one for ensemble (three flutes, clarinet, horn, trumpet, trombone, piano, three to seven cellos, and two to four double basses) and one for two pianos. A whole chapter, almost entirely in tabular form and lasting for 71 pages, is dedicated to a comparative analysis of these two versions. Although Snijders illustrates impressive care, precision and temporal commitment, readers may be forgiven for questioning the utility of such a large section of the book. The tables consider each ‘ictus’ of the respective ‘versions’ in turn, indicating the instruments featured in each instance, how their sonic material is distributed between six registers (high high, middle high, low high, high low, middle low and low low), resultant numerical discrepancies between the two versions, etc. The enterprise requires seeing to be believed, and the act of checking its accuracy falls far beyond the remit of this review! That being said, one of the primary conclusions of the book stems from this painstaking exercise, insofar as the two *Ixions* ‘can be seen as two versions of the same material, but with their own musical identity, enough to treat them as separate compositions in their own right’ (p. 235).

The fourth chapter, ‘Ixion – Performance Issues’, is perhaps the most ‘useful’. Snijders interrogates the indeterminate natures of the scores and their performance instructions, situating *Ixion* within its musical and social context and using his vast performance experiences to intuit interpretive possibilities that are either in keeping or against the ‘spirit’ of the work. While limits of notational specificity are present

in any musical work of any historical period, they are brought to the fore in the instance of this groundbreaking work. Accordingly, Snijders traverses issues of coordination, duration, dynamics, pitch, rhythm, tempo, texture, timbre and vibrato, in each instance resisting dogma and meditating on as many interpretive possibilities as reasonable. Certain contentious philosophical delineations, such as the distinction between ‘sounds’ and ‘tones’, although regarded, do not derail the overall thrust of the book. Rather, performative and pragmatic considerations of the work are regarded in relation to the practices pursued by musicians operating in Feldman’s immediate milieu. In many instances, *Ixion* is almost employed as a case study for exploring approaches to performing indeterminate and graphic notations more generally, highlighting the extant dearth of publications in this area. Snijders, in his role as ‘performance coach’, makes appearances throughout the text. These passages will surely appeal to both active and non-performers in equal measure, in the same way that ‘performance masterclasses’ with preeminent teachers often generate interest above and beyond those immediately involved.

The final chapter, ‘*Ixion* and Jackson Pollock’, serves as a vessel for further speculation on the part of Snijders, primarily in relation to the nature of the relationship between art and music in Feldman’s theory and practice. A central tenet of the book, brought to our attention in the first line of the first chapter, is that Feldman ‘feels that his way of thinking about composition has more to do with the way painters think about painting than how composers think about composing’ (p. 17). A fundamental question that pervades the book concerns whether *Ixion* should be primarily conceptualised as a reified musical score whereby each ictus is ‘purposefully conceived’ or as a piece of visual art wherein its sum is certainly greater than its parts. Feldman’s intention to ‘break the notion of a cause and effect continuity’ by pursuing an ‘unchanging image, where you have this image and there is movement and mobility but essentially, it’s just the energy of keeping up the same image’ (p. 213) was achieved through thinking of and treating the piece as an ‘oilcloth’ during the process of composition. Snijders probes the similarities and differences between Feldman and Pollock’s *modi operandi*. In exploring the extent to which *Ixion* was composed with a ‘composer’s mindset’ or an ‘abstract expressionist painter’s mindset’, Snijders includes pages from his *Pollockised version of Ixion* (2018) in both ensemble version and two piano version. This inventive approach to musical analysis resonates with the choice of bespoke publisher and

is in keeping with its overarching series *Drawing Theory*. More of these artistic adventures would have constituted welcome additions. For example, it appears obvious to me that an artistic intervention predicated on gradating/shading each ictus in relation to the number present within each box may shine further light on the conceptual and visual thrust of the work.

The book’s principal faults appear to be a product of lacklustre editing (missing words, brackets and speech marks; inconsistent capitalisation, italics, use of the Oxford comma), though these do not detract from an eclectic and penetrating journey into this pioneering piece. In the book’s Acknowledgements, Snijders extends his appreciation to Feldman for making his life as a musician so much richer. In turn, Feldman aficionados, alongside performers of *Ixion* and other works of indeterminate and graphic natures, should be appreciative of Snijders’ myriad insights in this innovative contribution.

David Cotter

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Tom Perchard, Stephen Graham, Tim Rutherford-Johnson, Holly Rogers, *Twentieth-Century Music in the West: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2022, 394 pp., \$34.99.

Apart from Tim Rutherford-Johnson, who is an independent researcher, the authors of *Twentieth-Century Music in the West: An Introduction*, Tom Perchard, Stephen Graham and Holly Rogers all teach at Goldsmiths, University of London. The four have written what they describe as ‘the first introductory survey to address popular music, art music and jazz on equal terms’. Since 2008, the authors have been teaching a course that is the basis of the book. As a result, *Twentieth-Century Music in the West* covers a large amount of material succinctly yet thoroughly. I teach a ‘Music Since 1900’ course for undergraduates every year and have adopted *Twentieth-Century Music in the West* for Spring 2024.

The book also accomplishes the incorporation of recent educational and societal goals, heretofore missing from most textbooks: de-canonisation, decolonisation and better representation of music figures of all genders and sexual orientations. Unlike most, if not all, twentieth-century music history surveys, *Twentieth-Century Music in the West* does not approach its subject chronologically. Every chapter is devoted to a different topic pertaining to twentieth-century music: ‘Harmony’,