

RESEARCH REPORT

Zelenka Reception since the Eighteenth Century: The Role of Emotions

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Ever since Camerata Bern first released their recording of Jan Dismas Zelenka's (1679–1745) trio and quadro sonatas in 1973 (Archiv 2708 027), something of a cult following has formed around the Bohemian composer and his music. An online forum (www.jdzelenka.net) keeps track of most new recordings and notable developments in research, and a regular Zelenka Festival (www.zelenkafestival.cz) now takes place in Prague, usually with a conference attached. Discussions about the composer in both scholarship and the media generally express a sense of admiration and curiosity about his quirky-yet-learned style, and the paucity of biographical sources has led to speculation about his personal life and character (for example, that clues about his alleged homosexuality are encoded into his compositions).¹ Zelenka's name, however, is hardly ever mentioned in standard music history textbooks.

¹ Wolfgang Reich, *Zwei Zelenka-Studien*, Studien und Materialien zur Musikgeschichte Dresdens 7 (Dresden: Sächsische Landesbibliothek, 1987), especially 'Die Triosonaten von Jan Dismas Zelenka: Untersuchungen zu ihrer Struktur und Semantik,' 13–59.

It was not until about 1980 that research on Zelenka gained serious traction, and most of this has taken the form of editions, or studies of his life and works. Zelenka spent much of his career composing sacred music for the Catholic court of Dresden, but relatively little is known about the posthumous fate of his music, and it has generally been assumed that there is no real transmission or reception history to write of; that is, until the 'rediscovery' of his music in the second half of the twentieth century. In some ways this assumption is correct: Zelenka's music has certainly not enjoyed the posthumous fame of contemporaries such as Bach or Handel. But it has long been clear to musicologists, if not the wider community of musicians and listeners, that posthumous fame is not solely determined by the aesthetic value of a composer's musical ideas, but also by the various uses (social, cultural, or emotional) that the composer's music and identity can continue to serve as time progresses.

My PhD thesis, which is currently in preparation at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music under the supervision of Janice B. Stockigt, Jane W. Davidson and David R.M. Irving, aims to provide a reception history of Zelenka's music in a series of snapshots from the eighteenth century to the present day. Each snapshot in the study investigates the place of Zelenka and his music in a particular historical context. The sources for the study were mostly uncovered in 2015 during a six-month Endeavour Research Fellowship at Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg, under the supervision of Wolfgang Hirschmann, during which I was able to travel extensively to archives across Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria and the UK.² Discoveries included numerous new manuscript copies of works by Zelenka dating from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as references to Zelenka and his music in encyclopaedias, periodicals, newspapers, and even children's literature. More recently, time spent in the Czech Republic to attend conferences allowed me to interview certain musicians and scholars involved in the Zelenka 'rediscovery' of the 1970s and 80s, adding important perspectives on the opportunities available to engage with Zelenka's music behind the Iron Curtain. Online searches have retrieved almost 300 reviews of recordings or concerts of Zelenka's music, and an online experiment is also underway to gauge responses to Zelenka's music in the 'digital age,' using methods recently developed in the field of music psychology.

While the reception of Zelenka and his music can fruitfully be explored from the perspective of (for example) social or political function, the issues that have shaped the reception of Zelenka's music since the eighteenth century all seem to intersect at the concept of emotion. This is problematic, because the idea that emotions play a role in music reception is at once so obvious it is almost a truism, and yet so theoretically contested that a scholarly consensus on the most appropriate approach for investigating the nature of that role seems impossible. The contested nature of emotions scholarship is partly a consequence of the fact that the concept of emotion, despite the alacrity with which it is so often discussed, is notoriously difficult to define. This has been the case since the moment the term 'emotion' entered scientific discourse in the early nineteenth century.³ Since that time, research on emotions has been undertaken by psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and others, turning up greatly varied results. Historically, these studies can be grouped into two main 'camps': social constructionism and universalism. The former emphasises the idea that emotions are local phenomena whose

² For a blog of this research trip, see <https://fredkiernan.wordpress.com/>

³ Thomas Dixon, "'Emotion': The History of a Keyword in Crisis," *Emotion Review* 4 (2012): 338–44.

substance is derived from the material conditions of life in a particular time and place. In contrast, the latter emphasises the apparently entrenched, biological (and therefore universal) aspects of emotional processes. Moreover, the questions of how music relates to emotions, and whether past emotional engagement with music can leave behind traces to be recovered and analysed by historians, add additional theoretical problems.

