

An outstanding individual contribution is Linda Phyllis Austern's substantial piece on seventeenth-century *vanitas* imagery. This is a model essay, providing in-depth background to the genre, insightful discussion of the imagery, and is written in an eminently readable style. Austern notes the growing materialism of early modern European culture, and provides fascinating insights into selected *vanitas* images, as well as the genre and its context more generally. Roy Sonnema takes up the theme of materialism in his chapter on seventeenth-century Dutch art. Using a Lacanian-inspired approach, Sonnema argues that images were a significant part of the redefinition of music as pleasurable sound, thus allying it with other consumable objects.

Three contributions by Franca Trinchieri Camiz and a list of her works complete the volume. These essays show Camiz's wide interests: the first on music performance and healing, the second on biblical dance and the last on music settings to poems by Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna. The first, although short, is especially interesting in its discussion of the role of music and images of music in healing at the Hospital of Santo Sasia in the second half of the sixteenth century.

There are many black and white images in the book, although none in colour, unfortunately. The volume could have been much improved by more careful proof-reading and rigorous editing—nearly every other chapter contains an annoying typo, and the widely disparate writing styles can be off-putting at times. Doubtless some of the individual contributions in this volume will be a welcome addition to scholars with an interest in art and music from the early modern period, but as a whole package the book is disappointing. The lack of clear direction or sense of accumulation in the treatment and coverage of topics is a major weakness. The disparate approaches taken by contributors show a frequent lack of coherence or rigour rather than the strength of multiple and complementary interpretations and methods. Perhaps most importantly, there is an overall dearth of engagement with theoretical issues involved with multidisciplinary research, despite the claims found on the jacket sleeve. What counts for a multidisciplinary approach in this volume is, at times, merely the juxtaposition of subject matter or ideas from different disciplines without any of the necessary development of theoretical tools for the simultaneous engagement with such material.

Meirion Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1850–1914: Watchmen of Music*

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**Reviewed by Suzanne Cole**

Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in studies of British music of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an area that has long been neglected. The most obvious manifestations of this flowering are the Biennial Conference of Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain (first held in 1997), and Ashgate's series *Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, which includes many of the papers from these conferences in the three volumes of *Nineteenth-Century British Music*

*Studies*. Ashgate and series editor and conference organiser Bennett Zon are to be congratulated on their substantial contributions to this area.

This renewed interest in nineteenth-century British music can be seen as one of the results of the recent broadening of the scope of musicological enquiry beyond the life and works of the 'Great Composers'—it must be admitted, rather thin on the ground in the Victorian England—to encompass a much wider range of musical activities. While nineteenth-century Britain may not have produced too many masterworks, it was the site of a great deal of other musical activity, with a flourishing concert life and a very active musical press, which, in the last couple of decades, have become the subject of scholarly interest. The most comprehensive study of English musical life is the *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century London Database* project, currently being conducted by Simon McVeigh, Christina Bashford and Rachel Cowgill,<sup>1</sup> but a number of other studies of music in Britain have been published recently, many in the *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies* volumes.

The press is a rich source of information about what is often described as 'musical life,' which many of these new studies draw on in various ways. The sophisticated use of the press calls for a careful analysis of the political and ideological position of both the individual critic and the newspaper or journal in which it is published, yet the information that would allow such a careful assessment of the British musical press has often been hard to find.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, most music reviews remained unsigned,<sup>3</sup> and identifying the author is often difficult: resources such as the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals* have only limited coverage of music reviews. Leanne Langley's doctoral dissertation, *The English Musical Journal in the Early Nineteenth Century* (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1983) is a valuable resource for the first half of the century, but for the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, this information has not been readily accessible.

Meirion Hughes's *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1850–1914: Watchmen of Music*, published in 2002 in the Ashgate Nineteenth-Century Britain series, goes some way towards filling this gap and, in Hughes's own words, bringing late nineteenth-century music critics 'out of the shadows' (p. 7).<sup>4</sup> This book is divided into two sections: the first half, to use Hughes's formulation, which he borrows from J.A. Fuller Maitland, deals with the Watchmen and the Watchtowers—that is, the critics and the journals/newspapers—and the second with the Watched—the composers. The Watchmen section concentrates on four of the most important publications, in terms of circulation and influence: the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Athenaeum* and the *Musical Times*, each subdivided into the reigns of their chief music critics. The second

<sup>1</sup> A summary of this project is found in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies*, vol. 2, ed. Jeremy Dibble and Bennett Zon (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2002) 1–12.

<sup>2</sup> Studies of the French press are rather more advanced: see for example, Katharine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris, 1834–80* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995) and the various *dossiers de presse Parisienne*.

<sup>3</sup> The Introduction to the Wellesley Index claims that ninety per cent of nineteenth-century journal articles were unsigned. See Walter E. Houghton, *et al.*, eds, *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals 1824–1900* (Toronto: U Toronto Press; Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), vol. 1, xvi.

<sup>4</sup> Hughes, in my view wisely, uses the term English, rather than British, observing that it was the preferred usage of the critics who make up this study, despite the involvement of Scotsmen such as Mackenzie and McCunn, and Irishmen such as Stanford (p. 1). I will also adopt this usage throughout the rest of this review.

half is structured around the three composers that Hughes argues were of greatest interest to the critics: Arthur Sullivan, Hubert Parry and Edward Elgar. The *Watchmen of Music* also includes two useful Appendixes. Appendix A provides a list of the chief editors and critics at the four journals listed above, together with the *Morning Post* and the *Musical World*, and an extremely useful set of biographical notes of forty-two critics and journalist active during this period. Appendix B comprises a list, sorted alphabetically by composer, of the premieres of major English works reviewed by newspapers and journals.

