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**Introduction: Panel on *Rethinking Contemporary Musicologies: Disciplinary Shifts and the Risks of Deskilling*, Royal Musical Association, University of Manchester/RNCM, 12 September 2019.**

Chaired by Ian Pace (City, University of London).

Speakers:

Larson Powell (University of Missouri, Kansas City, USA): ‘Sound Track or Musical Text? Film-Music Studies between Disciplines’.

Eva Moreda Rodriguez (University of Glasgow): ‘Are We all Transnational Now? Global Approaches and Insularity in Music History’.

Darla M. Crispin (Norwegian Academy of Music, Oslo, Norway): ‘Artistic Research in Music: Brave New World – or Harbinger of Decline?’

Peter Tregear (University of Melbourne, Australia): ‘Telling Tales in Musicology’.

**Introduction**

**Ian Pace**

Twenty years ago, in 1999, Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist published the co-edited volume *Rethinking Music*. This followed in the wake of a series of publications now associated with the ‘New Musicology’ from the early 1990s, but the scale of this publication and its appearance from such a major publisher as Oxford University Press indicated how various tendencies had entered the musicological mainstream. Twenty years later, Peter Tregear and I are in the process of co-editing a new volume, *Rethinking Contemporary Musicology: Perspectives on Interdisciplinary, Skills and Deskilling*, which will appear from Routledge in 2020. This brings together a range of leading scholars who are all offering critical perspectives on both developments in English-speaking academia which were relatively new when Cook/Everist was published and the state of play in more long-established realms of research and teaching. Four of the contributors are here and will be giving papers, most of which relate to their chapters in the book.

I would emphasise that this book deals specifically with English-speaking academia. This is not because of any type of provinciality, let alone any assertion of centrality of Anglophone contributions to the disciplines. Rather, the editors simply feel that the issues at stake in the Anglosphere, while far from homogeneous, are somewhat distinct from those elsewhere, and as such warrant separate consideration.

Amongst the other chapters in the book - this is not an exhaustive list - are Paul Harper-Scott on musicology, the middlebrow and questions of demographics amongst academics, Christopher Wiley on popular music education and the question of specifically musical engagement, Mu-Xuan Lin on body politics and gendered orthodoxies relating to contemporary composition and the ‘New Discipline’, myself on the application of ethnomusicological approaches to the study of Western art music, then Michael Spitzer on the state of musical analysis, Alan Davison on that for music history, Nicole Grimes on neoliberalism and the study of Western art music, and case studies relating to areas of study provoked by the work of Richard Taruskin,

Nicholas Cook and Georgina Born, written by Frank Cox, me and Joan Arnau Pamiès respectively.

In general, the contributors can be said to share varying degrees of scepticism towards some aspects of such Anglophone musicology which can be said either to have become orthodoxies, or are sufficiently widespread as to be worthy of critical interrogation. In short, it is time to cast a critical eye on what the discipline has become. Key questions which recur in many essays have to do with the demands of interdisciplinarity, especially whether some allegedly interdisciplinary work entails more than a superficial injection of a handful of concepts or buzzwords from other disciplines (as has been argued by Giles Hooper, another contributor to the book), rather than more rigorous engagement, and the complementary issue of ‘deskilling’ of musicology.

The term ‘deskilling’ was coined by Marxist theorist Harry Braverman in 1974 to characterise the lowering of skill levels as part of a process of progressive estrangement and alienation of workers, relating to the division of labour, in the process increasing their dispensability. As musicology has supposedly become more diverse, many of us argue that various core skills and knowledge, not least relating to basic musicianship, notation, familiarity with history and repertoire, and especially theory and analysis, can no longer be assumed on the part of students, graduates, and indeed many academics themselves. This reduces the possibility of broader interactions between those working in different sub-disciplinary areas, and limits the ability of many to contribute to certain types of core curriculum.

What remains, at worst, is an atomised profession permeated by disputes and struggles for territory and power, in place of genuine quests for knowledge, however utopian such ideals might be. Such a situation is exacerbated and in some ways fuelled by neo-liberal reforms to higher education, pitting students as ‘consumers’, creating increased precarity for academics, and importing aspects of market culture as well as ever-growing strata of top-down management. Whilst many of the new musicological tendencies are advocated by those laying claim to ‘progressive’ political causes, at the same time they have often proved most amenable to the strictures of the commercialised university, not least through the post-modernist eschewal of conceptions of truth and knowledge with a degree of autonomy from their social function, in capitalist society.

Contributors to the book consider how his situation has come about, what are some of the ideological assumptions which underlie such a predicament, how this has been manifested in certain types of work, and what might be positive alternatives.

The four contributions today are all roughly 15 minutes long, and we will hear all of them, then have around 30 minutes for questions, which can be addressed to one or more of the contributors, or can deal with wider issues emerging from this session as a whole.

**Larson Powell** is Professor of Film Studies at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, and has published widely on literature, music, film, German culture and philosophy and much else. He has published two monographs: *The Technological Unconscious in German Modernist Literature*, which considers the persistence of

nature as a brake on constructions of identity; *The Differentiation of Modernism*, on various postwar German media arts; and a third is forthcoming on German filmmaker Konrad Wolf; He has also published two edited volumes, of which one is on classical music in the GDR; and articles and book chapters on Adorno, Carter, Stockhausen, Cage, Wolpe, Martinu, Enescu and film music theory. Current projects include a contribution to the Oxford Adorno Handbook on Adorno's media theory, an essay on Pli selon pli, an entry on Marxism and musicology for Lars Klingberg's online history of GDR music, and an entry in "Komponisten der Gegenwart" on Albert Breier.

**Eva Moreda Rodriguez** is Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of Glasgow. She is the author of *Music and Exile in Francoist Spain* (Ashgate, 2015) and *Music Criticism and Music Critics in Early Francoist Spain* (Oxford University Press, 2016). Her research on the political and cultural history of Spanish music during the 20th century has been published in *Music and Letters*, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* and *Twentieth-century music*, among others. In 2018 she held an AHRC Leadership Fellowship, researching the early history of recorded music in Spain.

Professor **Darla Crispin** is Vice Rector for Research and Artistic Development and Director of the Arne Nordheim Centre for Artistic Research (NordART) at the Norwegian Academy of Music (NMH), Oslo. A Canadian pianist and scholar with a Concert Recital Diploma from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and a PhD from King's College, London, Darla specialises in musical modernity, especially the works of the Second Viennese School. She is an acknowledged expert in the developing field of artistic research, having co-authored one of the seminal books on this subject, *The Artistic Turn: A Manifesto* (Leuven University Press/Orpheus Institute 2009).

**Peter Tregear** is a Principal Fellow of the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. He has worked extensively across Australia and the United Kingdom as an academic, performer, and teacher. From 2000 to 2006 he was Lecturer and Director of Music at Fitzwilliam College, and upon his return to Australia he became a company member of both Victorian Opera and Melbourne Opera and founded the professional vocal ensemble The Consort of Melbourne. From 2012–2015 he was Head of the ANU School of Music in Canberra. Peter's academic research centres on musical culture in Weimar Germany. His two most recent books are *Ernst Krenek and the Politics of Musical Style* (2013) and *Enlightenment or Entitlement: Rethinking Tertiary Music Education* (2014).

[For during discussion: Those devoted to the study of music of earlier times, historical musicologists, in particular are somewhat beleaguered and often unable to find employment in many institutions in which music which is by 'dead' people is deemed less 'relevant', spurred on by both administrators and self-styled progressives who equate topicality with 'relevance'.]

