

ROGER WOODWARD AND ZUJIN MEHTA astonished the New York Philharmonic's audiences at the Lincoln Centre for three nights last November by pivoting the première of Xenakis's piano concerto *Kegrops* between Bach's *Brandenburg 6*, and his D minor, ending with a fizzy *Rosamunde* Overture. Each work gained by the contrast. In *Kegrops*, Woodward mastered a piano part with passion, strength, and understanding, then he glided naturally into graceful rigour and shapely articulation in Bach in a feat few pianists would even contemplate. Woodward is an outstanding interpreter of all Xenakis's piano works and *Kegrops* was commissioned for him by fellow-Australians, the Paroulakis.

From the opening tutti rhythms, spine-chilling and strident in the brass with slow and stately measure, we find ourselves in a barbaric and martial world—the archaic Greece of Xenakis's fantasy. Square attacks of the solo piano drive on the brutal splendour, echoed from time to time by the orchestra with its insistent rhythms. The piano shifts to double time while the orchestral rhythm slows down, splitting the timbral layers of the chords. A work of vast scale and compelling authority is launched—*Pithoprakta*, *Antikthon*, *Jonchaies* come to mind.

In the second phrase—the piece is made up of roughly five or six clearly articulated phrases of increasing length—there is a gradual disarray, dense glissandi turning into whirlpools and duststorms of tremoli and pointillistic figures against jewelled arpeggios up and down the piano, again echoed by the orchestra. We are already aware of new timbres and colours in the different layers of articulation, and speeds of attack which prefigure a new logic and plasticity. The piano is locked in opposition with the orchestra, repeating insistent chords until it emerges with an almost 'fugato' solo, a periodic cadenza filling out as it progresses with cellular chords around the central pitches which recall the beginning.

The flutes and oboes weave and twist an uncanny silver border of modal harmonies into the piano sonority, underlining the archaic character. The same pitches are rotated in the strings, coiling and turning through the main fabric of the orchestra. Tatters, seemingly of folk music, are thrown up by the chromatic permutations, opposed by the low tempered blocks of rhythm in the piano part, always shifting up the register.

In the fifth section a fine glissando passage, which increasingly becomes more chaotic and aperiodic, is shot through by piano rhythms, again moving upwards in parallel chords. There follows a densely figurative orchestral part against brilliant and glassy piano sonorities, gaining momentum with rising tremoli and trills played freely against the teeming, criss-crossing strings. The orchestra is divided into very high and very low; suddenly the harp and piano fall like a rainbow across the stormy backdrop of double basses, developing into a brief duo.

We enter the last breathtaking climax—the winding-down of the universe with repeated orchestral attacks which slow down, regain speed, and slow down again. The suspense is unbearable, but the piano emerges repeating the rhythm slower and slower, throwing out an anchor to the piece in a controlled loss of momentum.

In his programme note Xenakis refers to a Mycenaean King of legend, *Cegrops*, half-man, half-beast; and also to the word 'weaving'. In effect, we hear the jacquard effect of different patterns produced by varied rhythms and modes of articulation in separate sections of the orchestra, which are overlaid to merge into a highly complex and mobile fabric; then parts split, change in measure, separate and re-pattern through new colours and densities. In the past Xenakis has often proceeded by the impetus of juxtaposition: hard cuts from one texture to another, in solid blocks often having the same character right through.

In *Kegrops* there is a polyphony of instrumental layers, of textures and rhythms, owing to a superb control of changing speeds and densities of attack.

The internal tempo of the different rhythmic sections are markedly different and clearly inter-related to mould a seamless whole. Sensitive to this, Mehta's vigorous conducting laid bare a clear temporal framework, the skeleton which carries the flesh of glistening sonorities and brilliant and transparent colours, new in Xenakis, all in majestic proportion. I have never heard a work from Xenakis which so strongly asserted its own entity from beginning to end. The moment it was finished I wanted to hear it again.