By bringing together information about publications, critics and editors from a wide variety of sources, Hughes provides a useful service to scholars of the English musical press in this period, and largely meets his goal of being a 'platform on which other researchers and scholars [can] build' (p. 9). His chapter on the *Athenaeum*, for example draws upon the City University Library's complete series from 1828 to 1921, which, he suggests, probably came from the office of the journal's editors. It contains manuscript attributions of authorship of almost all articles after 1850, and as such constitutes an extremely valuable resource not readily available to those of us with irregular access to London libraries.

Hughes not only identifies critics and editors, but goes to great lengths to draw the reader's attention to the many personal and political agendas, to the 'symbiotic relationships' (p. 7) between composer and critic that lurk behind the reviews he examines. He draws our attention, for example, to the disquiet that Sir Arthur Sullivan's success as the composer of popular works for the theatre, and his 'champagne and racehorses lifestyle', seemed to generate in the 'Watchmen', and the doubts his popular success cast on his ability as (in Hughes's rather unfortunate formulation) an 'Art-Music composer' (pp. 125–26).

The reception of Alexander Mackenzie's oratorio *The Rose of Sharon* provides a nice example of these complex inter-relationships between composers, critics and journals. The *Musical Times*'s 'special correspondent,' identified by Hughes as Joseph Bennett,<sup>5</sup> wrote a glowing review of the work's premiere at the Norfolk Festival, hailing it as 'the most remarkable English work of modern times' (p. 91). Hughes points out, however, that as the *Musical Times*'s publisher Novello had paid £500 for the copyright of the oratorio, the journal had a commercial interest in the work's success. The waters of journalistic objectivity are even further clouded, however: Bennett was also a librettist, writing the book for Sullivan's *The Golden Legend*, Frederick Hymen Cowen's *Thorgrim* and *Ruth*, and Mackenzie's *Jubilee Ode*, *Bethlehem* and the work under review, *The Rose of Sharon* (p. 60)! But here, I'm afraid, we come to the serious weakness of this book. Perhaps Joseph Bennett's positive review was simply a promotional puff-piece to fill the Novello coffers, influenced by his own involvement in the project, but it is also possible that his admiration for the work was entirely genuine. Without some kind of examination of the music and its reception by other critics, we simply don't know.

No doubt many, maybe most, of Hughes's conclusions are perfectly valid, but without some examination of the music itself, the point is simply not proved. For example, Hughes implies that the conservative critics dismissed Parry's *Scenes from Prometheus Unbound*, the work often identified as the start of the Renaissance, due its obvious Wagnerian influences. What is less clear is whether such criticism was justified—were the reviewers prejudiced, or was it, as the

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<sup>5</sup> Hughes, however, does not identify the source of this information, nor of his claim that in the 1880s *Musical Times* editor Joseph Lunn 'left much of the review work to Bennett' (p. 91).

*Musical Times* claimed, dull (p.141)? Likewise, Hughes argues that it was with the success of the oratorio *Judith*, which he represents as a capitulation to conservatism, that Parry 'began to emerge as the major figure in the nation's music life' (p. 149). Hughes's statement that 'Up to the premiere of *Judith* Parry had been stigmatised as a composer whose stylistic orientation was at time unclear and confused' (p. 149) implies that this assessment is incorrect, yet no evidence in support of this, or indeed of any number of similar claims, is provided.

In at least one case, this failure to assess the musical validity of the critics' comments leads Hughes astray. He sites a brief review of Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis* by William McNaught, editor of the *Musical Times* from 1909 to 1918. McNaught considered the work 'over-long for the subject-matter,' and Hughes cites this review as proof that McNaught 'was seriously ill-equipped for his responsibilities at the *Musical Times*' (p. 102). Vaughan Williams, however, appears to have agreed with the assessment of McNaught and other critics of the first performance: he subsequently cut the *Fantasia* by thirty-three bars, reducing the performance time by something like a fifth.<sup>6</sup>

Zon defends Hughes's approach in his editorial preface, arguing that Hughes 'embraces the inability of musicological language to express a de-politicised discourse and invests his writing with frequently controversial ideas.' Hughes is best known as co-author, with Robert Stradling, of *The English Musical Renaissance: Construction and Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1993) and the rather less quirky revised edition *The English Musical Renaissance, 1840-1940: Constructing a National Music* (Manchester UP, 2001), and as such is no stranger to controversy. This volume is, I feel, rather less successful in its attempts to push the boundaries than these earlier ones. The writing style lacks the panache of the joint volumes; typographical errors are, as is often the case with Ashgate publications, not uncommon.

In the end, the reader is left with the uncomfortable sense that Hughes has fallen into his own trap. His preoccupation with extra-musical power plays, rather than leading to a healthy awareness of the elusiveness of objectivity seems to have blinded Hughes to the possibility that, value-laden though they undoubtedly were, the opinions of the Watchmen could also stem from genuine aesthetic responses to the music. *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press* makes a useful contribution to an emerging field, but Hughes's apparent lack of affection for either the Watchmen or the Watched is reminiscent of the anti-Victorianism that limited the study of nineteenth-century British music for much of the twentieth century.

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<sup>6</sup> Anthony Pople, 'Vaughan Williams, Tallis and the Phantasy Principle,' *Vaughan Williams Studies*, ed. Alain Frogley (Cambridge: CUP, 1996) 57.