

## CHAPTER 1

### A History of the Scratch Orchestra

1969-72

*At a certain stage in the development of the Scratch Orchestra the politically more conscious members (constituted within the Orchestra as the Ideological Study Group) felt the need to clarify our experience in the Orchestra, to view it historically and sum it up. We therefore commissioned Rod Eley, the most educated among us, to write the History of the Scratch Orchestra. He based his work on written reports submitted by a number of individuals who had first-hand experience of the various stages of the Orchestra's work. I have added notes at the end of the book to clarify references that would otherwise be meaningless.*

### A HISTORY OF THE SCRATCH ORCHESTRA

by **ROD ELEY**

The origins of the Scratch Orchestra derive from the Experimental Music Class at Morley College (1) run by Cornelius Cardew and attended by a number of young composers, some of whom were also pupils of Cardew at the Royal Academy of Music. In May 1969 Victor Schonfield put on a 7-hour concert, including among other things Cardew's *Great Learning Paragraph 2* and John Cage's *Atlas Eclipticalis*. Paragraph 2 brought together over 50 people around the nucleus of the Morley College class. Seizing the moment, and seeing the potential of this large group and the need of the members of the group for outlets for their ideas and activity, Cardew wrote the *Draft Constitution*, founded the Scratch Orchestra together with Michael Parsons and Howard Skempton, and opened its bank account. The *Draft Constitution* (2) was published in the *Musical Times* in June 1969 and a meeting of interested people was called for July 1st. Practical work began in September and the first public concerts in November.

In this initial phase of formation one can detect some of the seeds of future

growth, deeply embedded contradictions within the Orchestra which have been sharpening ever since. The nucleus of Morley College composers were dissatisfied with 'established, serious music'; in other words, they were dissatisfied with the elitism of 'serious' music and its strong class image and with the repression of working musicians into the role of slavish hacks churning out the stock repertoire of concert hall and opera house. The prevailing dry, limited critical approach in this century had for them killed spontaneity and simple enjoyment of music and reduced it to an academic and self-conscious 'appreciation' of form and technique. In the *Draft Constitution* the category of Popular Classics - where famous but now hackneyed classics were given unorthodox and irreverent interpretations - was a blow against the crippling orthodoxy of 'musical taste'. The attraction of a number non-reading musicians and actual non-musicians into the Orchestra through seeing the *Draft Constitution* was therefore welcomed. Here was a source of ideas and spontaneity less hampered by academic training and inhibitions. Amongst the Scratch Orchestra members there was considerable support for the ideas of John Cage, Christian Wolff, etc.; that is, random music with a multiplicity of fragments without cohesion as opposed to serialism. Aleatory (chance) music seemed richer, unpredictable, free! But serialism, the tradition stemming from Schönberg, was formal, abstract and authoritarian. Most important was the social implication of Cage's work — the idea that we are all musical, that 'anybody can play it'. All this, at least, in theory. Serial music, on the other hand, was definitely elitist, uncompromisingly bourgeois, and anti-people. From the first, music was considered an experience which might include other media.

However, while rejecting the formal preoccupations of 'serial' music, the Scratch Orchestra was still formalist. Whilst eager to tap new sources of vitality, to experiment with compositions that had the character of catalysts, stimulating the sensitivity, imagination and inventiveness of the members, the content of the music was invariably reactionary. The concern was to create 'beautiful experiences'. The problem was really one of form.

What bound together the varied membership of the Scratch Orchestra? A common experience of the two oppressive blocs in our social and cultural environment - the 'serious' music and art of the establishment on the one hand, and the commercialism of pop, etc., on the other. However, the struggle against them was blind and instinctual rather than conscious at this stage. A number of Orchestra members did think in terms of the Orchestra as a subversion of bourgeois cultural and social values, as have a couple of generations of young artists. But their cultural 'protest' took much the same form as before: music was to be experienced for its own sake. It was the stock reaction of the alienated, bourgeois artist - withdrawal from social responsibility - 'art for art's sake'. At its worst the roots of the ambitions of the Orchestra lay in the Romantic pretension, expressed by Keats: 'All art aspires to the condition of-music'. Music being a 'pure experience', untainted by mundane human or social concerns.

Thus the inception of the Scratch Orchestra was an unconscious and, as it eventually came to appear, a negative, self-indulgent and basically reactionary rejection of the culture and values of the ruling class, of bourgeoisie. No one as yet understood that both these oppressive blocs - bourgeois establishment culture and pop commercialism - were only two facets of *one* world-wide system of oppression: the capitalist system and its final stage, imperialism, now degenerating into fascism throughout the so-called 'free world'. We were all unconsciously rejecting imperialist art, art as a commodity for sale on the market, a function which has been developed since Renaissance times with the rise to power of the bourgeoisie, but which has now reached the point of bankruptcy. It is now an art whose sole function is to shore up the decaying superstructure in an attempt to stave off the inevitable collapse of imperialism. With the gradual breakdown of the capitalist world during the twentieth century the future life of the bourgeoisie, the preservation of their ill-gotten wealth, has become one incredible mass of problems for them. This is seen in personal anxiety and neuroses due to alienation, the pressure of the 'rat-race' and now a growing sense of guilt or, to be more accurate, fear about the precarious affluence of a small class in a sea

