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Christopher Dingle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Music Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), xvi + 826 pp.

This is a much-needed book. Musicologists have long used music criticism without attempting to chart it over the *longue durée* – and this 35-chapter work does provide a chart, richly contextualised if inevitably affected by what its editor Christopher Dingle calls 'partialities and simplifications' (p. 5). Dingle's introduction shows him to be aware of the gap between the volume as it stands and a truly inclusive – one might say more radically, a 'decolonised' – history of music criticism, whose 'full realisation', he states, is 'sadly beyond…the state of the discipline at this time' (p. 3). In his chapter on post-WWII British music criticism he seizes on the 'conceit…that music criticism means classical music criticism' (p. 629), despite the fact that the same equation effectively applies to many of his authors' contributions. But geography weighs just as heavily as genre. Thomas Christensen's parallel Cambridge volume is on 'Western music theory': is there really enough here to justify that modifier's absence from the title of the present volume?

Notwithstanding interruption by sections on 'Critical Influence and Influences' (a chapter by Dingle on recording and two powerfully-argued chapters by Laura Hamer addressing issues of canon-formation and women in criticism) and 'New Areas' (including Simon Frith on Anglo-American rock criticism and Timothy Taylor on the category of 'world music'), the narrative lines, geography and periodization of the volume still bear a recognizable resemblance to those of the 2001 *Grove* article on 'Criticism', albeit with welcome additions. After two chapters on discourses around medieval plainsong (Christopher Page) and late medieval-to-Renaissance polyphony (Stefano Mengozzi), which despite not treating sources canonically regarded as 'criticism' manage to uncover early testimonies to the sensual pleasure and metaphorical fecundity of music, we are on to modernity, and history becomes (more or less) national. France, Britain and Germany/Austria all receive four chapters each, covering up to 1800 (by Charles Dill, Rebecca Herissone, and Stephen Rose respectively), the nineteenth century (in the same order, Mark Pottinger, Leanne Langley, and Laura Tunbridge), the early twentieth (Delphine Mordey, Paul Watt, and Karen Painter), and post-WWII (Christopher Brent Murray, Dingle, and Mark Berry). Italy gets three (Carrie Churnside for Italy 1500-1800, Alexandra Wilson for the nineteenth century, and Raffaele Pozzi for the twentieth), and North America and Russia two each (Mark McKnight covering the USA and Canada until WWII, Sophie Redfern the post-war period; Emily Frey discusses imperial and Peter J. Schmelz Soviet Russia). There are unnecessary overlaps, which could surely have been eliminated (along with some of the errors and stylistic infelicities) at copy-editing stage. The 'added' nations meanwhile are Portugal (Paulo de Castro), Spain (Eva Moreda Rodriguez), Norway (Per Dahl), Hungary (Lynn M. Hooker), Czechia/Slovakia (Kelly St Pierre), Cuba (Caroline Rae) and Singapore (Shzr Ee Tan). Excepting some of these 'additions' and Mark Racz's chapter on jazz criticism in America, breaking the rhythm of association between national criticisms and classical tradition, we are left in the 'main sequence' of the survey with maybe a couple of pages on criticism of popular musics in each of the main European languages.

How might we imagine this structure differently, in bolder antithesis to the assumption that 'music criticism means [Western] classical music criticism'? Expanding on clues in the volume itself, we would need to recognize that writing on popular music also existed prior to, or overlapping with, the rise of jazz and rock criticism: some of Neville Cardus's first pieces were on music hall (p. 378), and dailies in 1940s France gave 'marked preference to the genres of *chanson* and music hall' (p. 652). Portuguese *fado* is mentioned once in passing by Paulo de Castro, but periodicals on it existed since

1910, raising fascinating issues of class, politics and national identity.[1] 'Folk' and 'popular' musics in Eastern Europe were not always clearly separated, and their importance for national or regional discourses could outweigh that of art music, as Hooker shows (pp. 436-9) for 'the Gypsy question' in Hungary and St Pierre for Czech and Slovak nationalism – issuing an important caution as she does so that 'histories (including this one) risk examining only these nations' most accessible voices' (p. 454). (That caution may even apply to the USA, as evidenced by Racz and Redfern's references to what must be a substantial body of African-American music criticism ranging across genres in black newspapers such as the *Afro-American*, *New York Age* and *Chicago Defender* – pp. 460, 682-3). Other voices less accessible to Euro-American musicology will need examining too: ancient Chinese writings on music (as Dingle notes, pp. 3-4) but also those of the Arab world might occupy 'part I' of such a survey, while the process of cultures working out how to define their own modernity against that of Europe or the USA often involved vivid and intensive music-critical reflection during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (the music criticism of Rabindranath Tagore in colonial Bengal being one example). And we could be more sweeping. Split the twentieth century roughly in two at the 1960s, cram whatever needs saying about Western art music post-WWII into the tail end of the first half, fill the second half (the present volume's 'part VI') with chapters not just on *Rolling Stone* et al. but punk and zine culture, Brazilian *tropicalismo*, hip-hop criticism – or hip-hop *as* criticism (what else are the best diss tracks?)…and you would not only invert the present volume's (im)balance between the popular and classical, but surely stimulate more thematically rich historiography than Murray or Pozzi's dutiful trudge through lists of 'major' journals and critics. (Unfortunately, some of the worst of this book is about as inspired as a string of publication abstracts from RIPM: in case there are any masochists out there who might be tempted, I do not recommend reading it cover-to-cover.)

