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BOOKS

Music in Germany Since 1968 by Alastair Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. £60.00.

Musicology has faced many challenges in recent decades, including critiques of canons and the exclusive focus upon ‘great composers’ and autonomous ‘works’, the centrality of Western art music and the privileging of authorial intent, as well as the increased interest on issues of class, gender, sexuality as they relate to music and its contexts, an increased focus upon musical performance and reception, and the effects of musical institutions upon music-making. Yet I would find it difficult to identify many ways by which such concerns have affected the worlds of composition and performance of contemporary scores, in which fields there continues a discourse mostly sealed off to wider concerns as might be raised by non-practitioners. The divide can be stark; the possibilities of constructive dialogue between those convinced that modernism represents a last-ditch manifestation of hegemonic ideologies of autonomy, which serve to perpetuate white male bourgeois privilege, and those who revere the music, writings and worldview of now elder figures such as Brian Ferneyhough or Helmut Lachenmann, are practically zero.

The history of recent German music is by no means simply one of a steady canonisation of masterworks within a framework of general assumptions of musical autonomy and the virtues of increasingly sophisticated compositional technique, whatever Richard Taruskin or others might like to claim. Rather, at least from the late 1950s to the late 1970s, this field was characterised by ferocious opposition between musical factions, replete with charged polemics, withering critiques and counter-critiques of all aspects of avant-garde ideology and work, and a plurality of approaches and attitudes towards music’s relationship to wider society and politics, to an extent not witnessed since the 1920s. Alastair Williams’s new history of German music since 1968 displays a surprisingly conservative approach and a relative lack of methodological reflection in the face of new musicological challenges – surprising given that many of these challenges are outlined in the same author’s

Constructing Musicology;¹ Williams does not match the dialectical oppositions within the field of enquiry with much of a dialectical sensibility of his own. The result is a ‘history’ which is in large measure a study of two ‘great men’, Lachenmann and Wolfgang Rihm, with other composers and issues viewed relative to their work and world-view.

Williams makes clear at the outset that he does not intend to cover ‘the full range of art, popular and traditional musics’ existing in Germany during the period in question, preferring instead to concentrate exclusively on the area of ‘new music’ (p. 2), but this term is never adequately defined.² Williams alludes vaguely to some definitions by Nicolaus A. Huber and Carl Dahlhaus (p. 2), but finds neither really adequate for the range of music he wishes to cover, and does not provide any alternative workable criteria.³ Issues of institutions supporting and propagating this ‘new music’, the relationship of new music to other aspects of concert life, and reception of new music and the extent of its impact upon a wider German public, are either omitted entirely or dealt with in a perfunctory manner. And there are only smatterings of rather slight critical engagement with the aesthetic and political positions of composers or other figures. Performance and

¹ Alastair Williams, *Constructing Musicology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

² The term *Neue Musik* gained most widespread currency in the 1919 essay of that name by Paul Bekker, reprinted in Bekker, *Neue Musik: Dritter Band der Gesammelten Schriften* (Stuttgart and Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1923), pp. 85–118, a polemic against the staid nature of German music at the time which nonetheless held up the work of Debussy, Schreker and Schoenberg as possible catalysts for change. Bekker’s article provoked a wave of writings in the next years from Hermann Scherchen, Walther Krug, Bartók, Paul Stefan, Schoenberg, and others. For a thorough overview of the history of the concept, see Christoph von Blumröder, *Der Begriff »neue Musik« im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich and Salzburg: Musikverlag Emil Katzschler, 1981).