of world poverty; a world of growing unrest, communist subversion and revolution, national wars and the threat of a Third World War, from which they know they could not survive. As all political efforts fail to check this collapse, the bourgeois ideologists so-called economists, social 'scientists' and other 'experts' - are busily constructing Malthusian theories of doom, reducing man to a lemming-like creature set on its own destruction. In this way they try to make universal the approaching doom of capitalism and the bourgeoisie, and transform it by an academic conjuring trick into the doom of the entire world, or at least 'civilisation', as they would have it. Bourgeois artists have thus abstracted their own predicament from its class context and turned it into the 'human predicament'. This is why the keynote of 'serious' art this century in the capitalist world has been profound pessimism - the product: negative nihilistic art. Less honest bourgeois art has been more or less on the level of trivial fantasy. Bourgeois art of all kinds has been ignored by the working class for the most part. To them it has not even had the titillating appeal of scandal which it has had, at times, for the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. But even that effect has diminished; today 'anything goes', and usually unheard and unseen! Recent music is disliked, significantly, by working musicians.

The achievement of the great bourgeois composers such as Beethoven was to make the composer 'independent' from feudal patronage (3). Now he sold his product in the market like any producer. But he had to compete for custom with other artists. His music had to be marked with a strong individual musical style order to sell - a kind of brand name. With the trend towards individualism also came the removal of the composer from direct social contact with his audience. In the open market, or to be more exact, in the world of music publishers, agents, concert and theatre impresarios, you either had the saleable product or nothing. Relations were strictly on a cash basis. So the composer became alienated from his product or music, and from the audience. This explains the trend of 'serious art' towards abstraction. The audience capable of following such music has diminished. Most composers in that tradition can now only make a

living by teaching or pumping out music for TV commercials or background music for films. Such 'serious' composition as is done has been reduced to an almost entirely private, 'Sunday' activity amongst a few receptive friends and for minute public audiences (mostly consisting of the very same friends) (4).

This brings us to a most important point. The Scratch Orchestra was formed because a number of friends - people with similar artistic interests and attitudes - and who happened to find a focal point in the figure of Cardew, had grown to the point where the formation of a large-scale group was a natural (but not mechanically predestined) response to the demands of social necessity. In addition it was recognised from the outset that there are growing numbers of people (mostly young) with the same reaction to cultural oppression as us. That is why the *Draft Constitution* said 'the Scratch Orchestra intends to function in the public sphere'.

How can we explain this large, and apparently increasing, pool of dissatisfied young people?

'The lower strata of the middle class . . . sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which modern industry is carried on, and is swamped in competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialised skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production.' . . . 'Further, as we have seen already, entire sections of the ruling classes are, by the advance of industry, precipitated into the proletariat, or are at least threatened in their conditions of existence.' (Karl Marx and Friederich Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, 1848.)

What new methods of production have rendered our specialised skill, as creative musicians, worthless? Quite obviously, the application of technology to music: records, the tape recorder, radio, television, and the electronic amplification of instruments. As a matter of fact the number of properly employed professional musicians in this country, and in general throughout the capitalist world, has actually diminished (5), despite larger population and a claimed raising of cultural standards with more widespread education.

Why? Because live musicians are a more expensive means of producing music than machines. The object of the entrepreneur in music, as in the production and sale of all commodities, is to reduce labour costs. For in capitalism the profit is derived from the surplus value of human labour; that is the value of the amount produced over and above that necessary to provide a living wage to the worker. This is clearly seen throughout the capitalist world in the application of technology and sociological efficiency techniques, like work study. The result is greater productivity, certainly. A man can produce with a machine what it may have taken 100 men before. But for whose benefit is the advance made? In the case of music, the claim that the reduction of manpower by new technology is to reduce 'drudgery' is seen for what it really is in all fields - hypocritical rubbish! Today the opportunity for people with musical talent, or other artistic ability, to play a productive part in society is shrinking to vanishing point. The vast mass of music heard is produced by machines and their machine-minders - the disc jockeys. Even in the field of 'serious' music orchestral players are ground down to a monotonous repertoire of eighteenth and nineteenth century classics, and often feel little better than hacks. For those in the 'live' field of popular music, for the older generation there is constant mechanical repetition of 'old favourites'; for the young there is the domination of the entire capitalist world by a few British and American groups; everyone has to dance to their tune.

