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14 June 2010

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MOZART. Dice Composed Waltzes and Contredanscs, KS! 6. Solidac Experimental Computer directed by T. H. O'Beirne. Barr and Stroud Q SD888/1 (12 in., 32s. 6d.). Barr and Stroud Ltd., Caxton Street, Anniesland, Glasgow, W3.

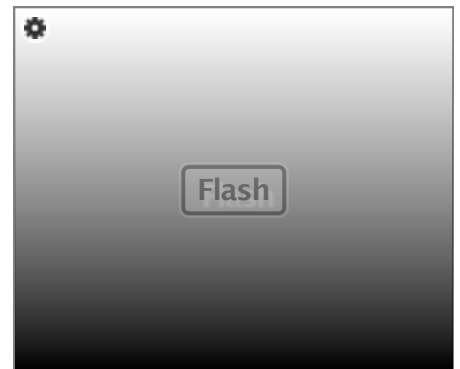
A favourite eighteenth-century musical game, played by Mozart, Haydn and others, was to write a simple dance-piece with eleven melodic variants for each bar (in which however the harmony remained unchanged): dice were then cast for each successive bar of the composition, and according to the numbers obtained the appropriate variants were selected. In this way a 16-bar piece was capable of producing —so Mr O'Beirne tells us, and I haven't the time for the moment to count up on my fingers to see if he's right—something like a thousand million million variants. With the help of a small digital computer (certainly quicker than throwing dice), some three dozen variants of a waltz and of a contredanse by Mozart have been put together, and they are here played by the computer itself, using a rectangular wave "not unlike a clarinet" though with a distinct "chuff" at the start of each note. To lessen the aural monotony of this modestly interesting exercise, the variants are split up into groups of four, each group being presented at a different pitch— though the computer's key-sense differs radically from mine, and I am reconciled to our not agreeing on what, for example, the note D is—and the tuning is not in equal temperament but in closer approximations to just intonation. Not something one can listen right through a side to; but quite ingenious. Melodically it's noticeable how much more satisfactory the contredanse is than the waltz; but the music, such as it is, loses a good deal by omitting everything but the top line. L.S.



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