
REVIEWS

Nelson R. Orringer. *Lorca in Tune with Falla: Literary and Musical Interludes.*

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014

ISBN 978-1-4426-4729-9. Hbk, 320pp., ill., mus. exx., bibl., index

Reviewed by **Beatriz Pomés Jiménez**

A picture is a poem without words. (Horace)

Today artistic disciplines are often studied and practised in a compartmentalised manner, which allows for a large degree of specialisation in very specific fields of knowledge. The disadvantage of this tendency is, however, that connections and interrelations between different disciplines are not always valued or even noticed. In this context, Nelson R. Orringer's *Lorca in Tune with Falla* is a refreshing and inspiring addition to the literature. Orringer focuses on the cultural interaction between music and poetry, providing a detailed analysis of mutual creative influences between two of the most recognised Spanish artists: the musician Manuel de Falla (1876–1946) and the poet Federico García Lorca (1898–1936). Orringer states: 'Unfortunately, with few exceptions, specialists in music and poetry have failed to sense the active, ongoing connection between the arts of both creators. To begin to correct the omission, produced by a division of knowledge contrary to the art of Falla and Lorca, is the purpose of this book' (p. xi). The author's stated aim leads him into research that goes beyond the usual domains of biography and study of composition. Orringer also takes into consideration the personal lives of both artists as well as the impact that their friendship had on their respective creations. His examination of manuscripts, letters, concert notes, unpublished articles and personal score collections contribute greatly to this analysis.

The book follows a clear structure: introduction, analysis, conclusions. The introduction focuses on the intersection of the two artists' lives, and their mutual admiration, which led to friendship. The author reveals that during this friendship, which peaked in 1923, 'they exchanged letters when either was away, shared aesthetic affinities, developed multivalent conceptions of poetry and music, blurred boundaries between the two arts, influenced each other's production, and collaborated on artistic projects' (p. 4). This section also offers an initial overview of the convergence of Falla and Lorca's talents and their artistic influence on each other. Orringer's original approach of considering painting and music as a single art serving the same purpose is surprising and challenging.

These ideas and their expression in Lorca's poems and Falla's musical compositions comprise the core of the book. According to the author, Falla's influence can be observed in Lorca's *Poema del Cante Jondo*, *Romancero Gitano*, *Oda al Santísimo Sacramento del Altar* and *Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*. Lorca, for his part, influenced Falla's *Retablo de Maese Pedro*, *Soneto a Córdoba*, *Gran Teatro del mundo* and *Atlántidas*. Orringer has undertaken a very detailed and complete analysis of some of these works which not only highlights the poetic-musical association, but also the artists' pursuit of a common artistic purpose: a focus on Andalucía's folk heritage, which is the underlying theme that unites Falla and Lorca's creations. Both artists felt the threat of extinction hovering above their cultural heritage; they shared ideas on how to preserve it, and contributed to it with their own creations. According to the author (p. 29), Falla and Lorca:

both rely on an Andalusian variation on nineteenth-century *Volksgeist* theory as a point of departure for their own highly individual arts. According to Nathan Rotenstreich, cultural spirit or *Volksgeist* signifies the "productive principle of a spiritual or psychic character, operating in different national entities" and showing up in "creations like language, folklore, mores, and legal order".

Discussions of this Andalusian dimension appear throughout the book and form the main point of the analysis. The author makes use of musical and poetic examples to demonstrate this aspect. English translations of all the poems are given, as is a comprehensive musical glossary. Nine different analyses are provided; the author specifically states that no others could be added due to 'spatial limitations' (p. 228). The majority of these examples reflect Falla's influence on Lorca's major work *Poema del Cante Jondo* (1921). Nevertheless, the reader has reasonable freedom not to follow the given order. Orringer completes the book with a well set-out bibliography together with extensive and detailed endnotes.

In my opinion, this rich and detailed picture of mutual influences is an interesting addition to the literature. This book would undoubtedly be of interest to musicians, writers and historians alike. *Lorca in Tune with Falla* offers a fresh approach to understanding and appreciating the arts of these two widely studied artists; a necessary supplement to the numerous existing studies on Falla or Lorca. Moreover, the discussion of the Andalusian soul and its presence in the chosen examples is outstanding. However, the book does present some difficulties in terms of comprehension and readability. Listening to the relevant works alongside the reading process is essential; while words can explain music to an extent, the explanations can only be fully understood with the aid of the music. This is a dense text that requires slow, reflective reading in order to absorb its depth, its challenging perspectives and its multidisciplinary

approach. In addition, the abundance of Spanish references (not only Spanish words, but also references to Spanish phonetics, and examinations of the importance of certain words in a poem, or letters in a word) makes me wonder how approachable this book would be for a non-Spanish-speaking reader.

In the preface, the writer states: 'my objective in the pages that follow is to open new pathways to intuitive and conceptual enjoyment of Lorca's production—and through the newness and rigour of my approach, of Falla's as well' (p. xii). Yet in the conclusion we encounter the confession that, 'the most salient conclusion that a book on the Falla–Lorca relationship can reach is its own inconclusiveness. The mutual impact of both artists has so many aspects and subtleties that exploration can proceed endlessly' (p. 199). This statement is in itself a recommendation to read *Lorca in Tune with Falla*. The preservation of cultural curiosity is an important human endeavour, and it is important to remind ourselves that there is always more to learn about subjects that may seem well-researched. In this light, Orringer offers a unique approach to the understanding of the creative processes of these two Spanish artists. May we never find an end to the inconclusiveness!

Paul Kildea. *Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century*

London: Penguin, 2014

ISBN 9781846142338. 665 pp., ill., map, facs, mus. exx.

Neil Powell. *Benjamin Britten: A Life for Music*

London: Windmill Books, 2014

ISBN: 9780099537366. 528 pp., ill.

Reviewed by Alexandra Mathew

I first knowingly encountered Benjamin Britten while a chorister at Trinity College, Melbourne. We were to perform and record *A Ceremony of Carols*, written for SSA choir and harp, although often sung by trebles alone, for our end-of-year Christmas concerts. Knowing little of this repertoire beyond the fact that Britten was a twentieth-century composer, I expected *Ceremony* to be obscure and challenging, and certainly not to my then-conservative taste in classical music. What I discovered instead was one of the most beautiful pieces of choral music I had ever heard. I was particularly drawn to the plainchant bookending the cycle, and listening to 'Spring Carol' was like hearing angels calling me from earth to heaven. Many words come to mind when listening to *A Ceremony of Carols*: angelic, ethereal, heavenly, celestial, otherworldly, sublime. What human could be capable of composing such music? And must this person meet our expectations of the heavenliness of the music? When it comes to Benjamin Britten, scholars, researchers, biographers, and musicologists seem intent on proving that he was as brilliant as he was flawed.