

function, such as the assertion of territory, but seem to serve the musicians' own general aesthetic demands. The recordings on this CD make a point against Darwin – clearly, the singing of dogs is not an outlet for erotic sentiment (on the other hand dogs – clearly? – do not derive their tunes from speech).

2

Singer dogs make use of a much richer palette of vocalizations than wolves, for instance, so that even the human listener is quick to tell their music apart from other nuances of their repertoire. To create a situation in which to do so, however, he will have to use discretion. The dogs are suspicious of the admirers of their art and, like all *dilettanti*, prefer to practise it unobserved. Both sexes and all ages join in the performance, the sexual element being wholly absent, as noted. The whelps go through a period of apprenticeship. At first they can be heard to yelp along somewhat cluelessly (though adding, one could argue, a charming chime to the *tutti*). Then, with a little experience (a lot of them will never catch on), they sopranize in support of the lead singers' strenuous *falsetti*. For in every ensemble one finds specially talented individuals who are recognized by the entire group as superior in the musical domain – it is not in general the alpha dog that sets the tone. The gradation of skills makes for an inevitable distribution of artistic function. On the flank of the stars the accompaniment builds the harmonic base, while a s(t)olid rhythm section occasionally provides mordents and mordant interventions, otherwise doggedly confining the more gifted to cynic tradition. (I have heard ensembles composed of singers only: they can go astoundingly far above the possibilities of the average orchestra.)

Canine music takes place in every season, by day or night and in all meteorological conditions, although external factors do influence the performance to some extent. The intervals between performances vary, on the average the pieces are clustered some two or more hours apart. The individual pieces are of a well-chosen length, rarely exceeding three minutes, and sufficiently structured (by which it is not maintained that their variability can always satisfy). Often the piece starts with a prelude by one or two soloists. Then the chorus comes delicate-

ly in, by and by developing the score to a point where the intensity of evoked feeling begins to question the proposed aesthetic order. While the protagonists strive to uphold form, chorus and rhythm section abandon themselves to their enthusiasm (the rhythm section growing in numbers as the elaboration proceeds); in furious *crescendi*, climaxes are reached which sometimes subside to an ordered retreat in quite intricate *cadenzas*. Unfortunately there is no extensive structural analysis of canine music to date, as far as I can see; no musicologist seems to have taken Spencer's hint. But even without the scholarly prerequisites the amateur has no difficulties identifying individual choirs, even if team styles may not be dramatically diverse on the surface. I can safely say that huge differences in quality exist and that *Jeremy's Team* of 1999/2000 – Bones, Chicken, Coco, Flash, Fubab, Raygun, Redbear, Tilt and two puppies of different age – play in the master league. (On second thoughts I do feel that their barking or rhythm section is at times a little preponderant, then again for obvious reasons I do not wish to point out names here.)

Can we then make out real compositions with a musical character that sets them off against others? I leave the answer to the listener. Yet clearly no-one can content himself with stock psychological explanations such as »group bonding«. The peculiar enjoyability of this music, which – in contrast to much contemporary human music – stands the test of repeated listening, forces one to the conclusion that, to the dogs at least, an abstract aesthetic experience constitutes the »figure« of their play. The »ground«, however, looms a perpetual mournfulness that cannot be accounted for in aesthetic terms. The wail is not about circumstance, chain, or hunger – conspicuously Creation itself stands indicted and I understand: *tua res agitur*.