Over the last thirty years, emotions researchers have begun to redefine the concept in ways that more easily accommodate both their social and biological components,⁴ and since societies (and bodies) are susceptible to change, this has given particular thrust to the field of the history of emotions.⁵ Despite this, discussions about music in history of emotions literature are somewhat lacking. Theories about the relationship between music and emotions have also begun to emphasise both their biological and social components, with one notable recent development being the BRECVEMA model of music perception, proposed by Patrik N. Juslin and his colleagues.⁶ This model explains how (socially susceptible) psychological mechanisms mediate between heard music structures and the emotional responses of listeners. It also highlights how some aspects of our emotional responses to music are learned, while others are the result of more hard-wired features of human biology. In this thesis, I ask whether this model might be applied historically, to help us understand better the relationship between emotions and music in the past.

But how does this help us understand Zelenka reception? At present, there is no clear answer to this question, although findings are beginning to emerge that point to the possibility of explaining why Zelenka's music became meaningful in certain historical contexts. They also indicate that these past meanings may be influencing the way we now feel about the composer and his music. While the argument of the thesis is yet to emerge, I sketch below some of the findings that appear to warrant particular focus.

It is already clear that the history of emotional engagement with Zelenka's music happened in phases. Zelenka composed mainly sacred music for the Catholic court church of Dresden—a wealthy outpost of Habsburg Catholicism in the heartland of Lutheranism—and the 'piety' of the *Tenebrae* ceremonies in which Zelenka's music was performed is revealed by contemporary reports to have been itself a kind of performance, involving a mix of emotion-concepts such as delight, sorrow, pain and joy. Moreover, piety in this context seems to have served specific

⁴ See, for example: Alice M. Isen and Gregory Andrade Diamond, 'Affect and Automaticity,' *Unintended Thought*, ed. James S. Uleman and John A. Bargh (New York: Guilford Press, 1989), 124–52; Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret M. Lock, eds, *Social Suffering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Lisa Feldman Barrett, Michael Lewis, and Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones, eds., *Handbook of Emotions*, 4th ed. (New York: Guilford Publications, 2016).

⁵ William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2006); Jan Plamper, 'The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns,' *History and Theory* 49, no. 2 (1 May 2010): 237–65.

⁶ Patrik N. Juslin and Daniel Västfjäll, 'Emotional Responses to Music: The Need to Consider Underlying Mechanisms,' *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 31 (2008): 559–621; Patrik N. Juslin et al., 'How Does Music Evoke Emotions? Exploring the Underlying Mechanisms,' *Handbook of Music and Emotion: Theory, Research, Applications*, ed. Patrik N. Juslin and John Sloboda (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 605–42; Patrik N. Juslin et al., 'What Makes Music Emotionally Significant?: Exploring the Underlying Mechanisms,' *Psychology of Music* 42 (2014): 599–623; Patrik N. Juslin et al., 'Prevalence of Emotions, Mechanisms, and Motives in Music Listening: A Comparison of Individualist and Collectivist Cultures,' *Psychomusicology: Music, Mind and Brain* 26, no. 4 (2016): 293–326.

social, political and didactic functions, recalling Monique Scheer's argument that emotions might best be understood as a kind of learned practice,⁷ as well as arguments from social psychology that emotions serve a communicative function.⁸ It is presently difficult to separate the emotional meaning of Zelenka's music for *Tenebrae* in eighteenth-century Dresden from that of the ceremony in which it was performed.

