

Reviews

Phyllis Weliver, *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction, 1860-1900: Representations of Music, Science and Gender in the Leisured Home*
Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2000
ISBN 0 75460 126 9; hardback, x + 312pp, 12 b&w ill.

Reviewed by Dolly Mackinnon

Music in nineteenth-century 'Britain' (most often used as a euphemism for English music) is a new and burgeoning area of study in musicology. The first volume in the series *Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain* appeared in 1999. The series continues to offer valuable contributions to English music, though to a far lesser extent the music of Ireland, Scotland or even Wales. Amongst the volumes published to date, while there are some chapters or sections dealing specifically with Scotland and Ireland, the emphasis still remains squarely on the English experience set against the European context. For those who do not question the terminology of categorisation this may not be an issue. But while other disciplines have tackled this issue in a sophisticated way, it remains somewhat surprising, particularly as this series attempts to move musicology firmly into the interdisciplinary, that what 'British' actually means remains squarely untested overall in this series. On the positive side though, it is heartening to see the inclusion of a range of approaches to music history represented in this series, and the firm dispelling of the notion of 'England's label as *Das Land ohne Musik*' (p. 19).

Indeed, the immense value of these volumes lies in the commencement of the recovery of diverse social and cultural uses of music, music reception, and the representation of music in art, language, poetry, literature, science, medicine, spirituality and mysticism. These volumes also cover aspects of the generation and transmission of musical repertoire from the city concert halls through to regional domestic settings. This relatively new focus also includes literary representations of women and music, and is a growing trend in research that examines different forms of cultural production rather than just the act of musical composition. Here the tendency towards the interdisciplinary is championed by Phyllis Weliver's scholarship that is inherently concerned with the middle-class musical individual as represented in Victorian fiction. This book explores the representation of music in fiction 'as a site of complex interplay between

the conscious and unconscious, mind and body, and individual and racial evolution' (p. 284), all of which were informed by contemporary scientific discourse.

This book is a testament to the potential rewards of examining women, men, science, gender, race, class, and music as represented in select Victorian novels. Based on her 1999 DPhil from the University of Sussex, *Singing Angel or Musical Demon? Representations of Female Musicians in Victorian Literature*, Weliver's book 'investigates representations of female musicians in British novels from 1860 to 1900 in terms of changing gender roles, musical practices and scientific discourse' (p. 1). Weliver's work is interdisciplinary, and builds on the research of musicologists Derek Hyde and Sophie Fuller, as well as the literary scholars Nina Auerbach and Emily Auerbach. Her work also draws on the theorist Pierre Bourdieu's notions of cultural and economic capital and the ability of a musical work to be deciphered (by means of class, gender, race) by the listener/viewer as 'taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier' (p. 32). As Weliver states, through print aimed at the 'leisured reader,' 'publishers sent messages directly or indirectly to their readership regarding music, and readers learned through conscious or unconscious emulation of stories and non-fiction articles' (p. 32). For middle-class women, Weliver contends, music not only allowed the observer to classify a woman's state, but also allowed women to classify themselves through the act of performance.

This book, with its musical emphasis, also draws on the gendered nature of the separate spheres model (men occupying public spaces, while women and family reside in domestic spaces) from the highly influential work of Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall (1987/2nd ed. 2002) that has dominated analytical accounts of the nineteenth-century English middle class since its first publication. Weliver's focus is on the representations of music, science and gender in the middle and upper-class leisured home, and 'explores the reasons for ... [and] the ways in which ... late Victorian authors frequently used the term "angel" to praise character traits that they supported, and "demon" for those that they criticised' (p. 1). Furthermore, she contends that between 1860 and 1900 music enabled women to increasingly blur society's notion of, and their place in, the public and private spheres.

Combining evidence from select nineteenth-century periodicals that contained articles about music, science, medicine, and the arts, with understandings of consciousness and identity, Weliver then re-reads select Victorian novels by Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, George Elliot, and George Du Maurier from the perspectives of music, science, class, race, and gender. Weliver takes us through Victorian understandings of science and music, such as music as a language, music as metaphor, theories of mesmerism (unconscious and conscious), natural and sexual evolution and their incorporation by male and female novelists into fictional depictions of music and music making. These novels are then read for the complex Victorian mentality that reflects the diverse discourses (for example, works by John Conolly on lunacy, Arthur Schopenhauer and the will to live, Charles Darwin and evolutionary biology, and Ludwig Feuerbach and the relationship between the individual and the universal), known to both their authors and also their broad target readership. Weliver demonstrates for Victorian fiction that 'music-making was informed by who played (gender, class, nationality), what they played (instrument and repertoire), and where they played (public or privately)' (p. 32).

The book is divided into contextual chapters (Introduction and chapters 1, 2 and 5) that provide the historical background of women and men in nineteenth-century English and

European music making. These chapters also address the 'cultural thematics' (relating to music, mesmerism and mental science, medicine, gender, race and class) to be analysed and discussed in the six focus novels: Wilkie Collins (chapter 3), Charles Dickens (chapter 4), George Elliot (chapters 6 and 7), and George Du Maurier (conclusion). There are two appendices: the first provides lengthier quotations from select primary source readings, while the second is an incomplete 'Glossary of Musical Terms,' the usefulness of which, however, for a non-musician, would appear extremely limited. The structure and apparatus of the original thesis are still apparent in places in the form and argument of the book. Yet, overall, the complex and diverse issues she tackles are drawn together successfully. Weliver is to be congratulated on publishing her doctoral work so quickly, and should be an example to other early career scholars to aim towards the publication of what is so often ground-breaking work.

As Weliver states, the select nature of the Victorian novels discussed has meant that any issues that did not feature in these texts were left unexplored. This work is a substantial start in this interdisciplinary area of literature, science and music. What we now wait for are contributions towards a comprehensive account of the fictional musical representations of masculinities and femininities in Victorian novels across classes and races. Furthermore, more work must also be done on fleshing out the historical context and reality of music and music-making in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. Interestingly, the relationship between music and science/medicine has been the feature of another Ashgate publication. A collection of essays, *Music as Medicine* (2000), that traced the history of music as medicine from antiquity to the twentieth century rise of music therapy also includes chapters on nineteenth-century medical understandings of the benefits of music that further contextualizes Weliver's thesis. Weliver's contribution is a good one, and shows how 'an investigation of cultural thematics' that does not 'pose answers ... instead demonstrate[s] how multiple and sometimes contradictory uses of music coexisted in Victorian literary, musical and scientific discourses, and how these played into representations of domestic female musician in late nineteenth-century fiction' (p. 284).

Alastair Williams, *Constructing Musicology*

Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2001

ISBN 0 7546 0133 1, 220pp.

Reviewed by Malcolm Gillies

Constructing Musicology tells the story of the move from the epistemological certainties born of modernism to the uncertainties born of postmodernism. It shows how the field-leading regard accorded to archival and analytical musicological work in the 1960s and 1970s has subsequently been questioned, and substantially undermined, by the increasing infiltration of subjectivities into the daily business of musicology. Alastair Williams sees his overall aim in the book as being 'to show the forces at work in current musicology, to demonstrate that traditions are socially constructed, and to suggest that established beliefs can be transformed in a theoretically flexible environment' (p. xi). He accords the recent 'paradigm shift' in