



Review

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Source: *Notes*, Second Series, Vol. 53, No. 3 (Mar., 1997), pp. 756-761

Published by: Music Library Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/899716>

Accessed: 14-09-2015 04:34 UTC

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trans. and ed. Ernst Oster [New York: Longman, 1979], 3)

Van den Toorn denies neither the social and cultural context of music nor the value of bringing it to bear upon experience and interpretation; but he seeks to circumscribe its power, and to warn of the dangers of subjectivity and sociopolitical manipulation that it harbors.

In detailing those dangers he scores many valid points against the various brands of postmodern musicology. He chides McClary for her insistence on sexual interpretations, which he sees as limiting and impoverishing rather than liberating and revitalizing, to the extent that they reduce the highly differentiated surfaces of starkly contrasting works all to the same sex act (a point noted also by Paula Higgins in her review essay on McClary's *Feminine Endings*; see her "Women in Music, Feminist Criticism, and Guerilla Musicology: Reflections on Recent Polemics," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 17 [1993]: 174–92). He also suggests—a telling criticism, in my view—that she grossly overestimates the actual cultural power of academic musical scholarship, whether the feared formalist establishment of music theory and positivist musicology or the new-musicological kids on the block, to have an impact on musical practice and experience in the culture at large: for better or worse, how many performers and educators actually notice what we say, much less change their lives because of it? For him, narrow music theory is just as likely—nay, more so—than the new socially aware criticism, to save the Western musical canon from extinction. He also takes Treitler to task for falling prey to simple, sexualized binary oppositions of the variety active/passive, rational/sensual, objective/subjective, and the like, always valorizing them simplistically to the ethical favor of the latter over the former. In this critique, oddly enough, he places himself in

the company of Taruskin, with whom he takes pointed issue in other matters later in the book (see Taruskin's even harsher criticism of Treitler on this count in *Text and Act* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1996], 25–31). And he faults Treitler for assuming that the humanistic values of his breed of scholarship (subjective, personally involved, empathetic, culturally aware) will leave him untouched by the values, limitations, and real-world entanglements of the institutional academic system in which he works (objective, positivistic, formalistic, culturally narrow).

These arguments, brought forth in the heat of battle, are well worth reading. Paradoxically, conceived for the moment, they, along with the music-theoretical and analytical demonstration of the final three chapters, are the parts of the book that stand the best chance of transcending their narrow political purpose and contributing in a more permanent way to our understanding of musical scholarship, its values, its models, and its goals. Unfortunately, the most cogent and incisive arguments are not easy to find. Van den Toorn is not a gracious writer. He has a penchant for obscure paragraphs, and for non sequiturs when moving from one paragraph to another, thus leaving the reader utterly baffled. His book would have benefited from a sterner editorial hand to straighten out such infelicities, and to curb some of his more willful potshots at the opposition. He remains to the end a proud and defiant critic of what he sees as a selling out of musical scholarship, and he will no doubt be pilloried for same by his detractors. Yet his is a mind to be reckoned with, and his book will commemorate, if but for a little while, a major skirmish in the music-scholarly version of the culture wars of the nineties.

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Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge. By Lawrence Kramer. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.) [xvii, 297 p. ISBN 0-520-08820-4. \$35.00.]

In this, his third book on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music as "cultural practice," Lawrence Kramer takes on one of the

thorniest problems facing musicology today: resistance to the idea that music means anything other than itself. He disagrees

with those who believe that masterpieces are works which “transcend all social utility” and “into which the social as such disappears without a trace” (p. 235). Kramer wants to show the contrary. He is concerned about the future of “classical” music, which he finds “losing both its prestige and its appeal.” In a country that has reduced it to endless repetition on the radio and entertainment for an aging population, he hopes to put this music back at the center of public discourse, where it was at the end of the last century.