By the mid-nineteenth century, score copies of Zelenka's music for *Tenebrae* had migrated into several important music collections across Europe and even to the United States. While performances of Zelenka's music did continue in certain circles, including in Dresden, Zelenka reception in the nineteenth century seems to have been marked primarily by a rise in the importance of the music score as a collectible object. Scores were now able to function as tradable commodities, and with the rise of enlightened historicism, they became valued for their capacity to provide explanatory narratives about music history. It is clear that Zelenka's music for *Tenebrae* had taken on new emotional meanings, which were no longer embedded in the ceremony of performance. Instead, the score-objects themselves, and their collection, seem to hold the clues, recalling Arjun Appadurai's thesis that things, like persons, have 'cultural biographies,' which can reveal as much about their context as their context can reveal about them.⁹

The enormous shifts in Europe's political landscape in the first half of the twentieth century also shaped the reception of Zelenka and his music in Prague at that time. Characterisations of Zelenka in the sources, and particularly in a children's book published in Prague in 1946, show that Zelenka's identity had been reframed as an emblem of antagonism toward German meddling in Czech culture and affairs. Zelenka is described as a sorrowful and frustrated man, diligently working in Dresden despite a deep longing in his heart to return to his Bohemian homeland, which had been depleted by centuries of Habsburg oppression. In accordance with contemporary nationalist interpretations of Czech music history, Zelenka's compositional activity at the Catholic court church of Dresden is understood not to have been in the service of religion, but rather, as a revolutionary activity whose aim was to preserve the continuity of Czech national culture. Accordingly, focus is given to the small number of secular, instrumental works in Zelenka's output, while the tension between Czech nationalist ideology and aesthetics seems to have relegated Zelenka's sacred music—the vast majority of his output—to a quiet, uneasy place.

These first chapters of Zelenka reception provide an extended prologue to the 'rediscovery' of Zelenka in the second half of the twentieth century, when his music entered the mainstream. Here I draw upon interviews with German and Czech scholars and performers involved in this new phase of Zelenka reception, tracing the origins of the early editions and recordings, and the rise of the idea that Zelenka was a 'bitter' and 'lonely' man, in spite of the absence of historical sources that might support this claim. Moreover, I ask whether the BRECVEMA model might be applied historically to analyse, for example, reviews of concerts and recordings of Zelenka's music, since this could help explain how ideas about the composer's personality

⁷ Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion,' *History and Theory* 51 (2012): 193–220.

⁸ Brian Parkinson, 'Emotions Are Social,' *British Journal of Psychology* 87 (1996): 663.

⁹ Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

entwine with heard aspects of his musical structures, which in turn can help explain how emotional responses to Zelenka's music are learned.

The final study in the thesis uses the BRECVEMA model to measure the emotional responses of present-day listeners to two short excerpts of Zelenka's music, in an online listening exercise and questionnaire. This study, which is currently being conducted with special guidance from the music psychologist Amanda Krause, will be absorbed into a narrative of Zelenka reception by painting a picture of how listeners respond to Zelenka's music in the digital age. By structuring the study in a particular way, I seek to understand how inherited ideas about Zelenka may continue to influence how present-day listeners feel about his music.¹⁰

While the overall argument is still yet to emerge, each of the individual studies in this thesis is already beginning to explain how emotional engagement with Zelenka's music has changed over time, why these changes occurred, and how these changes implicate our current thinking about who Zelenka was, and what his music is. By deploying innovative methods to examine the relationship between emotions and music in history, I hope to contribute not only to the field of Zelenka studies, which lacks a comprehensive study of Zelenka reception since the eighteenth century, but also to the burgeoning field of the history of emotions, which, for all its recent strides, is still grappling with the place of music in this history.

About the author

Frederic Kiernan is a PhD candidate in musicology at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, and a Research Assistant at the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions. He has recently edited Jan Dismas Zelenka's six settings of *Ave Regina coelorum*, to be published by A-R Editions (Wisconsin) in 2018.

¹⁰ Readers are invited to participate in the study, which will be live during the early months of 2018. To participate, visit: <http://go.unimelb.edu.au/8zp6>