

The Contour of the Void:

Madness and Mediation in Sir Peter Maxwell Davies's *Eight Songs for a Mad King*

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In “The Presence of Mediation” Roger Copeland writes, “The ongoing critique of theatrical presence is [...] valuable insofar as it reminds us that no experience (no matter how ‘live’) is entirely unmediated.” The inevitability of mediated presence, then, begs the question of how mediation interacts with and informs contemporary understandings of presence and liveness, particularly within multimedia interdisciplinary performance. Reading through Foucault, Baudrillard, and Agamben to consider the relationship between madness, mediation, and music, I will engage a recent performance of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies's *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969) by the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE) that makes explicit the mediation, technological and otherwise, performed upon the musicians and singer. In this new production, performed in October 2005 in New York City's PS 122, ICE's director, Lydia Steier, emphasized the performative qualities of madness, reimagining the King's fall from grace and from sense through issues of surveillance, representation, and the inherent politics of subjecthood: Via a larger-than-life real-time projection of the King (performed by tenor Peter Tantsits) and SpyCams placed on each of the musician's bodies, the immediate contradiction of live body and mediated fragment create a perceptual discord between body and representation, sound and image, which works in tandem with the King's own mediated presence, and, in doing so, points toward the multiple political resonances and aesthetic possibilities within twenty-first-century configurations of the digitized body.