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Music, a Connected Art/Die Illusion der Absoluten Musik: A Festschrift for Jürgen Thym on His 80th Birthday, ed. Ulrich J. Blomann, David B. Levy, Ralph P. Locke, and Frieder Reininghaus. Baden-Baden: Verlag Valentin Koerner, 2023 [review]

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Book Review

Music, a Connected Art/Die Illusion der Absoluten Musik: A Festschrift for Jürgen Thym on His 80th Birthday, ed. Ulrich J. Blomann, David B. Levy, Ralph P. Locke, and Frieder Reininghaus. Baden-Baden: Verlag Valentin Koerner, 2023 info@koernerverlag

368 pp. ISBN 9783873206038 (paper). € 78. Illustrations, musical examples, musical compositions, bibliography, index.

A recent bilingual Festschrift for the Eastman School of Music professor emeritus Jürgen Thym, whose contributions have particularly shaped the field of nineteenth-century lied, is a warm celebration of academic connection. It collects twenty-eight essays on the order of ten pages each, about a quarter of which are by women, and a handful of which are in German. The title, in two halves that are not direct translations, is *Music, A Connected Art/Die Illusion der Absoluten Musik*, a set of cognate words that should not trouble non-Germanists. Many readers will no doubt employ the subtitle, *A Festschrift for Jürgen Thym*, as their mental handle, if not the “Thymschrift” that the editors mentioned using as a personal shorthand.

Wonderfully, the book is an argument for the continued propagation of the Festschrift as an academic form—and not only for its constellation of luminaries, as such collections generally are, but for the history of the discipline that is revealed in them. There is more personal history in this volume than in any I have ever read (although I confess that for me “reading” a Festschrift usually means “dipping into for my very specific article of interest”). Certainly *Music, A Connected Art/Die Illusion der Absoluten Musik* can be mined in this latter way by many a researcher, particularly for a number of classic offerings from notable names such as Susan Youens’s “Translating a Winter’s Journey” or Harald Krebs’s “Two Responses to Eichendorff’s ‘Nachtblume’: A Comparison of Settings by Fanny Hensel and Hugo Wolf.” But many contributions also incorporate explicit reminiscences not just of Thym’s printed work but of scholars’ encounters with it, and with him, which are touching and informative to read in context: Seth Brodsky’s characteristically exhilarating “‘Und ringt die Hände’: On Hidden Labors,” and Rob Haskins’s “Hermeneutical Views of John Cage: Two Snapshots,” to name a few. Moreover, there is an entire appendix of moving “Greetings and Reminiscences,” including two compositions dedicated to Thym (by Samuel Adler and

Luca Lombardi), and I hereby move that such an appendix be required for any Festschrift.

Appropriately to the subject, the contributions do echo with the unheard “music” of Thym’s publications, including his many works on Schubert, Schumann, Eichendorff settings, lied, memory, and text-music relations (a full and impressive bibliography is included in the volume). The lengthiest subdivision—titled “Music and Poetry”—houses a mini-cycle on Schubert. This includes Susan Youens’s above-mentioned contribution on the Haslinger bilingual French/German edition of *Winterreise* (surely for Viennese singers, but in its French text more focused on lost love than alienation); Lorraine Byrne Bodley’s “The Gardens of Alcinous: Schubert’s Dream and Non-Dream” (which makes suggestions about Schubert’s biographical sketch and its relation to romantic poetry, particularly Novalis) and Yonatan Malin’s insightful “Poetic Endings and Song Endings in ‘Gute Nacht,’ and ‘Der Leiermann’ from Schubert’s *Winterreise*.” Shifting over to Schumann, Jennifer Ronyak’s “On Colliding with the Chorale in Robert Schumann’s ‘Anfangs wollt’ ich fast verzagen” divorces an individual song from its cycle (the op. 24 Heine *Liederkreis*) to good interpretive effect. Ronyak engagingly discusses the possibility that interpreting a song within a cycle can excessively limit the interpretation—a legacy, perhaps, of the romantic embrace of monumentality (i.e., the cycle) to fight against the smallness of the individual lied.

