Nineteenth-Century Programme Music: Creation, Negotiations, Reception
Edited by Jonathan Kregor, Brepols 2018

Nineteenth-Century Programme Music (2018) is a large-scale edited volume providing diverse perspectives from 23 scholars, based on revised versions of their papers from the eponymously titled conference in Lucca (2016). As such it gives us a snapshot of where research of this familiar subject had got to in the early twenty-first century. It is divided into large themes, and the provision of abstracts is very helpful in navigating such a large volume. However, as with all conference proceedings, there is a question of how much to include (what would ultimately advance the field beyond definitive studies such as Niecks, 1907; Scruton in Grove, 2001 and the one by the editor Jonathan Kregor, *Program Music* from CUP, 2014). The second is how much editorial control or steering should be exercised, which as ever is also a question of time and resources.

The approach to editing here is pretty much *laissez faire*, favouring diversity over focus and overall quality. This probably paid off in allowing some notably interesting contributions that have otherwise not got in, language diversity, and a few chapters which are thought-provoking even if a little rough (my review will skip only a few chapters). But it also resulted in a certain incoherence, from a simple decision of which English spelling to go with (starting with the word 'program(me)' itself), to a crucial decision about defining the conceptual boundaries of what constitutes programme music, as opposed to every other case of musical heteronomy. (Of course any such decision is risky and potentially open to criticism, but that in itself is a good thing).

The second problem arising from overinclusion is the inevitable of uneven quality and relevance. Some chapters are not saying much that is new or useful in the field of programme music per se, even if they hold some other interest. To give an example of the latter: Angela Mace Christian shows interesting evidence of the origins of Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte* in Nocturnes by Field and Berger, both through primary sources (the Mendelssohns' music library) and a little comparative analysis. The relevance to programme music is really tenuous, however. Likewise, Rebecca Day's chapter on Mahler is a *tour de force* in analytical form studies, but programmatic considerations are only secondary to it. Both chapters present valuable but mislocated scholarship that is in danger of being overlooked for that reason, which is a pity. These authors should really be encouraged to republish elsewhere.

Given issues of quality, coherence and relevance, the collective import of this book might be lost too. So the rest of the review will try to pull this together. A good place to start is by noting the essential difference between research that primarily focuses on the music, and one that focuses on historical discourse about the music. The two are linked of course, inasmuch as discourse *about* programme music has determined compositional decisions and strategies in the same historical era. Nevertheless, much of the public discourse on programme music, especially that generated by mid-Nineteenth Century quarrels around Liszt's symphonic poems, was primarily about cultural power. This comes clearly enough from the most rigorously researched chapters on critical reception in this book. It is also clear that this rhetorically inflated partisan quarrel was designed on both sides for the wider, and largely musically illiterate public arena. General claims for the convergence of the arts vs. accusations of formlessness were convenient cyphers for more complex differences that were beyond the musical-theoretical competence of the intended readership. More importantly, it

was beyond the competence of the music theory that existed at the time. We live with that legacy. The concepts used in the quarrel have been taken too much at face value, to the extent that it has affected modern musicology's ability to investigate the real history of composition. It reminds me of the way nationalist narratives about music have distorted transcultural realities. I will return to this point at the very end.

There are two main routes to progress that come out of this book: a critical deconstruction of opinion making and reception on the one hand, and a more critical and analytical approach to the repertoire on the other. A comparison between chapters by Jonathan Kregor and Stephanie Klauk make this point well. Kregor provides a useful comparison of competing narratives of the concept's origins from the familiar one by Liszt (1854–55) to Bischoff (1858), Riemann (1882), Corder (1883), and Niecks (1907). 'Historical origins', as Kregor concludes, 'are ever moving targets, with new or lost back stories…' (396). Klauk on the other hand tries to approach the origins of programme music afresh, bypassing the historical story tellers by focusing on underreported repertoires. Contesting the received idea of Beethoven being a pioneer of chamber music programme music, Klauk shows late Eighteenth-Century antecedents of tempo and character contrasts at structural moments in movements that foreshadow music such as the first movement of Beethoven's Op. 13. Klauk's chapter is unique in this book, and to my mind truly thought-provoking for asking essential ontological and analytical questions about a generic point of origin.

These two different approaches to historical investigation are complementary, of course. They can be bridged within a single methodology, most notably the traditional manuscript research, which can provide powerful insights into both compositional process and reception. Tatiana Ermolaeva's chapter on Tchaikovsky is a good example of this potential. Ermolaeva excavates MS. as means of understanding the suspicions surrounding programmaticism in professional circles. Equally, her study exposes hidden programmes that shed light on the compositional process. However, the two histories of reception and composition may suggest separate routes of development as well. For example, Kregor's chapter can lead to further questions about cultural power and influence. Klauk's chapter invites further concrete historical and analytical questions such as: did Beethoven actually build on the repertoire presented in this chapter? (Where can we find more evidence for this?). Is Beethoven's programmaticism qualitatively different or somehow more modern? Is it closer to the programmaticism of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* and Liszt's symphonic poems? Such questions require more analaysis and probably, in the end, a larger-scale theory.