³ In particular, he justifies the omission of all East German composers other than Reiner Bredemeyer and Friedrich Goldmann on the grounds that new music did not flourish in this country. But it is not clear why then Paul Dessau, Georg Katzer, Steffen Schleiermacher and Jakob Ullmann, all of whose work makes of interesting comparison with that of composers in West Germany, should be excluded, yet Detlev Müller-Siemens or Manfred Trojahn, identified by Williams himself as associated with neo-romanticism, should.

performers occupy a deeply subsidiary role relative to composers (and listeners hardly feature at all); in a few brief passages there are short mentions of the Arditti Quartet, Ensemble Modern, Ensemble Recherche and Musikfabrik, with a few banal remarks such as ‘the ensemble values individual preparation highly, so that all the players can be fully aware of one another in rehearsal instead of remaining immersed in the score’ (p. 23). There is no conception of any creative or critical role for performance other than realising a score and perhaps adding some type of ‘musicality’.⁴ Furthermore, important performers such as the two major Stuttgart vocal groups, the Schola Cantorum and Neue Vokalsolisten, are not mentioned at all, whilst the vitally important role of radio orchestras is skipped over in just a sentence (p. 18), portrayed at best as a facilitator for composers, at worst as an obstacle.⁵

Williams’s arguments for the importance of a starting date of 1968 (which holds a romantic appeal for many writers on music and cultural historians)⁶ reveal some of the wider limitations of his perspectives on German history and new music prior to this date. He portrays this year in terms of youth culture, new permissive attitudes towards sexuality and authority, and dissatisfaction with the world bequeathed by the *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle), whilst arguing that the specifically German dimension to this year’s events was ‘the shadow of the National Socialist past and the presence of the other Germany’⁷ (p. 5); in this context, he

gives a concise and accurate account of the shootings of Benno Ohnesorg and Rudi Dutschke.

To connect this all to music, Williams simply mentions the contemporary shift in France from structuralism to post-structuralism, linking this to the events of May 1968 despite himself pointing out that Derrida’s *L’écriture et la différence* was published the previous year. He links this to the end of serialism (as much of an ‘other’ for Williams as for many other musicologists)⁸, noting that a few composers active after 1968 made some reference to post-structuralist figures and that Rihm alludes to Artaud, who had been discussed by both Derrida and Deleuze and Guattari. This historical substantiation is most tenuous, relying on rough historical coincidence, too-easy assumptions of parallel processes in Germany and France, whilst also betraying a simple lack of knowledge of the broader historical and musical context. It is simplistic at the least to maintain that German music between 1945 and 1968 was monolithically dominated by serialism,⁹ unless one discounts the *Sprache als Musik* movement from the late 1950s onwards, the influence of John Cage, the substantial body of work in the realms of music theatre, the text scores of Dieter Schnebel from 1959 onwards, the beginnings of Fluxus, or the revolts against existing modern music in Cologne and Munich around 1960.¹⁰ Pierre Boulez and John Cage had already demonstrated a significant interest in Artaud’s work from the late 1940s–early 1950s onwards.¹¹ Furthermore, Williams

⁴ We are told that the Arditti Quartet ‘add much to the music that is not present in the notation’ (p. 23), without any consideration of what it means for something to be ‘present in the notation’ nor of any wider issues of performance aesthetics.

⁵ The role of the orchestras is one of various factors that differentiate the options available to German (and some other) composers more so than those who receive their primary commissions from other countries. This is witnessed by the fact that the mature Lachenmann (from *temA* (1968) onwards) has written only three major works for medium-size ensemble (*Mouvement* (-vor der Erstarrung), *Zwei Gefühle* and *Concertini*) to date, but 17 orchestral works.

⁶ See, for example, recent studies such as Beate Kutschke, ed., *Musikkulturen in der Revolte: Studien zu Rock, Avantgarde und Klassik im Umfeld von ‘1968’* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2008), Eric Drott, *Music and the Elusive Revolution: Cultural Politics and Political Culture in France, 1968–1981* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), and Beate Kutschke and Barley Norton, eds, *Music and Protest in 1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁷ There is no mention of the *Größe Koalition* between 1966 and 1969 headed by former NSDAP member Kurt Georg Kiesinger, the continuing presence of former Nazi officials at high levels of government, industry and culture, or the earlier trial of Adolf Eichmann and then the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials of 1963–65, all major catalysts for radicalised attitudes towards *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the

past) amongst a generation too young to have been personally involved with the Third Reich, but in many cases with parents who had.

