

KEVIN C. KARNES, *MUSIC, CRITICISM, AND THE CHALLENGE OF HISTORY: SHAPING MODERN MUSICAL THOUGHT IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY VIENNA* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ISBN 978-0-19-536866-6, xiii + 204pp, £30.39/\$55 (hardcover).

A glance at the table of contents of *Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History*—an introduction and epilogue framing two chapters each devoted to three pivotal figures, Eduard Hanslick, Guido Adler and Heinrich Schenker—might lead one to expect three independent approaches to Karnes's monumental account of the institutionalization of musicology as an academic discipline in the late nineteenth century. The reader may not anticipate the sophisticated connections, continuities and disparities that Karnes finds in the output of these figures. Nor may one expect the fluent and rigorous manner in which he interweaves the threads of their individual thought with one another and with the ideological, methodological and philosophical currents of the day into a richly textured fabric of intellectual inquiry. His exploration of the formative stages of the discipline of musicology begins before the appointment of Hanslick as the first Professor of the History and Aesthetics of Music in 1861 and extends beyond Adler's appointment to the first chair in Musicology in 1898, both at the University of Vienna, and proves the genesis of *Musikwissenschaft* to have been far more complex and nuanced than has previously been suspected.

Before the publication of Karnes's monograph, Geoffrey Payzant had made the biggest contribution towards an understanding of Hanslick's academic background and the conditions leading to his university appointment. Karnes makes a significant contribution to Hanslick studies by viewing his admission to the university in the context of Austrian political reforms in education. He points to Hanslick's unique position, as an employee in the Ministry of Education, to exploit his inside knowledge of these reforms to his best advantage. For instance, in his letter of application for a university post in 1856, Hanslick went to great lengths to align himself with their programme to refashion the university's curriculum along distinctly Austrian lines, encompassing both the liberal arts and the natural sciences, in such a way as to rival the great centres of learning in Berlin, Heidelberg and Leipzig. In this same letter, he hinted at a large project to expand *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* into a systematic, Herbartian aesthetics of music—'a Leibniz-inspired brand of anti-idealist metaphysics' (31) that espoused philosophical enquiry, positivism, and 'the search for permanent, objective truths' (31), while at the same time undermining the experience of the perceiving subject.

By viewing Hanslick's career advancement within the University of Vienna in the context of these national reforms, Karnes neatly encapsulates a central dichotomy in his output, that of the positivist formalist versus the cultural historian and hermeneutic critic. Karnes is the first to account for, rather than merely to observe, Hanslick's

removal of a number of statements that reveal the idealist underpinning of his central argument in his 1854 publication, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, thus making the first revision of 1858 an ideal complement to the work of others in the field of positivist musical inquiry. Although Hanslick began expanding his treatise into a systematic Herbartian aesthetics of music on his promotion to the salaried rank of Associate Professor in 1861, a project he had hinted at in his letter of application for the post, he became frustrated in his efforts to identify objective criteria by which to judge musical beauty and deviated from his original path, thereby disavowing the Herbartian movement and turning instead to cultural history.

However, I have difficulty with Karnes's assertion that Hanslick publicly rejected the tenets of his epoch-making treatise a little more than a decade after its publication in his effort to write his second book in the idealist tradition of Hegel. To my mind, Karnes's argument at this point lacks the acuity that permeates much of the rest of the book. Certainly, Hanslick changed direction significantly, and abandoned Herbartianism in the 1860s, by promoting music history as a 'living history (*lebendige Geschichte*)' (47) and by placing 'the subjective impressions characteristic of journalistic criticism at the center of the historical narrative' (22). An abandonment of Herbartianism, however, does not amount to a wholesale rejection of the tenets of his early monograph, certainly not the 1854 edition. Hanslick's somewhat insincere research proposal designed to gain employment—his embracing of Herbartianism and his removal of the idealist underpinnings in the 1858 edition of *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*—attains the significance of the principal tenets of his argument in Karnes's line of reasoning. Karnes scarcely considers that Hanslick continued not only to sanction the publication of new editions of *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* throughout his lifetime but also made significant contributions to these revised editions. Furthermore, not only in his autobiography but, perhaps more significantly, also in his later critical writings of the 1890s, Hanslick again discussed his early monograph and remained faithful to many of its arguments. In making the case that Hanslick publicly rejected the tenets of his treatise and instead converted to writing a 'living history' of music, Karnes views the two as mutually exclusive aspects of Hanslick's multifaceted mind. The greater concern here is that this does not bring us any closer to understanding the complex relationship between Hanslick's critical writings and his aesthetic thought. In fact, it obviates the need to do so (thereby disregarding one of the most under-explored and crucial aspects of Hanslick studies), and at the same time could be read as tacitly excusing *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* as being an early indiscretion in Hanslick's career.