In addition, the continued expansion of monopoly capital is every day threatening the small capitalists and the 'professional' classes, i.e. the petty bourgeoisie (6). Dissatisfaction has spread widely throughout the petty bourgeois youth and students in Britain, Ireland, America and Europe, witness the spontaneous upsurge of the student movement against American imperialism in Vietnam in the 1960s. Hitherto, when the capitalist system was strong the petty bourgeoisie trailed behind the bourgeoisie. Now that the world's oppressed people are rising up to wipe out imperialism, this class is vacillating and many youth and students are disillusioned and unwilling to take up their role as ser-

vants of monopoly capital. They are searching around for a better role (7).

This then is the source of the rapidly increasing pool of dissatisfied young people from which the Scratch Orchestra is drawn and to which it has tended to appeal: the decay of the British bourgeoisie under the impact of growing working class militancy, seen in factory occupations, massive wage demands and strikes; as part of the general pattern of crisis in the world capitalist system through the accumulation of internal contradictions and national liberation movements in the so-called Third World. Bourgeois ideology and education attempt to make some sense of the world, a world 'safe for capitalism'. The contrast with the objective facts is glaring. The bourgeois world outlook is in ruins, along with capitalism.

From the first, the Scratch Orchestra has therefore been a truly 'social' body, a product of social and historical change, not a formal body which would collapse with the desertion of some members. The majority of the members were petty bourgeois students and intellectuals with a genuine, serious and principled interest in finding out what was the right way to contribute to society. Active membership in the region of forty to sixty has been maintained by constant infusion of new blood.

The first active phase of public performances was from November 1969 to July 1970. There were seven concerts from November to January, six during April-May, and one in June plus a BBC studio recording of paragraph 2 of Cardew's *Great Learning*. The culmination of this period was the two-week tour - 27 July to 7 August 1970 - playing to country audiences in village halls, etc., the first week in Cornwall, the second in Anglesey, North Wales. Some members now look back on that whole period as the 'Golden Age' of the Scratch Orchestra.

It was certainly a period of great energy and optimism. The *Draft Constitution* proved its strength; concerts were put on. In addition new elements accrued which extended the scope of the Orchestra, and pointed the way to the future development of social involvement. These elements were:

1) Spontaneously and collectively designed programmes to cater for colleges which invited us to play (in contrast to the central idea of the *Draft Constitution*, which was concerts proposed by individual members).

2) Participation in two political events: the Chicago 8 Protest Concert (8) and a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament Rally.

3) The beginning of a movement towards 'environmental events': a well-planned all-day ambulatory concert round the Richmond area, designed by Psi Ellison and Stefan Szczelkun, and a concert in the forecourt of Euston railway station.

Two important lessons emerged from this 'Golden Age', however. At the Chicago 8 concert, which was mainly a pop event, it was clear that, a band of 100 players without discipline was actually weaker than a disciplined band of ten or even five. The other discovery was that, despite some TV coverage in December 1969 in addition to the many concerts, the Scratch Orchestra did not catch on with the public. And in fact to this day almost the only occasions when the Orchestra can count on a large audience are at intermittent performances of Cardew's *Great Learning* (roughly three times a year), and much rarer performances of works by Christian Wolff, etc.; and this is due almost entirely to the reputation of the composer, not the Scratch Orchestra, and the publicity grapevine of Victor Schonfield's Music Now organisation, which spreads its tendrils amongst the 'progressive', avant-garde elements of the musical 'establishment'. Although if you take the country as a whole there are large numbers who have heard of the Scratch Orchestra - amongst art students and the like interested in the avant-garde only on exceptional occasions such as the Liverpool concert (January 1972) has the audience been large on the strength of the Orchestra's reputation. Perhaps because of the odd locations of many of our events and the frequent disappointment of those who do see us we have mostly outnumbered the audience. There seem to be, as yet, few regular Scratch concert-goers.

Why then did the Scratch Orchestra not disintegrate through lack of the

encouragement of public support, lack of direction and its own internal ultra-democracy?

1) Ironically, the usual need for public support (and thus the search for audience) - the need for money - was no problem. The fees from TV and a number of concerts at arts festivals and the like, supported by the Arts Council and similar funds, that is by the state and private industry, have proved sufficient to meet the expenses of travel, publicity and the staging of other ventures as well. No member of the Orchestra received fees for performances. All our appearances were financial failures, judged on a profit-loss basis, but could be subsidised from the earnings of a few avant-garde concerts, smiled on by the establishment. Thus the bourgeois ruling class, which in every other case, even where human life is at stake, demands that everything should 'pay its way' or 'realise a profit', in the case of avant-garde culture is prepared to corrupt any potential threat to the worship of dead idols and present-day mediocrity, tame it, and thus house-trained, actively promote such rubbish - bourgeois liberal, idealistic, anarchistic and nihilistic art. Thus with the Scratch Orchestra. While the merry-go-round continued to turn there was no concern with winning an audience, or, as it was usually put, 'making concessions to the public'. Thus also there was no idea that the Orchestra must grow, gain strength and improve... develop or die. The activity was an end in itself. In this way the capitalist system, now in its terminal stage, deludes people with an imaginary world without change, either growth or decay, where money - the 'cash nexus' which alone links humans together in social relationships amongst the bourgeoisie; money - the 'god' of capitalist society - is thought to have the mystical property of sustaining life itself in near corpses. State or industrial subsidy is to the arts in the bourgeois world what expensive medical technology, like heart transplants, is to the moribund. The function of bourgeois art at this stage is not to make bourgeois society seem any brighter (that is now impossible) but to make it universal - so that pessimism, defeatism and nihilism are seen to be rooted in 'Man'.

