

Book Reviews

David A. Sheldon. *Marpurg's Thoroughbass and Composition Handbook: A Narrative Translation and Critical Study*. Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1989. 299 pp.

Reviewed by Vernon Kliever.

In recent years a number of important 18th-century theoretical writings have been published in translation. These translations marvelously make available to the monolingual reader the thoughts and ideas of an age whose music is widely known and studied but of an age whose theoretical ideas principally have been available in secondary sources. All too often these secondary sources provide fragmentary information sufficient to augment an author's personal point of view, or to provide a means for disputation of the original writer's views. The reader either has to accept the interpreters' statements at face value or to base judgments on incomplete or even distorted information. Of course, reading a work in the original language still is preferable and is an ideal for which each of us should strive; but short of that, good translations provide an important and acceptable alternative.

Notable examples of translations that opened new vistas for the scholar interested in 18th-century theoretical writings are the published translations of Rameau's *Traité de l'harmonie*,¹ Kirnberger's *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik*,² and Koch's *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition*.³ Every researcher also has available doctoral dissertations that are translations of important writings, such as Rameau's *Démonstration du principe de l'harmonie*⁴ and *Nouveau système de musique théorique*.⁵ Each of these translations is a literal version of the original with commentary.

Another means for making non-English language works available is Sheldon's narrative translation and critical study of Marpurg's *Handbuch bey dem Generalbasse und der Composition*.⁶ Literal translation plays a small part in this book;⁷ narrative,

¹Jean Philippe Rameau, *Treatise on Harmony*, trans. Philip Gossett (New York: Dover, 1971).

²Johann Philipp Kirnberger, *The Art of Strict Musical Composition*, trans. David W. Beach and Jürgen Thym (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

³Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Introductory Essay on Composition*, trans. Nancy Kovaleff Baker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

⁴Roger Lee Briscoe, *Rameau's Démonstration du principe de l'harmonie and Nouvelles réflexions de M. Rameau sur sa démonstration du principe de l'harmonie* (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1975).

⁵Glenn B. Chandler, "Rameau's *Nouveau système de musique théorique* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 1975).

⁶David A. Sheldon, *Marpurg's Thoroughbass and Composition Handbook* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1989). The study by the Graves of Georg Joseph Vogler is concerned with presenting the ideas of a man and how his ideas impinge on all of his activities. Their chapter, "The Science of Harmony: Foundations for an Enlightened System," is an excellent summary of Vogler's views but the reader still must return to the original work(s) to experience how Vogler expressed himself. Floyd K. Grave and Margaret G. Grave. *In Praise of Harmony: The Teachings of Abbé Georg Joseph Vogler* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).

⁷For example, see 172-73.

paraphrase, commentary, and occasionally interpretation, are the modes of presentation. Sheldon states:

This critical study follows as closely as possible the order of presentation in the original source. Marpurg . . . tended to repeat himself at times and to scatter his thoughts beyond the subject at hand. This study condenses as well as coordinates Marpurg's main points and ideas, providing cross references where necessary. Only occasionally . . . does this study rearrange the contents of the original source. . . . This reorganization is most evident in the presentation of Marpurg's handling of dissonance. . . . In a few instances material from other Marpurg sources is included in the narrative. These inclusions . . . provide the contents of the *Handbuch* with greater clarity and perspective.⁸

Sheldon's Introduction contains an excellent, documented overview of the *Handbuch*; of Marpurg as an 18th-century man who attempted to balance reason with taste and fashion; of Marpurg as he interacted with his contemporaries, Kirnberger and Sorge; of his admiration for Heinichen; and of his near-worship attitude toward J.S. Bach. Rameau's influence on Marpurg's thought is dealt with briefly but adequately. Earlier writers tended to stress Marpurg's misunderstanding of Rameau's ideas, whereas Sheldon, rightly, emphasizes Marpurg's understanding of Rameau's principles so that the reader can have no doubt as to those which were tenable to Marpurg, and those that he rejected because the principles did not measure up to reason and good taste as Marpurg understood them.

In Chapter 1, "The Basic Materials," which corresponds to the introductory sections of the *Handbuch*, Sheldon explains Marpurg's notions about the materials of music. It is not always clear from the discussion that Marpurg thought of intervals in a harmonic (i.e., vertical) context, albeit as parts of a chord. True, Marpurg's concern with "pleasantness or unpleasantness to the ear" is given its

⁸Sheldon, xix.

due attention as these notions provide a rationale for harmonic consonance or dissonance. The chapter includes Marpurg's views regarding the seventh chord as the model for dissonant harmonic structures, in a manner similar to Rameau, and how extended tertian harmonies can be derived as well as how these compound harmonies can be part-written.

Of great importance to Sheldon's presentation in Chapter 1, and throughout the study, is the documentation he provides through extensive footnotes, and in the text itself, relating Marpurg's views in the *Handbuch* to his views as they are found in other of his writings.⁹

Chapters 2 through 6 are the heart of the *Handbuch*. It is in these chapters that Marpurg's discussion of consonance and dissonance is presented. As Sheldon points out, Marpurg relies upon Fux for his ideas on how consonance progresses, and in the *Handbuch* Marpurg delays any further discussion of consonance until he deals with three- and four-part writing. At this point Sheldon provides an important synopsis for the reader about Marpurg's lack of concern in the *Handbuch* with the progression of consonant chords to one another. The synopsis is from *Sorgens Anleitung*¹⁰ and introduces the notion of harmonic *Sprungen*, which is Marpurg's method of explaining elided chord connections. Digressions such as this provide completeness to Marpurg's harmonic thinking but may draw attention away from an understanding of the contents of the *Handbuch* in its own right.