One of Karnes's principal claims running throughout *Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History* is that these thinkers each found it difficult to reconcile the task of writing about music and the demands of scholarship. They were aware of the important distinction between being a writer on aesthetics (*Aesthetiker*) and a scholar

(*Gelehrter*) and historian. Karnes argues that nearly all late-century attempts to impose positivist agendas upon the study of art betray a degree of anxiety. He gives a clear explication of the various contributors in this regard and supports this with a lucid discussion of how these three complemented, disputed and engaged with one another.

One of Karnes's most discerning observations is that Hanslick did not understand criticism and scholarship to be mutually exclusive but rather to be deeply inscribed within each other. Karnes argues that in distancing himself from Herbartianism, Hanslick did not retire from disciplinary debate. Rather, his critical writings can be understood as an endeavour to 'dissolve the boundaries between historical research and critical reporting' (44) and can be seen as engaging in a provocative critique of the positivist movement, issuing a prescient diagnosis of its risks, from within the academy; *From the Concert Hall* of 1870 was a work of historical scholarship in the positivist tradition of Ambros, Jahn, and Spitta, yet it recorded Hanslick's subjective impressions within the narration of cultural history, thereby deconstructing one of the central disciplinary oppositions upon which the positivist movement was founded. In the subsequent nine volumes of collected criticisms, brought together under the shared title of *Modern Opera*, Karnes argues that Hanslick inverted this relationship. He 'identified the critic's pen as the historian's camera, and the critical essay as the historical photograph' (62). In taking photographs of the present moment, that is in recording his impressions of the moment critically, Hanslick engaged in an historical act.

While Karnes depicts Hanslick's rejection of the positivist enterprise as straightforward and resolute, Schenker's was not. Karnes points to three phases in Schenker's output in which he vacillated between embracing and rejecting positivist scholarship. The first in the 1890s was marked by his fascination with the compositional process and theories of the artistic creativity of Hoffmann, Wagner and other Romantic composers and writers. Here Schenker found an alternative to Adlerian scholarship in analysis that was firmly within the nineteenth-century hermeneutic tradition. Karnes makes the case that Schenker's first attempts at analytical work revealed a profound distrust of the influence of positivist discourse on the critical discourse on music. He believed that critics ought to 'greet with skepticism calls to emulate the methods of the natural sciences in their work' (107). In arguing that Schenker viewed Brahms's compositional process through a Wagnerian lens at this point, Karnes significantly confounds 'the persistent assumption that late-century critics were sharply divided by their aesthetic allegiances to one or the other of these artists' (13).

The second phase, beginning in 1895, saw Schenker make a radical turn to a self-consciously realistic and empirical perspective that considered only those insights provided by the sketches and reminiscences of composers. He now held that all musicians must strive to hone their artistic sensibilities through diligent work and practice, and a

dedication to a course of empirical, rationalistic inquiry. This entailed a rejection of metaphysical speculation and Romantic poetics, an implicit critique of Wagner and Hanslick, and an identification with the notion espoused in Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human* (1878) that one must labour to produce one's creations. Brahms epitomized this approach for Schenker in that he did not allow himself to be ruled by the whims of his creative imagination. Despite the broad range of primary sources that are consulted and translated here for the first time, this discussion would have been enhanced if Karnes had clarified one way or the other whether Schenker's ideas in this regard actually came from Brahms.