2) However, although this financial support did ensure survival in the early

stages, this aspect was not absolutely fundamental. The Scratch Orchestra was not constituted with a clearly defined aim, like most cultural groups, whether to play the blues or avant-garde music. It fulfilled a deeper social need for a number of people who were already involved in that kind of activity in many cases. In a kind of blind way it was known from the first, and can be seen in the scope of the *Draft Constitution* with its spur to research projects that the Scratch Orchestra had some functional role in present-day social change. As yet this was only glimpsed in bourgeois idealism, the search for some ideal way of organising people to a common task without infringing their 'individuality' or establishing any hierarchy to the detriment of 'equality': some vague anarchism lay at the root, with its starry-eyed faith in 'human nature if freed from authority', the abstraction of human nature from its class context.

3) The *Draft Constitution* was the unifying factor. It provided a stimulating base from which to organise concerts. It encouraged ideas, composition and activities which drew together all the disparate elements of the membership.

4) The quality of leadership by Cardew was another important factor which held the Orchestra together. It vindicates the Marxist concept of natural leadership; the idea that human groups provide the leaders appropriate to the realisation of their needs. Certainly this does not mean the 'Führer principle' - the bogey which so many 'democratic' liberals see in the term 'leadership'. No, this leadership has been neither imposed, nor induced by some personality cult, but by the way in which Cardew and the *Draft Constitution* he wrote managed, for a time, to channel the aspirations and activities of a body of people in a way meaningful to all of them, which brought out the best in them. Cardew's role in the orchestra has been important, but it must not be exaggerated. Indeed, the manner of leadership in the Orchestra is now in the process of change as we search out a new role in society. In the end, leadership is only the guiding element in a more fundamental social trend. The true potential strength of the Scratch Orchestra lies with the membership, and its future reflection of the militant, revolutionary aspirations and struggle of the proletariat in an artistic

form.

The *Draft Constitution* was the last word in liberalism. 'Anything goes' was the policy and any discussion of the merits of a proposal was outlawed. However, this had a beneficial aspect, for the *Constitution* stressed the importance of actually organising activities. This was a break with sterile and detached preoccupations, with 'criticism' which paralyse and degenerate most bourgeois art movements. In this atmosphere a kind of collective confidence grew out of the common activity of work together. Instead of one or two individuals doing everything, new and younger people were encouraged to put their ideas into practice, and this released a lot of initiative. By encouraging the active participation of everyone, individualism was opposed and this created fertile conditions for the introduction of the new ideas of Marxism-Leninism. The respect for real work, actual leadership and for putting ideas into practice made many members receptive to the Marxist-Leninist principle of integrating theory with practice in order to change society, and working as a collective.

All these factors, then, enabled the Scratch Orchestra to establish, during the initial 'Golden Age' (November 1969 to July 1970) the resilience of a complex network of personal relationships, generating a sense of equality and mutual respect amongst the membership through the experience of much work done in common at many concerts, that has enabled it to survive so many disappointments and the threat of collapse through internal contradictions. During this initial phase of hectic growth which firmly established a sense of 'Scratch identity' the Orchestra was not yet forced to face those contradictions; therefore it developed in a positive and fruitful way for the time being.

In fact there were already factors at work which would bring this honeymoon atmosphere to an end; or perhaps we should say, which marked a new development since, strictly speaking, there have been no 'beginnings', no 'ends', no clearly defined periods but a continuous process of change from which we are trying to extract formative trends and find the points where the development took significant steps forward.

The village hall concert tour at the turn of July-August 1970 seemed to sum up the achievement of Scratch Orchestra identity. Here was a group of Scratchers, relaxed and with a wealth of shared experience working and alert to learn more. Amongst the Orchestra there was diminishing interest in the formal concert. In the country the Scratch came across a different kind of audience. The reception was friendly and good-natured by people who had not heard of Cage or Stockhausen. People joined in and played with the Scratchers. People in the country seemed to have the self-assurance and emotional maturity to enable them to accommodate this 'foreign body'. This was in stark contrast to the crippling inhibition and alienation amongst the usual audiences in London and in colleges the 'respectable' and the 'intellectual', the bourgeois and the petty bourgeois (9).