To this end, Kramer posits what he calls a number of “postmodernist strategies of understanding.” Not that this is a study about postmodernism in music: Jean-François Lyotard is cited as an authority only in passing and American postmodernist theorists like Frederic Jameson appear not at all. In his first chapter, Kramer questions the insistence on impartial rationality, the tendency to universalize and desire unity, the notion of subjectivity as alienated, and the communicative paradigms of modernist thought. But what really interests him is the “musical pertinence” (p. 13) of psychoanalysis, for it is the reception of music, rather than its composition or performance, that he sees as critical in determining its meaning. Lacanian psychoanalysis, he explains, is “a theory of how certain articulations of identification and alienation, desire and law, continually ‘mark’ the field of communicative action” (p. 12). Taking off from Theodor Adorno and Michel Foucault and bringing his understanding of Jacques Lacan’s “imaginary” and “symbolic,” Julia Kristeva’s “abject,” and Jacques Derrida’s “dissemination” to his inquiry about the listening process, Kramer argues that listeners continually interact with what they hear. They listen (as they act), he tells us, “not as a radiation from a central core of being, but as a circulation among positions to be taken in discourse and society.” They respond in diverse ways contingent on their own situations. Their perspective is always “partial,” like Donna Haraway’s description of the “never finished, constituted” self who “does not seek partiality for its own sake, but for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings [its] situated knowledges make possible. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular” (*Simians, Cyborgs, and*

Women: The Reinvention of Nature [New York: Routledge, 1991], 196: quoted by Kramer on p. 7).

Of course, this raises the problem of self and other: How does one interact with what is outside oneself? In other words, In the process of hearing music, what are the boundaries between the listener and the work? In the second chapter, Kramer points to the binary opposition, masculine/feminine, to explain how the self has come to be associated with “reason, activity, progression, unity, and the integrity of boundaries, the other with irrationality, passivity, stasis or regression, fragmentation, and the crossing or dissolution of boundaries” (p. 38). This, he argues, is a historical idea, “not just a conceptual phenomenon, the consequences of which have too often been inhumane or worse . . . [it] always has a moral dimension” (p. 39). Kramer is particularly interested in “the rhetoric of abjection” in critical thinking about music, the attempt not to fuse with the other, but rather to reject it violently to preserve one’s “intactness” (p. 58). To illustrate this, he examines Friedrich Nietzsche’s rejection of Richard Wagner, the present-day dismissal of Felix Mendelssohn, and Carl Dahlhaus’s categorization of Gioacchino Rossini. In each case, he argues that the music under analysis is treated as a feminized “other” and he shows how grounded these perceptions are in the “logic of alterity.” This is the same logic, he tells us, that often ascribes to music a function of “otherness” for listeners, something that exists in a formal sense beyond oneself, as a “feminine lack,” an “empty sign”—a division he believes “modernist musicology” tries to protect. Kramer wishes to cast away such thinking and replace it with an acknowledgment of music’s “function of mirroring the identity of the self” (p. 52). “The postmodernist musicology for which I am pressing,” he writes, “is ultimately an attempt to transfer disciplinary value from the logic of alterity to such performative listening” (p. 65).

In the next six chapters, some of them diffuse and hard to follow, Kramer “explores the consequences” of these ideas in examining “problems in musical aesthetics (representation, narrative, expressivity)” and the “cultural politics of music (subject formation, social space, commodity)” (p. xiii). In each case, he begins by situating the

music he will examine in some context, be it nineteenth-century literature, philosophical ideas of its time, contemporary poetry, a film, or the commodity system. Then he analyzes the music as closely as he can, focusing on a number of details and accompanying them with enough music examples to help the reader follow his argument.

As in the section on Haydn's *Creation*, the analysis is usually straightforward and descriptive. His interpretation, however, may sometimes take one aback and is not always fully justified by the analysis. Because he believes that "music seeks to model what exceeds representation," he finds that the musical means of suggesting "chaos" at the beginning of the *Creation* are not just those of "an incipient cosmos" in the process of forming, but a representation of "limitlessness." As such, it takes us to a "border zone" where, "one step beyond sublimity," it resembles "monstrosity." Kramer justifies this interpretative leap not by returning to the music, but by pointing to "literary tradition" and the Lacanian Slavoj Žižek for whom "monstrosity is a familiar means of personifying chaos" (p. 85). Of course, Lacan would not have made such clear-cut assertions, but Kramer does not stop there. He interprets the entrance of the chorus as "an all-embracing offer of human solidarity," "a vehicle for the Enlightenment ideal of universal sympathy" (p. 92). And yet, since it was underwritten by a "consortium of aristocrats" and "composed by man [of] enormous success" and its libretto tells of the "subordination of Eve to Adam," he finds it also "a celebration of rigid social hierarchy" (p. 93). Thus, he concludes, the work embodies "two models of the cosmos: cosmic harmony and social conservatism" (p. 93). This is a "cultural" and "hermeneutic" reading of the work, but hardly an "open-ended" one (p. 96). In general terms, Kramer's definition of representation in music is perhaps the most useful part of this chapter. He understands it differently from most people applying semiotics. Rather than a "relationship established between a sign and a referent" (or, one might say, between a signifier and a signified), he prefers to think of musical representation as a "dynamic, culturally conditioned process of affirming and deploying such a relationship" (p. 68). It is a process aided by tropes or references to

what other composers have done in similar musical circumstances.