By 1906 Schenker was in his third phase which saw him turn back to a more metaphysical view of creative genius, and to a dramatic rejection of positivism. Schenker denied that the work of Adler, Nottebohm and other scientifically-oriented scholars ever played a role in his intellectual development. He denied that he had ever been swayed by the positivist movement, and blamed his early encounters with empiricism on conversations with Brahms.

Although Adler's career was launched by his positivist polemics, the period after his employment at the University of Vienna was marked by his endeavour 'to respond to an array of Wagner- and Nietzsche-inspired critiques of science and historical study' (14) in which he argued that musicologists ought to advance historical study in the service of composers who would in turn transform historical styles and idioms into a 'living' music of the present. Although the bulk of Hanslick's work at the University of Vienna 'left many of his colleagues deeply unsatisfied' (23), Karnes underlines Adler's unacknowledged indebtedness to Hanslick, and draws attention to their shared belief in the 'cultural relativity of aesthetic judgement' and their common 'faith in the Hegelian maxim that works of art are phenomenal manifestations of the human spirit in its evolution through time' (53). Karnes observes that the 'virulent anti-Semitism of many late-century Wagnerians might have played a role' (143) in Adler's selective reading of Wagner, citing his distaste for such a radical position as that taken by Batka as a case in point. This is a sharp observation. It leaves the reader with an appetite for two things: an exploration of the relationship between Adler's and Hanslick's views on anti-Semitism; and examples of, or at least citations to, Adler's articles in the *Neue freie Presse* that give an indication of his reaction to the anti-Semitism then rife in Vienna, and his attitudes on Wagner. But perhaps these two lie outside the confines of Karnes's study.

In the epilogue, Karnes draws our attention to a number of fundamental dichotomies that were established in the heady days of the institutionalization of musicology and that continue to resonate in more recent musicological discourse. Among these are aesthetics versus the natural sciences, positivism versus intuition, objective versus

subjective trajectories of musical investigations, *Musikwissenschaft* versus criticism, and hermeneutic criticism versus analysis. One of the most important roles this book plays in current musicological debate is to acknowledge that much of the scholarship that has been carried out on these figures in the second half of the twentieth century has been one-sided and blinkered by what Anthony Newcomb refers to as a 'twentieth-century reaction away from an expressive aesthetic and toward a formal aesthetic'.<sup>1</sup> The result of Karnes's meticulous scholarship is that from his vantage point that considers the output of these writers in their entirety, he can see that much postwar musicology was of a 'radical variety, which rigidly shunned (or proposed to shun) all value judgements in the name of scientific objectivity, [and] became, as Joseph Kerman has shown, a significant force in music study in the postwar years.' (188) Karnes contends that such one-sidedness does not help us to understand or deepen our knowledge of the complexities and nuanced thinking of Hanslick, Schenker or Adler. He argues for a more moderate and nuanced view of their position on these dichotomies.

Although Karnes does not seek to invalidate earlier studies, he argues for a revised view of the founders of musicology by fundamentally altering the way we think about these figures and by legitimizing an alternative approach to their work, one that he argues was vetoed in the second half of the last century. Karnes sees this academic one-sidedness in the context of the Cold War era. He is not the first to do so, and he quite openly adds his voice to an array of recent commentators, among them Anne Schreffler, Celia Applegate, Philip Gossett and Daniel Beller-McKenna. *Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History* can be understood as a decisive and significant contribution to scholarship, not only in the field of musicology, but also in the broader field of German and Austrian cultural life. This book is also to be welcomed for the wealth of source material it consults, as evidenced in the extensive bibliography. A number of figures, tables and previously unpublished photographs and drawings add to the appeal and usefulness of the book. It is to be further valued for the elegant and idiomatic translations it contains.

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Newcomb, 'The Birth of Music out of the Spirit of Drama: An Essay in Wagnerian Formal Analysis', *19th-Century Music*, 5/1 (Summer, 1981), 38–67: 39.