At the time the reaction of the Orchestra was to lay blame for this failure on the audience, the common vice of the 'avant-garde' bourgeois through this century. What was not realised was that in the village hall tour we had encountered a different class, the rural proletariat. But an accumulation of similar experiences, for instance with bystanders at later environmental events in towns who were usually working class adults and children, gradually made some members aware of the class basis of culture, through our education at the hands of audiences: on the one hand there was the inhibited, passively 'appreciative', intellectual reaction of the bourgeois and petty bourgeois; on the other hand the more relaxed, spontaneous and honest reaction of the proletariat. Eventually some members came to fully understand through practical experience (not theory alone) this correct analysis of culture by Mao Tsetung:

'In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics.' (*Talks at the Yen'an Forum on Literature and Art*, 1942.)

With September 1970 we enter the second phase of the Scratch Orchestra's development. It began in a spirit of great optimism after the village

hall tour, and ended in the disillusionment and recriminations of the Discontent Meetings of August 1971. During this period the hitherto submerged contradictions already outlined began to sharpen and break through the hardening crust of the 'old' Scratch Orchestra. There were six concerts in November, six in December 1970, mostly in universities, art colleges and concert halls. But a change was on the way, with more environmental work, and work impinging on society and the community after Christmas. A section of the Orchestra were increasingly attracted by the challenge of this kind of activity, and they began to make the pace in the production of concert proposals. But disillusionment was to come, with the fiasco at the Metro Club, Notting Hill, in 12 June 1971. Here we were faced with a club for young immigrants, oppressed by the bourgeois ruling class and therefore the natural enemy of capitalist society. There had been several arrests in a riot with the police at the club the previous week and there was a display board of telegrams and messages of support from black liberation movements the world over. What did the Scratch Orchestra produce? *A Toy Symphony* - a typical Scratch atavism, return to childhood. We experienced at last the true nature of our almost total incompetence and the total irrelevance of the Scratch Orchestra in its present form in the modern world (10). But even with this experience, social awareness of the futility of everything we stood for - bourgeois art and society - did not come yet (except for the Communist members who were to provide leadership into the next stage). It did not come until we ourselves, as an orchestra, were the direct victims of this same social and cultural oppression experienced daily by black people and the working class throughout the 'free world'. This blow, which finally brought the Scratch Orchestra to its senses, was to fall within a fortnight of the Metro Club fiasco, when it went on tour to Newcastle, Durham and the North East from 21-26 June 1971. But we will come to that later.

Two features of this period must be noted. The first was the gathering rival attraction of the so-called Scratch subgroups (generally agreed to be a misnomer). As the problems of Scratch Orchestra development became greater

many of the ‘musicians’ tended to devote increasing attention to their small groups, such as PTO, Harmony Band and Private Company, to name a sample (11). Such parallel development had for a time its good points; it was natural to try out ideas with the confidence gained through Scratch Orchestra experience, in more manageable groups of fewer numbers and greater homogeneity. However, as a result, a definite decline in new ideas and composition for the Scratch Orchestra did take place, and this in turn dispirited people who wanted to get on performing new compositions, and who favoured music in the concert hall to social involvement with the environment.

The second, and complementary feature of this reduction in ‘musical’ content was the rise of the ‘non-musicians’ to take the initiative largely vacated by the ‘musicians’. The appearances of the Scratch Orchestra had always had the character of ‘Happenings’, but now this more provocative role (playing aboard trains in the Underground, etc.) became predominant; and it was accompanied by diminishing attendance by many orchestra members at public appearances, especially amongst the ‘musicians’. However, as always, performances of Cardew’s *Great Learning*, for instance Paragraphs 2 and 7 for a recording by Deutsche Grammophon on 15 February 1971, for their series *Avant Garde*; and other Paragraphs at St Pancras Church on 17 April 1971, for the Camden Arts Festival; and at the Wandel Concert at the German Institute on 13 May 1971; these events brought Scratchers back together to work sometimes for a number of weeks of rehearsal before performance. So the rupture between ‘musicians’ and ‘non-musicians’ was contained. In fact the polarisation of the groups did not go too far, and there were always people playing a positive role in Scratch development with a foot in both camps. As with the case of ‘periods’ of development, ‘musicians’ and ‘non-musicians’ were not discrete entities; we use them rather to distinguish divergent tendencies within the Orchestra.

Now it is necessary to describe the events of this period in more detail to bring the experience of the Orchestra (and thus our analysis) to life.

After the village concerts of July-August 1970 the Scratch Orchestra went

back to routine concerts, and the audience reaction compared unfavourably. Except for the first appearance at the German Institute on 11 December 1970, organised by Greg Bright, which was well-rehearsed and where we were playing to an audience tuned in to avant-garde music, audience alienation was often painfully obvious; for instance at the Queen Elizabeth Hall concert of 23 November 1970 (12), and at Leeds and Essex Universities on 27 and 28 November. It was probably as a natural reaction to disappointing contact with the audience that a group emerged within the Orchestra - the self-dubbed Slippery Merchants - which organised, in secret, events to occur coincidentally during Scratch concerts. On 'aesthetic' grounds this could be seen as an extension of the tradition of John Cage - randomness and simultaneity. The intervention of the Merchants thus added an unexpected note of drama at some concerts and as a result provided newsworthy items for reporters or critics, desperate to find something they could understand - sensation - for their papers, on the occasions they were present, as at the Queen Elizabeth Hall concert. Perhaps it did not strike too many of the 'musicians' at the time, but for the audience the appearance of the Slippery Merchants in strange attire and performing inexplicable actions more or less completely swamped interest in the music.

