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### The Schenker Project: Culture, Race and Music Theory in fin de siecle Vienna

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COOK, NICHOLAS, *The Schenker Project: Culture, Race and Music Theory in Fin de siècle Vienna*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007. xi, 355 pp. £38.99. ISBN 978-0-19-517056-6.

How far the culture of Vienna in the early twentieth century was essentially a Jewish one remains a vexed question, but there can be no doubt about the dominant role played there by musicians of Jewish descent (Mahler, Schoenberg, Zemlinsky, Korngold, Schreker, Gál, Wellesz, etc.). This being so, it is strange that Heinrich Schenker (1884-1935), the most influential musical theorist of his (and our) age, has not attracted more attention as yet another Jewish luminary within that seminal culture. In his painstaking, challenging and deeply thoughtful study, Cook sets out to fill that gap in our understanding. Although particularly aimed at North American musicologists, who tend to revere Schenker's work in a context-free way, Cook's work will prove rewarding to a wider audience through its sensitive account of a Galician immigrant embarking on the path of cultural assimilation in a city where Judaism was rarely perceived as anything but a hindrance to success. That Schenker grew into a cultural conservative with pronounced German nationalist sympathies will surprise few but may still dismay some. In the face of what Richard Wagner perceived as the pollution of German music in the wake of Felix Mendelssohn, Schenker "redefines the German in music: he wrenches it away from the Wagnerians and relocates it back in time to the Viennese classics, back to a legacy that is common to Jew and gentile" (p.88). It is this which the author sees as the principle motivation in what he terms the "Schenker project".

Relying almost exclusively on translated sources, Cook does an excellent job in charting Schenker's critique of what he, like the (gentile) architect Adolf Loos and the (Jewish) satirist Karl Kraus, regarded as the superficial, indeed criminal, ornamentations of Viennese aestheticism. Schenker thus belongs to what Allan Janik in *Wittgenstein's Vienna Revisited* (2001) terms the "critical modernist" tendency within Viennese culture. The extent to which Cook can call on material in English to perform his task of explaining Schenker in context signals how much "Vienna 1900" can now be appreciated and studied even in considerable depth without recourse to its original linguistic identity. However, there are several instances when the author's insufficient acquaintance with German sources becomes evident, and these could well have been picked up by more rigorous editing. It is particularly unfortunate that in an otherwise lucid account of the linguistic purists Kraus and Loos the

famous inscription on the Vienna Secession they so disparaged should have been bowdlerised. Olbrich's famous motto reads "Der Zeit ihre Kunst, der Kunst ihre Freiheit" not "Jeder Zeit ihre Kunst, jeder Kunst ihre Freiheit". Similarly, a writer more versed in the classical German culture Schenker strove to make his own might not perhaps have overlooked the allusion to *Faust* near the beginning of the monograph on Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony. When Schenker writes "In the beginning was content", surely this relates at least as much to Goethe's "Im Anfang war die Tat" as to St John's Gospel (p. 210)?

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