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Book Review: John Rice, *Music in the Eighteenth Century*

by Bryan Proksch

John Rice. *Music in the Eighteenth Century*. Western Music in Context, Walter Frisch, series editor. New York: W. W. Norton, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-393-92918-8. \$40.00.

<http://books.wwnorton.com/books/detail.aspx?ID=4294971252>

John Rice's *Music in the Eighteenth Century* is part of W. W. Norton's effort to update their period-specific textbook offerings, a welcome event given that the volume from their previous series, Philip G. Downs's *Classical Music: The Era of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven*,¹ is now more than twenty years old. Much has changed in those intervening decades, especially insofar as a textbook on the Classical era is concerned. Where Downs could take for granted an epoch beginning with Haydn's birth and ending with Beethoven's death, Rice is here faced with two daunting decisions. First, just what is the "Classical era" (assuming it even exists anymore)? Second, do Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven still demand the bulk of the reader's attention? His chosen title hints at his preferred answers to these questions, and to his credit he sticks to his position of treating the Eighteenth Century as the years 1715–1815 without regret while relegating the Viennese triumvirate to a less substantial role than seen in comparable texts. The book thus opens with Couperin and closes with Beethoven's Sixth Symphony.

Before appraising his coverage, it needs to be noted that the book is part of a series in which the preceding volume, *Music in the Baroque*,² covers music up to 1750, while the ensuing volume, *Music in the Nineteenth Century*,³ begins with the Congress of Vienna (basically picking up with Beethoven's later works). The first few chapters of Rice's *Music in the Eighteenth Century* examine the growing importance of the Galant style, a much needed section improving on Downs's coverage. However, Rice turns the clock back further than seems necessary, all the way to the 1710s and '20s. The consequences

¹ Norton Introduction to Music History series (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992).

² Wendy Heller, *Music in the Baroque*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013).

³ Walter Frisch, *Music in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012).

of going back this far are that he is virtually forced into addressing J. S. Bach and Handel in the early chapters on an all-too-regular basis. Discussing a 1715 work by Couperin in Chapter 2 as if he were laying the foundations for the Galant style seems odd to me, as my experiences of Couperin's music have always placed the composer squarely in the Baroque, yet Rice's musical example is compelling and thought provoking. A heated discussion of the point in a classroom setting will surely prove fruitful to the students.

There is a significant downside to Rice's opening in 1715—namely that in a book of only 275 pages, space is at a premium. His coverage of music prior to 1740, while valid and informative, means that Haydn only appears beginning on p. 139 and Mozart fifty pages later. Beethoven's early and middle periods receive merely a brief nod in the final chapter, while the ensuing volume picks up the thread with his late period. Norton's decision to place a volume break at the Congress of Vienna artificially splits Beethoven's music across two volumes, something that bothers me from an educational standpoint. Given that this is a textbook intended for the undergraduate classroom, I wonder if it is not ill advised to sacrifice a detailed study of these central figures in favor of examining a handful of Galant composers. When used for a course aimed at performers and music educators, the delay in addressing the Viennese Classics risks graduating students who know less about Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven (and more about Sammartini, Couperin, Pergolesi, and the like) than seems right. While I am admittedly old-fashioned in my tastes, the addition of 100 pages on the Viennese Classics, including full—even overlapping—coverage of Beethoven's entire career, would have made the book more versatile as a textbook. For Downs, writing decades ago, this was not an issue: he unabashedly covers Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven in detail, and at double Rice's length his book still had room to cover everyone else besides.

Setting aside the issues of classroom time, text length, and coverage, it is worth noting that this is, in fact, an excellent book. Rice's writing is fluid, readable, and engaging when compared to its peers. His points on style, form, and analysis are clear and dispense with the usual technical jargon that makes undergraduates glaze over and lose

interest. That he organizes the book around place instead of composers or genres is neither unusual nor a hindrance. In fact the scheme works quite well for the first half of the text, and after that point he navigates around Haydn and Mozart's travels with ease.

There is an accompanying anthology of scores for this book,⁴ but I feel that it unnecessarily abbreviates works that should be included in full and shows a marked preference for including the same musical examples seen in every other Norton anthology. For those using Norton's Grout/Burkholder⁵ for a history survey text, the students encounter far too many re-runs in Rice's anthology. For instance, Stamitz Op. 3/2/i shows up as does the finale to Haydn's "Joke," Op. 33/2/iv. I do not think it is asking too much for Norton to provide alternatives given the more detailed nature of the book. Besides, Haydn's "Joke" Quartet hardly presents the composer's most intriguing work in the genre; in my opinion, it is not even representative of Haydn's quartets as a whole. Surely there is a second Stamitz symphony worth analyzing. I am under the distinct impression that Norton was looking to save costs in compiling the anthology, a regrettable decision.

Rice consciously combats the disappointing anthology by covering a number of additional works in the text. Furthermore, he makes a concerted effort to discuss opera plots in detail, even in cases where excerpts do not appear in the anthology. After reading about these operas in the text, I wanted to have a look at the score, but of course this was not possible nor would it be in a classroom setting. Norton's on-line coverage of opera is very good, so perhaps at least one could listen to a snippet or two without a score. In a real-life course, the author's opera synopses and analyses would probably go to waste simply because there is no way easily (or legally, perhaps) to get the scores into the hands of students.

In conclusion, my feelings on this book are more positive than negative. I believe that

⁴ John A. Rice, *Anthology for Music in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012).

⁵ J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).

students will find it useful and interesting and that they will learn quite a bit if it is adopted as a course textbook. This is especially true in those areas pertaining to the development of musical style. On the other hand, Rice's limited coverage of Haydn and Mozart combined with a decidedly weak anthology make the decision to adopt this text for an upper-level undergraduate history course on Eighteenth-century music more difficult than it otherwise might have been. In courses where coverage of the Galant is valued, this book will be the preferred one; in courses revolving around Haydn and Mozart, less so.

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