

All eleven authors provide a wealth of evidence to substantiate their readings and, collectively, the chapters draw on extensive, and very broad, sources. They engage thoroughly with previously published scholarship in the field, but also with the other chapters in the book. The essays, in their referencing of and active debating with other essays in the volume, particularly in Part I and Part II, build up a powerful argument for the diverse and complex meanings imbued in novels of the Victorian period and beyond through musical allusion.

While the primary focus of this book is the Victorian period, some authors explore beyond the boundaries of 1837 and 1901. More work still needs to be done in this area, extending studies to the long nineteenth century. It would perhaps have been beneficial to expand studies in literature and music beyond England to Scotland and Wales—certainly this would have been appropriate for a series purporting to explore ‘British’ music. As Dolly MacKinnon noted in her review of Weliver’s book (*Context* 24: 69), this is a significant problem with the series so far.

Nicky Losseff and Sophie Fuller write: ‘By offering reflections on music in one of its many reception contexts, we hope to contribute to an enhanced awareness of the culture and sociology of nineteenth-century music’ (p. xx). This collection of essays certainly does that while also leaving the reader with a sense of how many new possibilities there are to be explored in this field.

Alison M. Garnham, *Hans Keller and the BBC*
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Reviewed by Anthony Burton

I remember vividly an early encounter with one of the most remarkable minds in British musical life. Shortly before my seventeenth birthday, I went to a London Philharmonic Orchestra concert which began with Schoenberg’s *Verklärte Nacht*. The programme note was by Hans Keller, and it was divided into two parts. The first was headed ‘To be read before the performance.’ The second was headed ‘To be read after the performance,’ and it began: ‘It is a pity that the reader is not heeding my advice...’.

That single, devastating half-sentence says a great deal about Keller. There was the subject-matter: Schoenberg was the composer at the very heart of his thinking about music. There was the psychological insight, the result of close study and even self-analysis in his younger days. There was the dry humour, and the utterly precise use of English; no other tense, no other form of words, would have produced exactly the desired ripple of guilty starts all round the Royal Festival Hall. And there was also, to be frank, the characteristic relish in getting the upper hand—even over a passive reader with no chance of arguing back.

At that time, I knew Hans Keller only as a distinctive voice on the radio and as the author of a few articles. Little did I realise that a little more than a decade later I was to become a colleague of his at the BBC in central London, then after his retirement occupy what was generally known as ‘Hans’s old office’, and later represent the BBC musical hierarchy at his funeral in 1985. Not that I really got to know him well: I occasionally shared a lunch table with him and a few colleagues, but I never joined the admiring circle which then adjourned to the

Stag's Head pub round the corner. Just as well for my health, too, in view of the amount of passive smoking that would have entailed.

It is Hans Keller's twenty-year period in the BBC Music Division, between 1959 and 1979, that is the subject of Alison Garnham's detailed and appreciative study. She begins, however, with an introduction sketching his biographical background, although perhaps not in as much detail as a general reader might have appreciated. Born in 1919, Keller was a Viennese Jew, raised in intensely musical circles. In 1938, in hair-raising circumstances, he fled to England; once there, he became a free-lance orchestral string player with a sideline in articles about psychoanalysis. Garnham's second chapter traces his gradual move into writing about music, and his co-editorship of the short-lived but influential magazine *Music Survey*, set against the background of his early offers of talks to the BBC, which led to his first music talk in 1955.

Garnham devotes an extended chapter to one of Keller's major preoccupations as a freelance contributor to BBC radio, Functional Analysis—his method of demonstrating the underlying thematic unity of a work by means of specially composed interludes (and in some cases a postlude) inserted into a performance. Esoteric in the extreme by modern standards of broadcasting, this aroused great enthusiasm and controversy at the time, prompting many articles and even a piece in *Time* magazine. Garnham's detailed narrative does not conceal Keller's almost compulsive willingness in this as in other episodes to bite the hands that fed him with criticisms and quibbles; nor the irony that an analytical method specifically designed to be wordless should have generated such a mountain of explanatory prose.

In any case, the flow of analyses largely dried up after Keller joined the staff of BBC Music Division in 1959, at the invitation of the recently appointed Controller William Glock. He began as Music Talks Producer, introducing many new ideas, and even after moving on to other positions continued to produce talks, and give many broadcasts himself. At his best, Keller was a remarkable broadcaster and lecturer: I remember with awe a series of introductions to the Schoenberg quartets which he delivered to a live audience, and the microphones, in Manchester in 1974 without a script or even notes. One of Garnham's many illuminating footnotes quotes a description by Geoffrey Wheatcroft of Keller's 'formidable, even frightening command of the language which he used like a musical instrument, or like a weapon.'