A more latent cycle concerns the role of nineteenth-century women sprinkled throughout the volume, not all in the realm of the lied. David Levy’s “Friedrich Theodor Vischer, Louise Otto, and the Nibelungs” examines the widespread interest (before Wagner) in transmediating the *Nibelungenlied* epic into an opera, highlighting the role of woman composer Louise Otto. Marie Rolf’s “Will the Real F. Mendelssohn Please Stand Up? A Source Study” is an advance look at work for Rolf’s edition of Fanny Mendelssohn’s “Easter” Sonata (identified by Angela Mace Christian), providing some analysis and, crucially, locating the lost manuscript. Harald Krebs’s comparison of the same composer’s unpublished setting of Eichendorff’s “Nachtblume” with Hugo Wolf’s on the same text helps us to conceive Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel’s subjectivity as a woman composer in a setting that is comparatively personal. Stephen Rodgers’s contribution, “In Praise of Simplicity: Marie Hinrichs’s op. 1, *Neun Gesänge*” (whose example can be supplied on imslp.org), begins with a charmingly personal introduction to the songs and goes on to combat the nineteenth-century value of “complexity,” rather than arguing (as one often does with women composers) that the results show a thwarted potential via hints of unrecognized complexity. To this latent cycle one could add Matthew Valverde’s “‘Whose Spinnrad is it Anyway!?’ Deconstructing Gender Specificity in Art-Song Performance.” From a performance perspective, Valverde notes the lingering discomfort concerning male singers performing lieder with an obviously feminine subject and our difficulty in decoupling the (male, but not female) singer from the poetic subject, noting that Fischer-Dieskau’s “complete” Schubert songs omit “Gretchen am Spinnrade”

and “Suleika” among others. (Ringing in my ears as I read this was the echo of my undergraduate advisor Claudia Macdonald, in the position Thym once held at Oberlin, ranting about how men so rarely sing *Frauenliebe und -leben*.) Valverde’s goal is in part a pedagogical one, to empower singers to “confidently perform songs traditionally reserved for singers of a different gender” (p. 155) without the threat of burlesque or parody.

Pedagogy is indeed another thread that binds the work together. Of course it includes the work of several who taught with Thym, including David Beach (“Bach and the Art of Diminution”) and Kerala J. Snyder (“Simone Vesi’s Vesper Music in Lübeck, Stockholm, and Bologna”), both classical offerings from their expertises. But it is Mary Natvig’s essay “Teaching Beethoven Post-2020” that in my opinion is the must-read of the entire collection—presuming we wish to cut straight to the heart of the curricular moment we are all currently confronting in the discipline. (When we pair Natvig’s pedagogical influence—for example her classic *Teaching Music History* [2002]—with her reminiscence about the “second chance” Jürgen Thym gave her [Natvig’s words, p. 306] at the doctoral level, we are momentarily staggered by the weight of influence wielded by individuals such as Thym over generations of learners.) In a companion essay that likewise thematizes the teaching of music history (not to overcodify it with the term “pedagogy”), Ralph Locke (“Music’s Connections: Experiences in the Classroom”) issues similarly readable and worthy reflections getting at the very soul of what it means to teach, and to teach music.

Some other historiography appears in essays that demonstrate the broader significance Thym’s thinking on text-music relations. Hanns-Werner Heister shows nationalist elements surfacing in art parodies of children’s songs in “Die prosodische Parodierung als Kontrafaktur ohne Musik in einem Werk des jüdischen Dichters Manfred Winkler,” noting that the variability of folk/children’s songs lends an inherent half-remembered quality or distance in their use. Hartmut Möller’s “‘Der Sänger der Machtergreifung’: Joseph Maria Müller-Blattau und die totgeschwiegene Melodieausgabe des Rostocker Liederbuchs” tells the history of another Festschrift (with contributions from Adorno and Dahlhaus) for Joseph Müller-Blattau, a figure connected both to the discovery of the Rostock Liederbuch and to the Third Reich. Its incidental historiography of the post-Nazi era links (un)easily to our own perennial confrontation of the unacceptable past behaviors of ostensibly respectable musical giants. Albrecht Riethmüller’s “Remembering the ‘Tempest’-Sonata Controversy” is both another historiography stretching into the Nazi era and also one of several articles drawing inspiration from Thym’s early work on “The Instrumental Recitative in Beethoven’s Composition,” which has appeared in both English and German. Theodore Albrecht’s “*Gegenliebe*: The Reciprocal Love Between Beethoven and the Orchestra of the Theater an der Wien,” presumably similarly inspired, is a very useful, interesting, and compact observation that Beethoven wrote particular orchestral lines for particular musicians in

his Theater an der Wien years, as Larry Todd and Marc Moskowitz have recently speculated concerning the Bonn years in *Beethoven's Cello* (2017).