⁸ Williams also conflates Lachenmann’s use of the term *Strukturalismus* with structuralism as it was understood in a French context, without substantiating this linking of the two concepts.

⁹ Williams seems unaware of the model presented by Gianmario Borio, in *Musikalische Avantgarde um 1960* (Regensburg: Laaber, 1993), which traces many ‘post-serial’ developments from the late 1950s onwards.

¹⁰ There are numerous texts relevant to this key moment in West German musical history, including Werner Klüppelholz, *Sprache als Musik: Studien zur Vokalkomposition bei Karlheinz Stockhausen, Hans G Helms, Mauricio Kagel, Dieter Schnebel und György Ligeti* (Saarbrücken: Pfau, 1995); Robert von Zahn, ‘“Refüsierte Gesänge”: Musik im Atelier Bauermeister’, in *Das Atelier Mary Bauermeister in Köln 1960–62*, ed. Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln (Cologne: Emons, 1993), pp. 100–119; and Josef Anton Riedl, ‘NEUE MUSIK München, Siemens-Studio für elektronische Musik und *musica viva* (1953–1963)’, in ‘*Eine Sprache der Gegenwart: musica viva 1945–1995*’, ed. Renate Ulm (Mainz and Munich: Piper Schott, 1995), pp. 65–74.

¹¹ See in particular Pierre Boulez, ‘Proposals’ (1948) and ‘Sound and Word’ (1958), in *Stocktakings: Notes from an Apprenticeship*, collected by Paule Thévenin, trans. Stephen Walsh, with

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never once mentions the work of Hans-Joachim Hespos or Gerhard Stäbler, in the work of both of whom the influence of Artaud is unmistakable; a mention of these two might have better supported his arguments. Electronic or electro-acoustic music – either pre- or post-1968 – also receives little more than passing mentions, with the glaringly inaccurate assertion that the genre of the *Hörspiel* (which began in the 1920s, very soon after the advent of radio) ‘came into being in the late 1960s, with Kagel’s *Ein Aufnahmestand*’ (1969) (p. 20). By this date, studies and histories of this by-then well-established genre had already been published,¹² whilst the minutes of the meeting on 18 October 1951, when the decision was made to establish the electronic music studio in NWDR Cologne, make clear that a desire to generate more sophisticated music for *Hörspiele* was a major reason for that decision.¹³

Williams also argues that 1968 ushered in a period in which composers sought to ‘reconnect with the past’, citing Mauricio Kagel’s *Ludwig van* (1970) as a major example of this tendency (p. 7). But such a process had occurred earlier, in the work of Hans Werner Henze (who re-engaged with romanticism in *Undine* (1956–57) and many later pieces) and above all Bernd Alois Zimmermann, from his *Dialoge* (1960) onwards, which was followed by a string of works amply employing quotations from earlier repertoire.¹⁴ As regards wider history, there is no mention of the oil crisis of 1973, the crucial year of 1977 at the peak of urban paramilitary

action (from which year dates Lachenmann’s *Salut für Caudwell*), leading to the suicides of all the founding members of the Baader-Meinhof gang, the speech by President Reagan in 1985 and the subsequent *Historikerstreit*, or the revelations in the mid-1990s of many atrocities on the part of ordinary soldiers in the *Wehrmacht*; German unification is presented simply in terms of the draining of some resources for new music in financially difficult times. Whether and how these events might have affected new music needs investigating, but they seem equally plausible candidates for such impact as do the events of 1968.