Were the Slippery Merchants a valuable development for the Scratch Orchestra? In the end, yes. Because although their activities were finally to prove negative and vacuous (they were to disband themselves by April 1971) they did serve to sharpen the contradictions within the Scratch Orchestra, and therefore probably accelerated the ensuing crisis of the 'old' Scratch Orchestra.

The Slipperies often moved in among the audience at concerts, initially in the manner of clowns at the circus to bring contact with the audience down to a personal face-to-face level, incidentally providing good fun; but increasingly to talk to people, and this was a positive step. At Scratch meetings they proposed many events to happen in public places, on the grounds that random and surprising appearances of people playing music and dressed in some amazing cos-

tune, or Wig Out as they called it, would shock people, if only for a short while, out of their alienation into a deeper awareness of each other. The School Raids (sudden, clandestine swoops on school playgrounds round London) were an example of this. And in future Scratch activities, even though formally disbanded as a group, the Slipperies' ideas came strongly to the fore, partly because of the dearth of alternatives. There was the Primrose Hill Walk organised by Catherine Williams on 15 May 1971, and the three events of Birgit Burckhardt: Scratch Below, which consisted of random appearances on the tube or subway, taking place over the whole day of 19 May 1971; the Demolition Site Event to attract the children of a working class locality on May 22nd; and the event where the Scratch Orchestra attempted to 'merge with Highgate Cemetery' on May 29th - paying our respects at the grave of Karl Marx, almost in unconscious anticipation of the future turn of events in the Orchestra. These experiences, notably the Tube Event, were important in stimulating social awareness, and consequently the questioning of the role of an orchestra such as ours in society today.

It is curious how vividly such environmental events - with their unexpected encounters and crazy situations - remain in the memory, although they were failures in reality, compared to the more formal, characteristic 'Scratch Music' presentations in concert halls; that is for those who were there, and by now many of the original people were absent from these latest developments, the point of growth and conflict. This split in experience, which had been shared previously, goes far to explain the problem of healing the rift within the Orchestra which is still current. Those of us who are reluctant to abandon 'old' Scratch idealism and anarchy tend to be the people with least experience of this kind of event.

But the vacuity of the trend of these events began to weigh heavily on everyone. Take for instance the environmental event composed by Hugh Shrapnel, which took place on and below some dramatic cliffs on the Dorset coast in February 1971. What did it achieve? It was in many ways a beautiful

experience, but largely because of the sheer amazing good fortune of the weather; the day turned out like a clear, warm day in mid-summer, ideal for cooking in the open, scrambling round rocks, etc. But who could share the experience? The seagulls, who echoed with their cries the Bach Prelude of a solitary cellist playing on a remote crag! And one or two incurious cliff walkers. Although some of the more formal avant-garde concerts seemed to bring periodic revival of the old spirit, for instance Greg Bright's *Balkan Sobranie Smoking Mixture* concert at Ealing Town Hall on 25 February 1971, and the Wandel Concert at the German Institute on 13 May, people became generally discouraged even with the 'old' Scratch music.

Things came to a head quite quickly when the crisis came. On June 12th there was the unnerving experience at the Metro Club. Then came the tour of the North East of notorious memory - from June 21 - 26th five concerts arranged and sponsored by Northern Arts. At the very first, at the Newcastle Civic Centre, the civic authorities intervened and forced the abandonment of the concert on the grounds of obscenity. Cardew, in accordance with the instructions of Greg Bright's piece *Sweet F.A.*, was writing four-letter words (now apparently permissible on TV) on toilet paper. In addition they banned us from returning to the Newcastle Civic Centre, as had already been arranged, for the final concert of the tour. The local and then the national press scented scandal (and something to fill up their papers, because it was the 'silly season' when there is little political news). For the rest of the tour the Scratch Orchestra was hounded by the press, and the Sunderland concert was disrupted by newsmen. In a concentrated and vivid way the corruption, hypocrisy and worthlessness of the 'establishment' - the decaying, senile bourgeois ruling class - was rammed home in personal experience. The drivelling reports in the papers were a mixture of downright lies and ludicrous distortions in an effort to infuse sensation into our harmless activities. For instance: 'A man dressed in an ankle-length leather coat and wearing a beret was playing with plastic cups and writing obscene words on toilet paper. I saw a group of young children playing around

his feet. It turned out to be Cornelius Cardew, a modern composer and leader of the Scratch Orchestra.' This was laughable, but this smear campaign to discredit Cardew as a composer had its sinister side, with the attempt to drag the Royal Academy of Music into the scandal, hoping to strip him of his status as Professor of Composition.