At the same time, there is no doubt that Keller began to appear on radio with uncomfortable frequency, especially with numerous short entries in a *Musical Glossary* broadcast to fill gaps between programmes. Garnham quotes his and my old colleague Leo Black as saying that these 'added to the impression for a while that the airwaves were full of Hans Keller all the time.' She might have added—but perhaps her research did not stretch this far—that that this was the period in which he was regularly parodied in the satirical magazine *Private Eye* as 'Hans Killer,' complete with Viennese accent: 'Mein Gott, vot is happenink?'

From Music Talks, Keller moved on to take managerial charge successively of chamber music (which in those days meant specially built studio programmes either recorded or broadcast live—Gramophone Department was another world), orchestral and choral music, and regional symphony orchestras. He also represented the BBC on the European Broadcasting Union's main music committee for some years. Garnham is sometimes a little generous to her subject here: it seems to me that his work was hampered by his restricted view of what music was important—basically the Austro-German tradition from Haydn to Schoenberg, with an extension to Britten. Surprisingly, she does not quote the story he told in print, only half against

himself, of ruling out the inclusion of Nielsen's great Wind Quintet in a programme of Leo Black's on the grounds that it 'wasn't good enough'.¹

Keller's last BBC job was as Chief Assistant, New Music, which chiefly involved the administration of the reading panel which scrutinised new scores—a task worthy of Sisyphus, because there was no built-in correlation between the amount of music recommended for broadcasting by the panel and the amount producers were willing or able to place in programmes. His considerable efforts here were hampered again by his limited range of reference: Garnham quotes Glock's successor Robert Ponsonby as saying, surely rightly, 'I don't think he had much instinctive sympathy for contemporary music which was not in some sense traditional.' Indeed, Keller's attitude to the avant-garde had been revealed by the notorious Piotr Zak hoax of 1961, in which a random studio improvisation by himself and Susan Bradshaw was passed off as a new work by the latest European sensation and taken seriously by several critics. There may have been a serious point to be made here about criticism, but as Garnham implies the chief result was to give aid and comfort to all those who anyway disliked new music in general—in Leo Black's paraphrase of Glock's reaction, 'a dreadful "own goal".'

In her account of this period, Garnham's concern is largely to build up the picture of Keller as a square peg in an institutional round hole, a man constitutionally opposed to hierarchies and authority. This comes to the fore in her account of *Broadcasting in the Seventies*, the BBC discussion paper of 1969 which led to the abolition of the old Third Programme, an evenings-only general cultural network including what were considered the more specialist music programmes, and the introduction of Radio 3, broadcasting almost entirely music all day. Keller led a full-scale internal revolt against what a letter to the *Times* called 'the abandonment of creative, mixed programming,' and—perhaps just as important—against the secretive and high-handed way in which the new policies were being formulated and implemented. It is this episode that leads Garnham to describe Keller in the subtitle of her book as 'the musical conscience of British broadcasting,' and there is no doubt that his stand was a sincere and principled one. But to me, joining the BBC some years after the changes had happened, it always seemed that there was a point to the idea of generic music broadcasting that the rebels never admitted: that it must surely not be a bad thing to offer listeners all their classical music in one place, without implying through its allocation to one network or another some kind of 'class distinction' into low-brow or high-brow, 'accessible' or difficult.

I finished Alison Garnham's thoroughly researched, well written, well presented book with some sense of nostalgia for a BBC era of which I only caught the end: a time when high ideals were articulated and refined in long internal memos; a time when awkward cusses such as Keller—or Louis MacNeice, or Martin Esslin, or Robert Simpson—were welcomed because of the distinction they brought to the Corporation. In the quasi-commercial BBC of today, the broadcasting production lines are still tended by honest, dedicated workers; but the schedules allow them no scope to close their office doors after coming back from the pub to ponder a new poem, an article on Brecht, a symphony in progress—or a letter to an editor in tones of measured vitriol arguing any one of a hundred passionately held views.

¹ Keller, 1975 (1984 minus 9) (London: Dennis Dobson, 1977) 22. The book was later republished as *Music, Closed Societies and Football* (London: Toccata Press, 1986).