The second and fifth chapters of the book frame the central chapters on Lachenmann and Rihm; the second concentrates upon already-established figures after 1968, both German citizens and some others who lived or worked in Germany – including Ligeti, Nono, Kagel, Schnebel, B.A. Zimmermann, Killmayer, Bredemeyer and Henze. The fifth and final full chapter is divided into three sections: the first deals with contemporaries of Lachenmann and Rihm in the form of Nicolaus A. Huber, Mathias Spahlinger and Brian Ferneyhough. The second section looks at a group of composers under the umbrella heading of ‘Neo-Romanticism’: the older figure of Aribert Reimann, then others including Wolfgang von Schweinitz, Detlev Müller-Siemens, Hans-Jürgen von Bose and Manfred Trojahn, followed by a short passage on the postmodernism debate in Germany, relating this to the work of Adriana Hölszky and York Höller, and in more extended fashion Walter Zimmermann and Friedrich Goldmann. The third section deals with four composers presented as representatives of ‘the younger generation’: Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf (b. 1962), Isabel Mundry (b. 1963), Rebecca Saunders (b. 1967), and Matthias Pintscher (b. 1971). German composers under the age of 40 at the time of publication are thus entirely excluded. But this last section is a mere nine pages long, suggesting that this body of work is to be viewed almost as a footnote to the older master-composers, a respectable position to maintain, but which needs to be properly addressed and argued.

These two chapters, especially the earlier one, constitute the least impressive parts of the book, consisting in large measure of quite elementary programme notes on a handful of pieces (with a few token musical examples), listings of the most superficially obvious attributes of pieces, blow-by-blow accounts, second-hand opinions presented in unmediated fashion, and worst of

introduction by Robert Piencikowski (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 47–54, 39–43, and John Cage to Pierre Boulez, 22 May 1951, in Jean-Jacques Nattiez, ed. *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence*, trans. and ed. Robert Samuels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 92–7.

¹² For example Friedrich Knilli, *Das Hörspiel: Mittel und Möglichkeiten eines totalen Schallspiels* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1961); Heinz Schwitzke, *Das Hörspiel: Dramaturgie und Geschichte* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1963); Kurt Fischer, *Das Hörspiel: Form und Funktion* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1964); and Heinz Schwitzke and Franz Hiesel (eds), *Reclams Hörspielführer* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1969). It could be argued that the genre moved in new directions following Kagel’s work, but this is a different claim to that made by Williams.

¹³ ‘So wird es beispielsweise möglich, das Problem der “rundfunk-eigenen Musik” in Angriff zu nehmen und auch für das Hörspiel akustische Effekte von bisher noch nicht gehörter Gestalt bereitzustellen’ (‘It will, for example, become possible to attack head-on the problem of producing “radio-specific” music and also provide not-yet-heard configurations of acoustic effects’); minutes from meeting at NWDR, 18 October 1951, cited in Lowell Cross, ‘Electronic Music 1948–1953’, *Perspectives of New Music*, 7/1 (1968), pp. 49–50.

¹⁴ Also, Kagel would have been well aware of how Schnebel drew upon a wide range of fragments from the standard classical repertoire in his realisation *Glossolalie 61* and *nostalgie* (1962) (the latter filmed by Kagel as *Solo* (1967)).

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all, a tendency to take a composer's own words on their pieces as synonymous with the actual listening experience. As a methodology, this is most problematic in a context so rife with composers' self-fashioning and self-promotion; in this respect Williams's work itself sometimes reads more like promotional literature than scholarship, a quality found elsewhere in the book as well, such as when he presents the ensemble Musikfabrik as an example of how 'dedicated performance groups do not just respond to the needs of composers, they also enable new possibilities and foster an environment in which new music can thrive' (p. 24).

