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**Meirion Bowen
on two keyboards
virtuosi of new
music**

Poles of kinesis



Cecil Taylor

ROGER WOODWARD, in his lumberjack shirt, and Cecil Taylor, in yellow boots, looked and sounded utterly different playing composed and improvised piano music, respectively, at a recital given first at the QEH and (from Saturday) touring seven cities on the Arts Council's Contemporary Music Network. In their separate ways, these two keyboard virtuosi are riveting and should not be missed.

Woodward, here, is the astute guide to an exhibition of the latest experiments in form, texture and colour. He remains detached, but persuasive. He allows the arborescent forms of Xenakis's *Mists* (1980) to displace any preconceived notions of piano register and figuration.

The piano itself becomes a new and vital organism; but also a machine that can compute sonorities in unbelievable permutations; none the less, a machine that breathes.

Takemitsu's *Piano Distance* and *Far Away* and Morton Feldman's *Piano* — a late change in the programme as a tribute to the composer — are all painterly abstractions, trying with subtle variations in dynamics, light and shade, but capable of brilliant galactic explosions. That these were written for Woodward testified to his acute sensitivity and comprehensive technique.

Cecil Taylor's continuous improvisation was as corporeally determined as Woodward's was intellectually distanced. He complemented his Olympic feats at the keyboard by singing, humming and murmuring.

Taylor's torrent of notes might well find common ground with some of Xenakis's composed onslaughts for the instrument. But it was more a way he had found of galvanising the energy and momentum for a rhythmically electric ballet.

It would be a truism to describe Taylor's performance as shamanistic. What that also entailed was a readiness to start from and refer back to simple acoustic materials — octaves, open fifths and fourths. Indeed, his slow air, more ruminative playing hinted at standard blues or perhaps Scriabin (or a mixture of the two). Thus, his musical language is never impenetrable, though it is light years away from the considered formulations of any so-called straight composer.

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