

MATTHEW GELBART, *THE INVENTION OF 'FOLK MUSIC' AND 'ART MUSIC'. EMERGING CATEGORIES FROM OSSIAN TO WAGNER* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). ISBN 978-0-521-86303-2, xxi + 287pp, £50.

Within the past twenty years, narratives of music in Europe have undergone a profound change, not least because of a general impatience with the work-based practice of German musicology, with all its attendant rhetoric of privilege, idealism and artistic sovereignty. The centre of gravity has shifted away from readings of music history which assent to this sovereignty towards a more pliant domain in which music has not only acquired a plural, but also a fairly radical series of perspectives in which the musical artwork is of far less importance than it once was. There is, of course, the compensating lustre of theory and analysis (in which discipline the artwork is self-evidently preserved as an end in itself), but the intellectual claims of cultural history and social anthropology, especially in the United States, have exerted a pre-eminent influence on what used to be described as 'historical musicology'. This book, which belongs to a series edited by Jeffrey Kallberg, Anthony Newcomb and Ruth Solie entitled *New Perspectives in Music History and Criticism*, is a compelling case in point.

Matthew Gelbart writes the cultural history of 'folk music' and 'art music' by tracing the origins of conceptual categories which have in very significant measure governed the reception of music in Europe since the late eighteenth century. In this enterprise, he clearly revisits a terrain which has been substantially scrutinized in the past, so that his own narrative inevitably involves primary figures in the development of these categories, notably Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Charles Burney and Johann Gottfried Herder (among many others). Nevertheless, what distinguishes this study from the outset is its persuasive and original address upon the history of Scottish music and of Scottish musical thought so as to foreground what has often been submerged in the past, namely the cardinal importance of an immediate reception history of Scottish ideas about music in the formation of European (and notably German) musical identity.

The result of this address is that a host of important (and very influential) writings by ideologues of Scottish music, many of them taking their cue in the first instance from James Macpherson and his *Ossian* poems of 1760, is engaged with immense skill by Gelbart in order to trace the impact of one prevailing (if admittedly complex) idea. This idea is that the music of the 'Other', in relation to the 'Self' (a favourite polarity in the later eighteenth century), takes firm root in the projection of Scottish music as a natural phenomenon, unrelated to the enterprise of art music. It is, in short, the idea of folk music. The history of this idea, which occupies Gelbart throughout the first three of his eight chapters, would at first entail a redrawing of the maps of Scottish music, so that more-or-less mythic or spurious originators (Gelbart calls these 'symbolic au-

thors') such as James I of Scotland or the much-maligned David Rizzio, gradually gave way to a more determined (and ideologically motivated) reading of 'natural' and 'pastoral' elements in Scottish music which would attest not only its antiquity (and authenticity) but its abiding presence, confirmed by the collections of the late eighteenth century. Gelbart's patient elaboration of this history, which retrieves (among much else) the writings of John Gregory, James Oswald, Joseph Ritson and James Beattie, incontestably affirms a theory—in all but name—of 'folk song' which these writers pursued far in advance of Herder's concept of *Volkslied* (a concept which, in any case, Herder applied to poetry rather than music). Gelbart argues that Herder's influence in the formation of this idea—the idea of folksong—has not only been 'dangerously overrated' in the past, but that it was effectively unknown in Britain before the turn of the nineteenth century. This argument will doubtless excite further commentary, but, in the meantime, it is salutary to quote briefly here from Gelbart's own quotation (90) from Beattie's essay 'On Poetry and Music, as they Affect the Mind' (1762) because it apostrophizes a decisive moment in the evolution of this concept within the folds of Scottish musical discourse (the bracketed edits and italics are mine):

To all this we may add, that Tassoni...speaks of this [Scottish] music as well-esteemed by the Italians of his time, and ascribes the invention of it to James King of Scotland... But though I admit Tassoni's testimony as a proof, that the Scottish music is more ancient than Rizzio, I do not think him right in what he says of its inventor[...]. *I rather believe, that it took its rise among men who were real shepherds, and who actually felt the sentiments and affections, whereof it is so expressive.*

Gelbart also argues, however, that Herder's engagement with ideas of folk music has been *undervalued*, and to this end he shows that, in his writings from 1779 onwards, 'Herder no longer proposes *Volkslied* as a sparkling natural alternative to mannered "art" song, but rather as "material" for poetic "art", ...as raw mined metals waiting to be forged into something greater' (198). This observation paves the way for a reading of folksong as a necessary condition for the development of German musical idealism in the nineteenth century, especially in regard to Beethoven. Although the general terms of this reading seem to me very persuasive, Gelbart's account of Beethoven's engagement with Scottish folk music is less convincing, insofar as he challenges the received opinion (which I share) that, in his work for the Scottish publisher George Thomson, Beethoven merely fulfilled routine commissions. I am certain that Gelbart is right to emphasize that 'Folk music could now be aestheticized, through great art' (203), and in this connection Gelbart's critique of folk elements in the Ninth Symphony is brilliantly conceived. Nevertheless, the importance which Gelbart ascribes to Beethoven's Scottish arrangements leaves me unconvinced (*pace* Barry Cooper's definitive research). The diagnosis of a new and 'national' art which emerged from European encounters with folk music is, of course, a different matter, and here Gelbart adds much that is of value, and not only to our understanding of Beethoven.

Perhaps the most important chapter in this book lies at its centre: entitled 'The Invention of Folk Modality, 1775–1840', it documents a history within a history, namely the growth of a universal concept of modal practice common to all peasant cultures. This preposterous idea (as it may now seem) originated, as Gelbart shows, in Rousseau's 1768 *Dictionnaire*, in which Rousseau cited a 'Chinese air'. This little tune 'became a foundation stone in scholarly discussion of Scottish musical theory. For the next hundred years, it would rear its head again and again in books and articles on Scottish music, accompanied by the assertion that it sounded uncannily and undeniably Scottish' (112). In a host of technical discussions, spearheaded by Charles Burney, the natural condition of a universal modality in folk music (one invention qualifying another, it would seem) gained ground. Elements of this idea still obtain in folk-music studies, and it is extremely revealing (to say the least of it) to find this idea deconstructed in this book for the invention that it is.

Readers of this *Journal* might feel prompted to enquire about the treatment of Irish music in this book. There are so many parallels suggested by Gelbart's narrative between the development of Irish and Scottish music, to say nothing of the dominance of folk music as an idea in the reception and discussion of music in this country, that one might expect some account of Ireland in a book devoted to the history of folk music as an idea in Western culture. There is none. To be fair to Gelbart, I do not intend this as an outright criticism of a study which makes its (virtually exclusive) concern with Scotland and Germany clear from the outset, but I do permit myself to wonder (and not for the first time) at the discrepancy between the ubiquity of traditional Irish music as a presence in British, European and North American culture and a general silence as to its reception in a study such as this one. If only on that account, one incidental merit of Gelbart's scholarship might be that it increases the urgency to consider traditional music in Ireland as a narrative, as an agent of reception history and as a decisive element in the formation of musical identities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the meantime, this thoughtful and important book shows how such enterprises might be achieved, even as it brings forward a vital development in the history of European musical thought which should be of abiding interest to scholars everywhere, not least in Ireland. I am not sure whether the decision to omit a bibliography rested with the editors of the series to which this book belongs, or with the author himself (some volumes in the series include a bibliography; others do not). This uncertainty does not prevent me from regretting the absence of a bibliography from this book, especially given the depth and range of Gelbart's primary and secondary research.

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