Williams's failure to establish a critical political perspective of his own leads to most of the historical politics portrayed becoming quaint exotica rather than anything that could be related to living political concerns. He does give a fair account of the political disputes at Darmstadt in both the 1960s and 1970s (here he acknowledges the work of Klaus Trapp and Martin Iddon),¹⁵ whilst integrating into the narrative more fully the positions and central role of Lachenmann (drawing on a few unpublished letters between Lachenmann and Ernst Thomas), who was able to navigate a position in between the hard-line positions of the protestors and other advocates of explicitly politically engaged work. But in Williams's narrative, what may have been substantive political issues appear as little more than a routine power struggle between generations. Such tussles may indeed have amounted little more than this, but if so this invites some serious political critique of the positions themselves (and their manifestation in the work produced), which is rarely present here. Later on, presentations of the work of Huber and Spahlinger reduce their politics mostly to a matter of compositional intent, without any consideration of what wider meaning or effect they might have outside a small community of intellectuals, whilst such an approach easily portrays Ferneyhough as a mandarin intellectual pursuing an essentially private and socially disengaged set of aesthetic concerns turned into fetishes.

The chapter on Lachenmann is stronger. Williams presents an overview of a significant number of Lachenmann's major works, intermingled

with summaries of some of the composer's writings. Whilst he again sometimes over-relies on uncritical renditions of Lachenmann's own views, and has a tendency to focus upon surface sonic novelties, there are more subtle sections, including that on *Accanto*, with a rare moment of critique of Lachenmann's view of Mozart (as 'music to dream by') with Williams arguing that this stance 'assumes that production and reception map onto each other, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of false consciousness' (p. 91). Even stronger is the extended passage on *Das Mädchen mit den Schwefelhölzern*, some of which is essentially a blow-by-blow account, though presented sensitively. Whilst in some places Williams derives far-reaching conclusions on the basis of insufficient information,¹⁶ his elucidation of how the striking of the match in this work might be viewed less as action than 'shimmering illusions of phantasmagoria', which he links to Adorno's critique of the Magic Fire music in *Die Walküre*, from which perspective he argues that the work's disjunction between supposedly fused sound and image actually allows for some utopian possibilities (p. 117), is genuinely original and penetrating. Williams registers the relative controversy of Lachenmann's setting a text by childhood friend and leading Baader-Meinhof figure Gudrun Ensslin. But such political controversies are easily surveyed from a safe historical distance; if Lachenmann or another composer had worked the words of Mohammed Atta into a fairy tale, this situation might be quite different.

When it comes to consideration of Lachenmann's views on Rihm, Ferneyhough and others prominent in the German new music scene of the 1970s and 1980s, Williams does identify with some critical distance the different positions, though without reaching many conclusions. He notes that Lachenmann has a blind spot with regards to the possibility that Ferneyhough and others might have found different ways of 'refusing habit', and also navigates Lachenmann's changing relationship to Rihm in line with changes in Rihm's own style. A greater familiarity with the early works of Kagel and Schnebel, which Lachenmann dismissed so sweepingly in 1987 (as 'products of a

¹⁵ Klaus Trapp, 'Darmstadt und die 68er-Bewegung', in *Von Kranichstein zur Gegenwart. 50 Jahre Darmstädter Ferienkurse 1946–1996*, ed. Rudolf Stephan et al. (Stuttgart: DACO, 1996), pp. 369–75; and Martin Iddon, 'Trying To Speak: Between Politics and Aesthetics, Darmstadt 1970–1972', *twentieth-century music* 3/2 (2007), pp. 255–75.

¹⁶ For example the mere fact that Lachenmann uses the *shō* in the 26th number from the opera, combined with the knowledge that Lachenmann has some knowledge of Japanese culture, is sufficient for the 'sense of stillness that is akin to a calming of the ego, and even to a state of non-being' to be interpreted as an invocation of 'the mystery of transcendence' rather than anything to be interpreted 'in simple orientalist terms' (pp. 113–14).

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narcissistically coquettish pseudo-radicalism'),¹⁷ might also allow Williams more scope to assess independently the viability of such a characterisation.