The hypocrisy of local councillors, civic dignitaries and other lackeys of the ruling class became very clear as they spoke pompously of 'defending the civic dignity of Newcastle', with the inevitable reiteration of the cost of the Civic Centre (five million pounds), and the waste of 'public funds', 'tax-payers' money' on Scratch Orchestra expenses (£150 but reported as £250). All this to stir hatred of the Scratch Orchestra in particular, and of 'avant-garde, rebel intellectuals and lofties' in general. What on earth was our crime? All this in an area which has consistently shown some of the highest unemployment figures in the country every year since the Depression years of the '30s! And this itself is due, as is the decline of bourgeois culture, to the decline of the British bourgeoisie and the decay of British monopoly capitalism.

But of course the oppression we experienced was trivial. Our worst experience was to be thrown off the land where we were camping by the landlord who came to read of our activities. Although trivial compared to the material insecurity and deprivation and the psychological degradation forced by capitalism on millions of working class people, especially in the so-called 'underdeveloped' countries, this experience was enough, as Marx put it, to make us feel 'at least threatened in (our) conditions of existence'. Most important, it was an experience of oppression, not as individuals which many young feel today, but as an orchestra for the first time. In the excitement (and humour) of the situation the barriers to discussion began to fail (13). The role of the Orchestra, its position in relation to the class struggle, was now in the process of being defined - in the usual way class is defined, by the oppressor. A group of genial eccentrics (you might call us) were under attack from established authority. Why? Previously without political awareness as a group, the politicisation of the

Scratch Orchestra was begun. From this moment the 'old' Scratch Orchestra was dead; it merely remained to bury it. Perhaps significantly, but certainly unconsciously, Michael Chant's proposal had been adopted for the format of the Newcastle tour: the Dealer Concert concept. By this all existing, unused Scratch proposals were used up in one great welter of simultaneity.

Recognition of the crisis was confirmed with the project to build a cottage as an environment for activity, designed by Stefan Szczelkun, for the contribution of the Scratch Orchestra to the Arts Spectrum Exhibition at Alexandra Palace for two weeks in August. As Michael Chant says of this:

'The Orchestra could pull together sufficiently to build a fire hazard, unfit for human habitation, and then withdraw to write its discontents. It became apparent that, like the cottage, the Orchestra was just a shell without any real substance.'

The contradictions, which had sharpened over two years, burst out with the Discontent Meetings of 23 and 24 August 1971 - John Tilbury led in positively by presenting a Marxist analysis of the deterioration and vacuity of bourgeois cultural activity, as part of the general picture of social and political decay within the capitalist world today, but with particular reference to the Scratch Orchestra. Under this stimulus the Scratch Orchestra began to polarise into two groups: the 'Communists' and the 'bourgeois idealists', the latter composing a wide range of more or less nebulous and contradictory views.

What, precisely, was the line put forward by John Tilbury?

After two years of activity, during which the whole gamut of contemporary bourgeois art has been explored, the Scratch Orchestra has reached an impasse. Either you sell your product on the market, or you drop out; this constitutes the dilemma of the bourgeois artist. The function of the Scratch Orchestra, if it is to remain bourgeois, is the mystification and further intensification of this dilemma, which is abstracted from its class context, universalised, and thus becomes "Man's Dilemma".'

Tilbury asked Mao Tsetung's question: Whom do we serve, which class do

we support? Answer: clearly, the ruling class of the bourgeoisie. What was the reaction of those who feared the Communist line? As Tilbury says:

‘Bourgeois idealism in the Scratch Orchestra, represented by anarchists and liberals, is characterised by simple accumulation of activities, fragmentation, and separation of ideas; and above all, by a pathological disunity between theory and practice.’ That is to say: despite the pious intentions of members to make contact with people, they were unable to carry them out in practice. Many different approaches were tried, but in a haphazard manner. Since there was no scientific base, no theory, no means of judging practice, they remained at the level of gimmicks, and certainly did not represent proper research into the problem of audience. Our files were full of proposed events that no one looked at again for the most part.

How could the Orchestra go forward? It should develop ‘. . . a revolutionary, Communist line using the method of Marxism and postulating dialectical change, the fusion and struggle of ideas and, most crucially, that (in the words of Mao Tsetung) “our thinking and feelings be changed and remoulded by gradually shedding our bourgeois world outlook and acquiring the proletarian, Communist outlook”.’ (14)

The clarity of the communist line put forward by John Tilbury and Keith Rowe brought together a smallish, but ideologically powerful group, containing Cornelius Cardew and some others of the most loyal and energetic Scratchers. They set up an Ideology Group to meet on a fortnightly basis; it set out, as Tilbury says, ‘to study the works of the great revolutionary leaders, primarily Marx, Lenin and Mao Tsetung, in order to attack and expose the cultural superstructure of imperialism, with particular reference to music in England, and to evolve music and music-making which would serve the working and oppressed people of England.’