There are three other main ontological questions about programme music in this volume. The first is about how we understand visual arts as the programme; the second is about ownership (who gets to define the programme); and the third, related to the second, is more specifically about the status of implicit programmes.

The fine arts serving as the basis of programme music is a fairly familiar if relatively neglected area of research that deserves more development. Where research can go further is demonstrated by two instructive chapters by Mariateresa Storino and Nicolas Dufutel respectively. Storino's chapter is seeking and finding a religious context for Liszt's last symphonic poem, *From the Cradle to the Grave* (1881), through and beyond the drawing by Mihály Zichy on which it is based. The 'beyond' is a contextual and paratextual analysis of Liszt's philosophical concepts associated with the drawing, and the numerological symbolism of the number three. Dufutel, also writing about Liszt, suggests we should consider the meaning of original score illustrations and, moreover, reinstate such illustrations in future

urtext publications if we are to recapture a fuller programmatic context. This is an interesting and fairly uncontroversial proposition where such illustrations reproduce artwork declared in the programme. But where publishers rather than composers are involved in deciding the content, the status of such illustrations as part of the 'programme proper' is debatable, even if their existence in relation to extra-musical meaning (both private and public) is not.

This brings us to the second question of who owns the programme, which can easily slide to questioning the existence of one. Miloš Zapletal's chapter on early Janáček works deals with this question through a thoughtful study of cultural context. Without recourse to jargon or heavy theory, the author shows that programmaticism is in essence an act of imagination drawing on shared references. He presents a promotional review by Berthold Žalud that provides listeners a 'programme' in the form of evocative imagery made of contemporaneous literary tropes. Though the question of authorship remains unresolved (Janáček may or may not have been behind Žalud's programmatic explications), what is revealed is the extent to which *all* works, whether considered absolute or not, could pass through such 'hermeneutic' forms of criticism that effectively invented programmes for them.

All this sheds light on the critical world of the time, and on the blurred boundaries between absolute and programme music, despite the passionate partisanship these concepts have aroused in the second half of the nineteenth century. Likewise Étienne Jardin, drawing on a broader repertoire played in Parisian concerts between 1884-1899, shows how the distinction between programmatic/absolute music were blurred in the public sphere, and how programmatic readings were quickly created to promote music consumption, rather than for compositional or artistic reasons. Should there be a separate concept for such programmes? More analysis is needed in this area for such questions to be answered.

Fin-de-siecle Vienna is another point of focus for two excellent chapters by Pesce and Joella, which heighten similar questions about the nature of the 'programme' and its ownership. Dolores Pesce provides a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the reception of Liszt's symphonic poems in the first two decades after his death (symbolically 1886-1904, the latter the year of Hanslick's death). Even if we already knew Vienna was a battlefield of contrasting aesthetic opinions around that time, what is really useful is to see how those map into different newspapers affiliated with different demographics and political factions. That these do not map exactly onto aesthetic opinion is an interesting complication in itself, but the chapter as a whole offers a method into extracting more critically and precisely what I have mentioned at the beginning of this review: the cultural power politics behind all the rhetoric. Secondly, this and other chapters already discussed (Kregor, Ermolaeva), show a broad agreement between historical promoters and detractors of programme music alike to place the 'poetic' at the aesthetic pinnacle, whereas mimetic sound effects are placed at the lower end. Tellingly when programme music is attacked, the more concrete narrative and mimetic aspects are those that are invariably signalled out.

In her chapter on Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* (1899; programme revised 1950), Laura Joella similarly shows how the work's programme became a focus for hostile critical reception in 1899. But in fact the haughty rejection of mimesis in contrast to human emotions reveals that the critics were in favour of a different type of heteronomy (emotion) in the end, rather than truly arguing for the autonomy of music. Part of the critical snootiness also seems to stem from the opposite: a frustration at not being able to follow more *concrete* parallels between the poem and the music. Schoenberg's programme is also somewhat unusual in its inclusion of quite a bit of notation. This assumes an educated listener encultured in the

tradition of published Leitmotifs. There is a greater question waiting to be answered, therefore, about the aesthetic response of literate listeners to such an unusually detailed programme.

Those turn-of-the-century Viennese critics that had so much to say about the spillage of programmes into chamber music in *Verklärte Nacht* were clearly unaware of the 'Francesca da Rimini' reference in Ethyl Smyth's Op. 7 (1887), inscribed at the top of the Romanze (third) movement simply as 'Dante. Inf. 5. 121' as revealed in Amy E. Ziegler's chapter. This is among a number of notable chapters about hidden, vague and post-facto programmes that require modern, proactive musicological mediation. Ziegler's first method is to provide persuasive biographical contextual evidence. Second, she analyses the form and some moments in the music in relation to both the composer's life and the story of Dante's Francesca. The mise en abyme ternary structures are quite striking in this work and I was convinced by Ziegler identifying a fusion of motifs and a high climactic point in the middle of the work. What really fascinated me was the undoubted influence of Brahms in this work, and an aesthetic that owed much to Leipzig. This – as well as guarded privacy – could also explain why a deeply felt 'programme' had to be suppressed.