The chapter on narrative is largely based on others' work with a skewed perspective on the subject. Rejecting those who have used the concept to describe a kind of musical structure, he asserts that "music can neither be nor perform a narrative" (p. 99) (though it can "accompany stories" [p. 111]). Kramer agrees with Carolyn Abbate who argues that the "moral distance basic to narrative, the division of the teller from the tale, is at odds with the mimetic immediacy of music, the communion of the hearer and the heard" (p. 99). He does invent his own word, "narratography," for "the practice of writing through which narrative and narrativity are actualized." But he calls its "most important characteristic" its capacity to "resist" continuity and closure. To suggest their "subversive" role in music, Kramer calls narrative effects "disruptive." His music example of a narrative that is "fractious and disorderly" (p. 119) is Robert Schumann's *Carnival*. Unlike Anthony Newcomb who finds recurring anagrammatical motives in the work, Kramer thinks Schumann was less interested in "buried interconnections" than in suggesting "flagrant anarchy" (p. 102). His reason: citing Friedrich von Schlegel, repetition can also be understood as "rupture," a force that "arbitrarily breaks down a prior musical whole," and therefore "a sign of a transgressive social energy" (p. 103).

I found the two chapters on Mendelssohn more convincing than the previous ones. In this case the "social" is less vague (here it is linked specifically to the Enlightenment) and the composer is not chosen for being transgressive. Rather Kramer here explicitly intends to "challenge the dominant trope of oppositionality" (p. 123). Even his own language is less confrontational and more evocative (as when he describes a motive in *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* as "exfoliating across the otherwise neutral texture" [p. 131]). Both Friedrich Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe set the stage for his revisionist reading of Mendelssohn. Kramer is also careful to show how Mendelssohn's music differs from Goethe, for example, in *Walpurgisnacht I*. Not only does the composer transfer the lament to an old woman and set it with dignity, he suggests through

the use of a concluding hymn reminiscent of Sarastro's ceremonial music that the pagans in the cantata are like "bourgeois Christians, bred of the Enlightenment." In his chapter on Mendelssohn lieder, Kramer takes up from Edward Cone the fascinating subject of voice—who is speaking/singing in songs, whose desires are being expressed. He tries to show the multiple and ambivalent answers one can have to such questions. To do this, he rehearses the history of German "tutelage" as a prelude to a man's coming of age—this is like the position of a woman as passive receiver. Kramer suggests that Mendelssohn had this very relationship with Goethe before he wrote his "Suleika" songs. He argues convincingly that these songs reflect Mendelssohn's experience of that position. One of them, for example, as it proceeds, "encapsulates the rising curve of self-possession" in its differing treatments of "ich" and "mir" (p. 160).

In the chapters on Charles Ives and Maurice Ravel, Kramer moves on to the twentieth century both to try to prove why the former was not the "pre-postmodernist" his stylistic collages may have led some to believe, and why the latter, despite his unique blend of classicism and exoticism, was in fact "proto-postmodern." The chapter on Ives is polemical in intent—"an exemplary test case for politically informed musicology" (p. 175). Kramer aims to "undo the idealization" of the composer by comparing his works with the racist film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Unlike Walt Whitman, who uses heterogeneous materials to suggest the "fluidity of democratic social space," Kramer finds that when Ives uses such techniques, he "intervenes to arrest [this fluidity] with signs of mastery." These tactics "confound innovation with belligerent masculinity" and reminders of an antebellum past. Kramer hears this as "modes of identity playing out their conflicted history, nostalgia being invented in the service of cultural purity. . . . Not to hear this in the music," he goes on in one of his more unnecessary overstatements, "would be not to hear the music at all" (p. 198).

The comparison of Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* to Emile Zola's description of a white sale at a fictional department store, "Ladies' Paradise," and then analogously with a postcard advertising the B.H.V. [Bazar de

l'Hôtel de Ville], is the strangest in the volume. Kramer mistakenly takes the department store in the image as the City Hall [Hôtel de Ville], but his thesis is intriguing—that both Ravel's ballet and the B.H.V. display "order and beauty" and "beauty as a deliberate, purposeful effect" (pp. 223, 203). Both were very much about fashion and, as he puts it, simulacra of exotica. But their consumers were not the same. The B.H.V. attracted the middle class, while the Ballets Russes audience was largely the aristocracy and those with the money to send servants to do their shopping for them. At the end I felt he had belittled the music and not shown wherein its beauty lies. I also wondered if his reason for choosing such a piece was because he found the ending "the most explicit representation of orgasm in all 'classical' music" (p. 220).