The contributions have the air of papers delivered in the personal presence of Thym, no doubt due to the editors' encouragement of "an approach more essayistic than is normal in musicological prose" (p. 14). Many are preliminary to or encapsulations of other work. (The abstracts, published at the end of each essay, are often clarifying introductions and generally an excellent index to the content.) Many are also outright fun—putting the "Fest" in "Festschrift," so to speak. For example, there is a playful quality in Larry Todd's "The Musical Cryptography of Niels Gade, or, What's in a Name?" Other scholarly *scherzi* range from the overarching and quirky (Ulrich Blomann's "On the Origin of Music: A Hypothesis") to the unabashedly confessional (Rufus Hallmark's pan of movie musicals "'Here Am I, Your Special Island:' Stage Musicals vs. Screen Adaptations"). One of the best combinations of fun and scholarly is Kim Kowalke's "I Remember It Well: Faulty Memory and the Broadway Musical." Crystalline in form, it is a virtuosic meta-description of the "faulty memory" romantic duet, incorporating the faulty-to-the-point-of-plagiaristic memories of Lerner ("I Remember It Well") and Sondheim ("I Remember That") in their failure to credit the influence of Kurt Weill's "I Remember It Well" in *Love Life* (1948).

I was particularly gripped by Michael Broyles's re-evaluation of the last fifty years in his essay "Why the Concert Didn't Die, Mr. Gould; or, Musicology's Multimodal Problem." It struck me as an eligible graduate-seminar companion to the oft-assigned Walter Benjamin. Glenn Gould's prediction of the death of the concert is, perhaps, paralleled by the (similarly fizzled) big ideas in Babbitt's "Who Cares If You Listen," an outgrowth of the same mid-to-late-twentieth-century mindset. Broyles's diagnosis is, roughly, that recordings and the digital age haven't killed the live concert because the visual element isn't as meaningless as purveyors of musical ideals were claiming; indeed, listeners before the recording/broadcast age clearly had *much more* visual element present when they took in music, though it was generally not discussed. The essay also, for me, formed an interesting triptych with Haskins's Cage piece and the concluding essay from Douglas Reed, "William Albright's *Juba for Organ*: Idiomatic Gesture and Organ Design," whose doctoral work on Albright was supervised by Thym in 1977. Concerning the even-more-recent past, Caroline Ehman's "Faustian Identities: Reimagining a Myth in Twenty-First-Century Opera" highlights Faustian inspiration in recent operas such as John Adams's *Doctor Atomic* and Jake Heggie's *If I Were You*—interesting research that inspired me to further reading. And though Frieder Reininghaus's examination of Crusade legacies and war at the margins of opera in "Nachhall der Kriege im Osten. Von Monteverdi bis zur Gegenwart" would seem to extend over opera's whole history, the up-to-date element—reverberations of the war in Ukraine in modern staging—was most striking.

Not least in the collection is Wilfried Gruhn's article on neurobiology and perception "Warum wir hören, was wir hören: Neuropsychologische Aspekte musikalischer Wahrnehmung." Its short but rich summary of "why we hear what we hear" distills research on hearing and perception, particularly concerning the idea that some listeners separate out frequencies better than others, or can "hear" the fundamental from just the overtones. The fact that we "learn" to hear and match sounds to our remembered templates has implications for the hearing of global music. I was also reminded of Robin Wallace's illustration of this process in his recent *Hearing Beethoven* (2018), which like this collection suggests that moving personal reminiscence (in this case watching his wife Barbara "learn to hear" again after a cochlear implant) does in fact have a place in scholarship.

This Festschrift demonstrates how a person's influence ramifies in unpredictable and often beautiful ways. Its editors and contributors clearly embraced this element. Yet I sensed a distant unifying thread—one which brought to mind Schumann's offbeat piano melody in *Hör' ich das Liedchen klingen*. For the reader not fortunate enough to know Thym, the "Liedchen" sounding just out of reach is that nostalgia for those moments of academic communion and personal camaraderie which pulled us into this scholarly world in the first place, whose music we recognize most when it is past.

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