The approach of the group to its own development and its role in the Orchestra could be summed up in the slogan: ‘Unity - Criticism - Unity’. That is to say, a deliberate, long-term view of the future of the Scratch Orchestra

was taken. There could be no miraculous transformation. Only steady work and progress step by step could carry the Scratch Orchestra forward.

The stimulus of the Ideology Group has proved a challenge to many of the active members who remain unconvinced, even suspicious and afraid of the demand by the 'Communists' that the Scratch Orchestra get involved actively in the class struggle. Fruitful and healthy competition developed between the 'Communists' and 'bourgeois idealists'. From 30 August to 3 September 1971 a Summer School was held to raise the level of musical knowledge, instrumental technique and composition. John Tilbury gave a talk on Marxism, the first open effort to raise the political consciousness of the Orchestra. And even though it had been planned before the Discontents, and with a view to the education of the public (who never materialised), this Summer School represented (if in an embryonic form) a new development amongst the old Morley College nucleus, away from randomness and 'freedom' towards music organised to express some intended content. From September this trend became conscious, with regular meetings of the Scratch Orchestra (with quite a number of enthusiastic newcomers) on a weekly basis to practise music, and thus encourage the flow of new pieces and raise the level of public performance by proper rehearsal for concerts. The next Scratch appearance was not scheduled till January so that the Orchestra had time to rehearse, and consolidate the lessons learnt from the summer crisis. To this end, every third week's meeting was to be devoted to discussion of the compositions, the problem of the audience (what sort, how to reach it, how we could serve it), and thus further the process of political education and establish a clear, unanimous line in the class struggle.

These changes proved their worth in the higher level of rehearsal and performance of Cardew's *Great Learning Paragraph 5* at Cecil Sharp House on 21 January 1972, and the premier performance in Britain of Christian Wolff's piece *Burdocks* also at Cecil Sharp House on 28 March. However, these were pieces written for the 'old' Scratch Orchestra. When it came to our first composition for the 'new' Orchestra - the performance of two versions of a scene from Sweet F.A. (15) in combined opera-ballet form at the Bluecoat Hall concert in Liverpool on 26 January 1972, which depicted the struggle and triumph

of a group of revolutionaries over a crowd of hippy students (loosely based on real events during the Newcastle tour) then we have to confess a musical failure. But it was only the first effort, and the 'Communists', far from being discouraged, have resolved to learn the lessons of the experience. We overreached ourselves. Our first task was to learn from the people, then try out composition and performance, constantly testing theory against practice, returning again to the theory, thus progressing from small experiments eventually to real work for the proletariat, as the general level of political understanding, revolutionary solidarity, and the necessary musical skills are raised, step by step.

So this third phase, from July 1971 up to the time of writing May 1972, has been hesitant at times, but positive steps have been made, which show that the Scratch Orchestra is undergoing a qualitative change, after the quantitative accumulation of two years' experience, during which the contradictions within the Orchestra (also in the capitalist world in general) have matured and sharpened. We are undergoing an evolution from a lower to a higher stage of development. As a whole the period shows:

1) That the Scratch Orchestra has not broken up as people might have feared at the time of the Discontents. The established network of friendships, based on mutual respect, seems strong enough to weather the storms of the process of change.

2) That, under the impact of the Ideology Group, the Scratch Orchestra is capable of increasing its level of musical ability and performance potential of improvement through perseverance in rehearsal that was rarely seen before. The Scratch Orchestra has taken on a new lease of life. Members glimpse a future ahead with a sense of direction.

3) That, since all factions are stimulating each other to higher levels of performance, the Scratch Orchestra is now turning its attention to the interest of the audience.

4) But that we have much still to learn before we can solve the question of the audience, and how to serve the struggle of the oppressed working class. To

learn more, with each public appearance we now programme time for discussion with the audience during concerts (so far with mixed and limited results, but at least a step in the right direction).

5) That Cardew's idea that the Scratch Orchestra should establish working relations with the class of working, professional musicians (some were brought in to participate in *Paragraph 5* and *Burdocks*) is good, since it stimulates the Orchestra to raise its own technical standards, and is a direct point of contact with working musicians in our society.

With the lessons of our past development in mind the Scratch Orchestra can begin to lay plans, and progress towards the future with hope. It must develop solidarity with the revolutionary class the working class - in the only way possible, by joining them. That would be a noble contribution to the struggle, and the final march to victory over the decaying fascist system of monopoly capitalism.

'Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.' KARL MARX and FRIEDERICH ENGELS, *Communist Manifesto*, 1848.

The message of the times is clear. What is our role?

'Proletarian literature and art are part of the whole proletarian cause; they are, as Lenin said, cogs and wheels in the whole revolutionary machine.' MAO TSETUNG, *Talks at the Yen'an Forum on Literature and Art*, 1942.

SMASH THE DECAYING IDEOLOGICAL AND  
CULTURAL SUPERSTRUCTURE!

SMASH THE BOURGEOIS CLASS AND ITS CORRUPT  
CAPITALIST SYSTEM!

DOWN WITH IMPERIALISM!