In the last chapter Kramer puts himself to the test. He is the listener under examination, the performer too, considering again, from another vantage point, the idea of musical autonomy. To do this, he changes tone and gets even more insistent on his point of view ("must be: this is mandatory" [p. 227]), while ironically attempting playfulness in his structure. This chapter alternates between theoretical musings on autonomy and pleasure; confessional and anecdotal reflections on Elvis Presley, whose music he never liked; and the same on J. S. Bach, whose keyboard music he finds "satisfying" but has trouble playing. All this to say that taste plays a role in how we hear, that we cannot ever lose our identity nor should we—and so no work is ever autonomous. Citing Derrida's "Cinders," he suggests that even with the unnameable, that which is neither present nor absent, there are always cinders—"a trace of what the fire has consumed and the trace that can be consumed by no fire" (p. 231).

This chapter is certainly a good example of a postmodernism that insists on the "relativity of all knowledge, including self-knowledge" (p. 6). Even in it, however, Kramer's distaste for Elvis—a voice with which he cannot identify—stands in strong contrast to his interest in the classical musicians in the rest of the book, implying a hierarchy many postmodernists would contest. Elsewhere too, Kramer's method and his use of postmodernist ideas and psychoanalysis seem in direct contradiction to this

notion of relativity. How is one to understand sweeping assertions like the “real significance” of audience applause in Haydn’s *Creation* derives from its role as a “utopian ritual” (p. 90)? Are not such generalizations among the “grand, synthesizing schemes of explanation” (p. 5) that postmodernism intends to replace? One possible explanation is that we are to understand the whole book, and not just the last chapter, as the written “trace” of Kramer’s own “imaginary and symbolic” as he engaged with these works. He is the “subject,” the “receptive listener” (standing in for all “culturally constructed” subjects). The book might be an attempt to explain his own “musical pleasure” which, “like all pleasure, invites legitimation both of its sources and of the subject position its sources address” (p. 22).

This could be interesting, but it is not what Kramer claims to do. He defines the meaning he seeks as “concrete, complex, and historically situated” (p. 2). He tells us, “the composer’s voice, narrative or otherwise, is, and needs to be heard as, a cross between rhetoric and history” (p. 121). Yet some of his theses have little to do with history. Where, for example, is the historical research justifying the consumerist meaning and “conspicuous sublimation” ascribed to the Ravel ballet? What is “cultural and political” about the “ends” (p. 203) to which this argument is supposed to lead? And if it is listeners who interest him, it would be interesting to know how those of 1912 heard and understood the musical exotic. Ravel’s listeners were weaned on works like *Samson et Dalila* and entranced by *Shéhérazade* and *L’Oiseau de feu*, *Daphnis*’ contemporaries. Kramer’s sources are largely nonmusic critics of consumerism publishing around 1990. Without doing much historical work in the period, he thus misses the very tropes that might have lent more authority to his interpretation. For example, what he calls “the most exotic-archaic element of all” in the ballet—its wordless choruses—are not at all “as far removed as possible from the European choral tradition” (p. 208). They were commonly used in late nineteenth-century French Orientalist works. He might also have made more of the “techniques of reproduction, iteration, similitude” that he compares to “those by which commodities are identified and distributed.” They also

were common in works performed in the same venue by contemporaries who exploited folk processes in music—and for reasons far more “cultural and political” than those underlying his consumerist objects.

Kramer might counter that what Lacanians want to eschew is just this “authority” and that in his work he tries to “implicate a different, more plural, more multiply situated cultural logic” (p. 51). In several chapters, he does suggest a “dynamic interplay” among various meanings (“structural, generic, social, psychological, and sexual” [p. 51]). And in his discussion of Ludwig van Beethoven and Rossini, he confronts Dahlhaus, whose views are very different from his own. But more often when he refers to musicologists’ contrasting interpretations (as in the Schumann section), it is not to open wide the space of possible hearings, but to narrow in on what is “right” and what “must” be done (p. 99). The ordinary listeners who fill the halls of classical music in this country—the orchestra and opera subscribers who might have been consulted in such a project—have no voice in the discussion.