In assessing the many insights the volume *does* offer I will pick out three running themes. Each in its own way casts doubt on criticism's autonomy – the assumption that the critic sets all 'prejudice' aside to register the pure aesthetic quality of a work or performance. The crudest but most striking of these themes is the extent to which criticism has historically been embroiled with commercial interests – something especially worth bearing in mind given that this affected 'serious' periodicals as well as newspapers. Germany's pre-eminent music-critical organ in the nineteenth century, the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, was conceived by its publisher G. C. Härtel as a means 'to help sell scores', even if it soon 'achieved more than that' (p. 174). Italy's leading periodical the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* was founded by Ricordi and 'linked closely to the publishing house's own commercial interests', especially in 'its enthusiasm for the works of Verdi and…Puccini' (p. 199), but its opponent from 1894, the *Rivista musicale italiana*, issued by academic publishers Fratelli Bocca, also 'had an agenda which disposed it towards and against certain repertories' (p. 205). In general, Wilson writes, the proximity of Italian journalists and music agents during the period 'makes it extremely difficult for the reception historian to distinguish between genuine [critical] responses and rapacious falsification' (p. 199). Mordey confirms that 'accusations of corruption and bias were rife' in Third Republic France too (p. 356), while in early nineteenth-century New York 'the "paid puff"…was pervasive' (pp. 296-7); a century later composer-critic Virgil Thomson's 'biases were often barely concealed', with 'conflicts of interest at every turn…he would lavish warm praise…on those who performed or commissioned his music' (p. 679). By the twentieth century it was record companies paying the piper, even if 'the most effective promotional support came from writers who were thought by their readers to make independent judgements' (Frith, p. 516).

[1] Q.v. Rui Vieira Nery, *A History of Portuguese Fado*, trans. David Cranmer (Lisbon: INCM, 2012), p. 202.

That commercial influences could only sully the 'ideal' definition of the critic's role seems a fair enough proposition: what critic would be proud of being bought? In the case of politics, itself a domain of high ideals, the case is less clear-cut. Certain periods cannot be understood unless we are prepared to view criticism as a political act. For the USSR, 'delineating "normal" criticism…is anachronistic, if not impossible', writes Schmelz – 'everything carried a political charge, even if some articles had less voltage than others' (p. 572). Juxtapose that statement with Frey's portraits of 'sermonis[ing]', 'vitriolic' and 'partisan' Russian critics a couple of generations earlier (pp. 208, 217, 227), and the Soviet case seems less unique. Or consider late nineteenth-century France, where 'no issue dominated music criticism more than Franco-German relations [and] no figure dominated this [issue] more than Wagner...the question of Wagner remained firmly tied to the [post-1870] political situation' (Mordey, p. 359). Tunbridge argues that the institutional project of German criticism began *c*1800 as a political means of 'constructing a musical nation', and succeeded after a century in creating a packaged heritage 'ready for export and for creating empires' (p. 189).

Given the politicised debates over that heritage that ensued, it is hard to see why Painter would take Austro-German critics over the next half-century to task for being unsure 'where their higher obligation lay – to a set of aesthetic criteria…[or] political criteria' (p. 423): 'political' definitions of music's role in community-building were being put forward during the 1920s and 30s by even the most liberal-minded and aesthetically aware writers such as Paul Bekker. By this point it was the refusal to see music in political context that was aesthetically naïve, as Tan reiterates for turn-of-the-millenium Singapore where 'politics in music-making was often naively appraised…as irrelevant to loftier aesthetic concerns… That is not to say that music scenes in Singapore were not political by nature; indeed, this entire chapter argues otherwise' (p. 547). Nevertheless, the politics of the classical canon and its 'transcendental' aspirations are not always as straightforwardly legible and hegemonic as Hamer suggests in chapter 12. An intriguing example mentioned by McKnight (pp. 302-3) is the Transcendentalist music criticism produced from the 1840s by J. S. Dwight (on both Beethoven and African American spirituals) and Margaret Fuller, one of America's most prominent radical feminists, whose fascinating life brought her into contact with utopian communists, Native Americans and Italian revolutionaries.

Finally, one might propose that the ability to make social and political contexts palpable *through* the musical experience and its verbal evocation is precisely what characterizes music criticism relative to its academic cousin – musicology, or more particularly, music analysis. Their uneasy relationship forms a third thread that could have been brought out more distinctly. Rose (referencing Estelle Joubert) notes a kind of music analysis reliant on notated examples and 'detailed discussions of musical grammar' in late eighteenth-century German criticism (p. 117) – but who exactly was practising it and why? Tunbridge mentions how at the end of the nineteenth century 'a different kind of musical writing was gaining currency', a 'more technical' idiom (p. 189), and its dominance within the academy affects numerous judgements on critics within this book, such as Racz's admiration for the 'ways of creating musical coherence' in jazz explored by Martin Williams, Gunther Schuller and Ekkehard Jost (p. 474). But more memorable, in a book that could have been much richer in memorable quotations from the critics it discusses, are these lines by Ralph Ellison from 1920s Oklahoma City (cit. p. 475):

> Often in the late spring night I could hear [Jimmy] Rushing as I lay four blocks away in bed, carrying to me as clear as a full-bored riff on 'Hot Lips' Paige's horn. Heard thus, across the dark blocks lined with locust trees, through the night throbbing with the natural aural imagery of the blues, with high-balling trains, departing bells, lonesome guitar chords simmering up from a shack in the alley – it was easy to imagine the voice as setting the pattern to which the instruments of the Blue Devils Orchestra and all the random sounds of night arose, affirming, as it were, some ideal native to the time and to the land.

What better ‘catalyst’ (p. 5) to the study of music criticism’s history could there be than writing like that?

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