Williams is more relaxed when writing about the music of Wolfgang Rihm. This, the longest chapter of the book, is a welcome contribution; no other substantial overview of Rihm's work exists in English. Distilling Rihm's vast output in 64 pages is no easy task; Williams divides it into a range of related sub-categories gathered together in larger groups: 'Tradition and Inclusivity' (sub-divided into categories defined by instrumentation), 'Events, voices and layers' (looking especially at Rihm's cycles), and finally the stage works and instrumental theatre. In the first section, Williams is concerned above all to situate Rihm's work in terms of its allusions to the classical tradition, evoking Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Mahler and Janáček. He stresses how these composers' work is mediated in Rihm's compositions, though mostly in a rather generalised manner and sometimes again relying upon the composer's own words. In some ways, the foregrounding of such allusions, and the recurrent theme of madness as conceived through Hölderlin (Williams portrays Rihm's lieder cycle *Hölderlin-Fragmente* (1977) as a key work which relates to various others) and Schumann, serves to reinforce the neo-romantic conception of the composer with which Williams is most comfortable; even his occasional allusions to Lacan and Deleuze/Guattari on schizophrenia seem predicated upon a thoroughly romantic notion of this affliction as some type of subversive deviance ('a break with the authority of language' (p. 140) or 'a subjectivity loosened from the boundaries of self' (p. 166)). It is debatable where Rihm really 'destabilizes the nineteenth-century model of internal subjectivity by linking it to the somatic self' (p. 147), as Williams claims, unless one believes all nineteenth-century subjectivities to have been utterly divorced from such bodily concerns (hardly true of Lisztian virtuosity, say). Overall, Williams succeeds in presenting a Rihm quite apart from most musical developments that have positioned themselves at a conscious

distance from nineteenth-century Germanic traditions; even his Artaud allusions can be appropriated in such a manner. In an interesting passage at the end of the chapter, Williams notes Rihm's eschewal of the postmodernist label and portrayal of both neo-classicism and serial composition as essentially conservative tendencies, as well as his openness to Cage on the grounds that the latter 'annulled the traditional aesthetic of coherence in the most convincing manner' (pp. 185–6). All of this is drawn by Williams into an argument that seeks to align Rihm with Adorno's critique of objectivism, in a particularly traditionalist reading of Adorno's thought – a reading that perhaps underlies Lachenmann's characterisation of Adorno as a 'naïve romantic'.¹⁸ This is not the only possible reading of Adorno, and I am uneasy with this attempt to present his thought as a hyper-subjectivist rejection of modernity. I read Adorno, instead, as continually negotiating the possibility of maintaining some vestiges of the individual subject in the face of a technocratic and administered late capitalist world, rather than seeking solace in lost nineteenth-century conceptions.

As a moderately sensitive if mostly uncritical overview of the output of Lachenmann and Rihm, avoiding most perspectives other than those supplied by these composers, Williams's book provides a reasonable addition to the literature. As a critical scholarly history, or even an introductory primer, it has serious flaws due to the lack of methodological reflection and critical distance from its object, as well as its simple limitations of knowledge and interpretation. It would be better viewed as an overview of the two main composers; as the title stands, I hope this book will not deter other writers and publishers from undertaking more thoroughgoing, knowledgeable and penetrating approaches to the wider historical questions. Personally, were I reading it for the purposes of introduction and advocacy, I believe the conservatism and political disengagement of Williams's book would likely deter me from exploring further; it serves up a high bourgeois rendition of recent German music that does not really do anything to negate the severe and blanket critiques of this body of work provided by Taruskin and others.

Ian Pace Q1

¹⁷ 'Produkte einer mit sich selbst kokettierenden und spielenden Scheinradikalität'. In Helmut Lachenmann, 'Komponieren im Schatten von Darmstadt', in *Musik in existentielle Erfahrung: Schriften 1966–1995*, ed. Josef Häusler (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1996) p. 343. Translated by Richard Toop as 'Composing in the Shadow of Darmstadt' in *Contemporary Music Review*, 23/3–4 (2004), p. 45.

¹⁸ Helmut Lachenmann, 'Musik als existentielle Erfahrung', interview with Ulrich Mösch (1994), in *Musik in existentielle Erfahrung*, p. 222.

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