A final strength of this volume is the way it showcases several musical-analytical approaches to programme music which interpret the meaning and ownership of programme in several different ways. Anatole Leikin's 'Performing Chopin's Second Ballade as Gothic Tale' is not so much about performance as it is about *Dies Irae* fragments being well-hidden but present in the Ballade Op. 38, which extends his book-length theory about the 'mystery' of the Preludes Op. 28 (Routledge, 2015). In some ways it is good to have a chapter that takes the music analyst's role in determining a programme to a new extreme, if only to bring to the fore a debate about the limits of programmaticism. There are certainly interesting figurative and intertextural allusions in Leikin's analysis (see esp. Ex. 5a). But the problem is that communicable, topical aspects of the Gothic are conflated in this analysis with motivic permutations too abstract to convey any such association on their own. If a topic cannot be perceived, how can it work as a programme? To give an example (4a): a 'partial inversion' of the chant (^3-^4-^3-^1) is hidden within a lilting 6/8 theme in F major that conveys a traditional pastorale. Whereas the pastorale topic is easily 'programmatical', the highly speculative and permuted *Dies Irae* motif is not.

Compare this with the free, undeclared (in any suggestive title), yet very perceptible and menacing appearance of the *Dies Irae* in Brahms's Op. 118 No. 6, as demonstrated by Joanne Grimalt in the next chapter. Analysis is used again to disinter an undeclared programme, but arguably does not depart from the explicitly 'accessible' aesthetic of programme music and the cultural work it normally does. Grimalt's claims for programmatic aspects and narrative coherence are based mainly on genre associations, tonal scheme (again, a little abstract on their own or without a further argument about generic expectations) and more concretely a sequence of familiar, perceptible topics.

Likewise Michael Saffle on Liszt's *Unstern! - Sinistre – Disastro* (the full title is regrettably not provided) sensitively decodes some Lisztian musical tropes to tease out a programmatic narrative that is more detailed than the archetypal negative-positive pairing of lament and triumph (or its quieter alternative, consolation). The danger, of course, is reading some putative 'codes' too literally (e.g. over-interpreting permutations of the so-called cross motif, similar to the issue with Leikin's article) or following Paul Merrick's semantic taxonomy of Lisztian keys too unquestioningly. But the risks are worthwhile, especially in a repertoire that

has been represented almost exclusively through biographical and tonal-analytical lenses. By opening a hermeneutic window and pointing at the possibilities, both Saffle and Grimalt invite us to follow and take our own risks.

It seems to me the way forward is to combine more detailed technical insights with topical and poetic analysis. There could be many fruitful ways of doing this, and a few are already suggested in this volume. For example, how do we read a persistent Nineteenth-Century topos when it recurs in different decades in contrasting styles? This is the question at the heart of Roberto Scoccimaro's analysis of different manifestations of Goethe's 'Walpurgis Night' in pieces by Berlioz (1830), Mussorgsky (1867), Raff (1876–82), and Widor (1880–88). The interesting proposition here is that, despite big stylistic differences between these composers, three of them show a common thread of an interest in the grotesque. The odd one out is Raff, who eschews any Berliozian or Lisztian grotequery in favour of a more traditional, classical-Romantic idiom reminiscent of Mendelssohn. How representative are these four examples? There is much scope to develop such ideas through greater repertoire context.

Another area of growth is hidden programmes, as we have seen. Day's chapter on Mahler's opens the door to this consideration, but it is Lauri Suurpää which squarely addresses it in an analytical chapter that does not pull any stops: 'Programmatic Narration without an Explicit Programme: The Opening Movement of Sibelius's First Symphony'. Synthesising Schenkerian and sonata-theory perspectives with narrative theory, Suurpää's thesis is that the uncertain duality between E minor and G minor which 'deforms' the classical model of a minor-key sonata form, also generates narrative tension between a hoped-for goal and a fateful, tragic, preordained one. It is an attractive reading, and one reinforced by much useful detail (including voice leading). Nevertheless, I return to the persistent issue of perceptibility. Even in an impressive and coherent study such as this one, what is missing is the all-important expressive surface and communicative gestures that might reinforce or complicate this narrative, or suggest others.

What emerges from this volume as a whole then, is the yet-to-be-realised role of music analysis in this field and the level of analytical complexity demanded by serious attempts to objectify readings of narrative. Surface and structure, gesture and topics, a whole array of formal aspects of the music – all appear to be at play; and no single analytical approach, however rich, seems to be sufficient. But the best hope for moving studies of programme music forward is to combine such level of analysis with reception studies and other historical methods, to finally confront and critique some of the phonier aspects of the 'War of the Romantics' and reveal more hidden histories of composition. Perhaps the most important lesson to take away from this edited volume is that programme music could use a form of scholarly work that we rarely see in musicology: collaborative research.

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