This self-righteousness seriously undercuts Kramer’s postmodern purpose. Somewhere the author gets caught in his own jargon about “giv[ing] oneself the law” (p. 228). And what he is implying—that music doesn’t have any inherent meaning of its own—is a return to a way of thinking that antedates Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Thankfully, his polemical style and these very arguments are full of contradiction. He writes: “we listen . . . only as we read and act” (p. xiii) and this is “good” for music. But his own descriptions of trying to play Bach say something else and his analysis proves that he can listen “musically.” He argues: “music *must* be so interpreted [in relation to nonmusical phenomena] or it cannot even be heard” (p. 24) and “we can only get to [music] by getting beyond it” (p. 32), that is, by admitting the contingencies in which it was produced and heard, the “cultural work” it was made to enact. But in his own discussion he describes listening as a “mode of dialogue,” something that is fully participatory no matter who is doing the talking.” In explaining the experience of listening as an “empathy” and as “a substantial reciprocity without which the mu-

sical summons cannot well be heard" (p. 22), he wants to shift attention to the listener's role. But this does not deny that the music has its voice too which, for the dialogue to continue, cannot be ignored.

Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge is purportedly written for the "non-specialist." Kramer does explain his major terms, but previous knowledge of the authors cited is essential. This book presents a series of, in some cases, new interpretation of traditional repertory, but in the end I'm not sure it fulfills its ambitions. Will classical music better "survive the dissolution of the cultural order that housed it" (p. 34) because this book turns its gaze on the subject's experience rather than the object's autonomy? What does it mean to be

"culturally relevant?" Focusing on the meanings listeners bring to music may indeed revive these works for a wider public; it is an important subject—for music in general. I am sympathetic to Kramer's project, but the book left me in a quandary. I would have liked more rigorous analyses with less didacticism, more "appeal to standards of truth and falsehood, reality and illusion" (p. 7) at the same time as more postmodernist thinking from the author—some of the "skeptical relativism" he rejects in Richard Rorty and Jean Baudrillard about his own concepts, theses, and even insights.

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Mozart, A Life. By Maynard Solomon. New York: HarperCollins, 1995, [xvi, 640 p. ISBN 0-06-019046-9. \$35.00.]

Maynard Solomon's eagerly awaited biography of Mozart represents a distinguished achievement in Mozart studies. The bulk of its pages (xiii–519) is devoted to Mozart's life and works, and includes an important appendix, "Mozart's Vienna Earnings," which furnishes a thorough and revelatory appraisal of Mozart's income during the last decade of his life. Significant also is the information Solomon gives in the endnotes and in a classified and annotated bibliography. Solomon surmounts the body of Mozart scholarship and literature, particularly that leading to and proceeding from the bicentenary in 1991 of the composer's death, and contributes decidedly fresh perspectives.

Psychological inquiry, a hallmark of Solomon's work, proved essential to his path-breaking Ludwig van Beethoven biography, and has informed his work on other composers, including Franz Schubert and Charles Ives, but not always without controversy. Here Solomon is aided by the illuminating and extensive correspondence of the Mozart family that provides insight into the Mozarts and suggestions about their motivations. Though the book is about Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, it would be difficult (and impossible for Solomon), to separate Leopold from Wolfgang in terms of cause and effect, motivation and influence. Yet, Solomon manages to form

a larger picture, drawn additionally from his impressive knowledge of primary and secondary documents, from which he interprets the dynamics of their relationship.

The book's prologue, "The Myth of the Eternal Child," advances one of Solomon's chief arguments, that a notion of Mozart, as both childlike and childish, as ultimately incapable of taking care of himself, was perpetuated by his family—notably by Leopold—in part to bind him to its prerogatives. Leopold became both impresario and teacher, and bore in eighteenth-century terms an obligation to his son's genius. "Mozart was seen, then, as a superlative example of the child's unlimited potentiality for creative and moral development, which could be unlocked by enlightened upbringing" (p. 4).

Thus, Leopold figured as Mozart's most important first model. He taught his son the clavier and composition, the latter practical in approach rather than systematic, as has been demonstrated by Wolfgang Plath and Alfred Mann. He organized the tours that allowed the Mozart child singular experiences involving music and musicians at Europe's courts and leading cities. While there was arguably an element of exploitation of the Mozart children on these tours (Marianne, Mozart's sister also appeared in the childhood performances), still the opportunities and their effects cannot be