Regular and irregular resolutions of dissonances (Chapters 3 through 6) received detailed attention from Marpurg—following the examples of his predecessors—ranging from the dissonant fourth, passing tones, syncopation, sevenths, diminished sevenths through thirteenthths. All of these are placed in a harmonic context but with

⁹The interested reader will find these well-documented in footnotes throughout the chapter.

¹⁰Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, *Georg Andreas Sorgens Anleitung zum Generalbass und zur Composition* (Berlin: G.A. Lange, 1760).

the implication that dissonance is a linear phenomenon.¹¹ Marpurg's harmonic thinking and his perception of *galant* style is clearly relegated to irregular resolutions of dissonance. Drawing upon concepts of voice exchange, retardation, and anticipation, Marpurg is able to explain resolutions of dissonance not possible without the concept of chord as an entity. It is in sections such as the one devoted to irregular resolutions that this reviewer would have preferred to have translation, rather than paraphrase. Although Sheldon makes every effort to be faithful to the original, the manner selected to deal with the material gives one pause from time to time.

The remainder of the *Handbuch* is more practical in character. It is devoted to such subjects as doubling of intervals both consonant and dissonant, distribution of intervals within the chord, figured bass symbolization, and writing for two or more voices.¹² Sheldon also includes a chapter on double counterpoint, canon, and fugue that appears as an *Anhang* to the *Handbuch*. As Sheldon makes clear, this is a condensation of Marpurg's earlier work on the fugue¹³ and is a means to make the *Handbuch* a "complete" unit for the student.

The final chapter of Sheldon's study, "Influence (H.C. Koch and D.G. Türk)" departs from the narrative translation concept and adds additional meaning to the inclusion of the word "study" in the subtitle of the book. Scholarly documentation is present throughout the book but here Sheldon goes beyond the main purpose of the book; and, in the opinion of this reviewer, it is one of the weakest sections, in that Sheldon appears to be grasping to show the

¹¹True of the regular resolutions. In the opinion of this reviewer Marpurg's similarities with Kirnberger could have been made more evident in the commentary. Marpurg seems to be attempting to make a distinction between essential and nonessential dissonance—but never quite reaching it—without using the terminology.

¹²It is interesting to note that Sheldon resorts to translation in the chapter on writing for two or more voices. The reviewer found this highly desirable for it permitted two things: 1) the ability to get closer to Marpurg's own views, and 2) the ability to compare directly with the original.

¹³Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, *Abhandlung von der Fuge*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Haude und Spener, 1753-1754).

influence Marpurg may have exerted. For example, statements such as the two presented below seem particularly insufficient to demonstrate influence.

This influence is confined essentially to the first part . . . of this volume [*Handbuch*], that part dealing with harmonic theory and the treatment of dissonance. Koch's recognition of the triads built on the first, fourth, and fifth degrees as being essential . . . and triads built on the other degrees as being non-essential . . . represents an important theoretical step beyond Marpurg and is the main cause of the differences between the two writers in the second part of the *Versuch's* first volume

The basic similarity between Koch and Marpurg is their belief that dissonant chords are generated by the addition of intervals below the fundamental seventh chord¹⁴

Influence on Koch and Türk is not convincingly demonstrated by Sheldon. As a matter of fact, the final chapter gives this excellent work the aura of a doctoral dissertation in which the author is required to produce something that is original to conclude the dissertation. That was not necessary here; the narrative translation and discussion of Marpurg's *Handbuch* and the documentation provided by Sheldon form a cohesive unit that does not require anything additional to make the book more complete.

Of course, this is a biased view of the reviewer, who already has indicated that a translation plus the scholarly comments would be preferable to the mode of presentation adopted here. Nothing would have been lost, and much would have been gained, if the author had followed the path being suggested. The reader would have had the advantage of more nearly experiencing Marpurg's work, and at the same time would have benefitted enormously from

¹⁴Sheldon, 243.

the scholarly expertise of the author. Even so, Sheldon's work deserves praise: he has made available for everyone his thorough understanding of Marpurg's writings. Perhaps all of Marpurg's works can appear in English translation someday so that the reader who prefers to do so, and who cannot read the original, may decide how important Marpurg's thinking is to the history of musical and theoretical ideas.

Stefan M. Kostka. *Materials and Techniques of Twentieth-Century Music*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990. 337 pp.

Joel Lester. *Analytical Approaches to Twentieth-Century Music*. New York: Norton, 1989. 303 pp.

Reviewed by Ronald Rodman.

Two welcome additions to the pedagogical repertoire on 20th-century music are now available for those who wish to acquaint themselves with introductory, yet authoritative, explanations of 20th-century compositional techniques. But despite the similarity of their respective titles, Stefan Kostka's *Materials and Techniques of Twentieth-Century Music* and *Analytical Approaches to Twentieth-Century Music* by Joel Lester are very different in their breadth and scope. Kostka's book undertakes an extensive survey of the many styles and compositional techniques of the century, and thus may be considered a successor to earlier survey books such as those by Dallin and Deri. Lester's book, on the other hand, focuses on the analytic application of pitch-class set theory to atonal and serial music.

Kostka wants his book to be used as a text for a 20th-century unit or class (somewhere) in the theory curriculum. The author states that the book is organized in a "quasi-chronological" format,