

Critical Music Historiography: Probing Canons, Ideologies and Institutions. Vesa Kurkela and Markus Mantere, eds. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015. xvi, 315 pp., illustrations, music. ISBN: 978-1-4724-1419-9.

Is writing a history of music still relevant? Which composers should be included in such a narrative? Who should be excluded? And on what grounds should scholars base and justify such complex decisions? It is with such fundamental questions that co-editors Vesa Kurkela and Markus Mantere begin this captivating and absorbing book.

Critical Music Historiography is a collection of seventeen chapters placed within four parts; all address areas that fall outside the boundaries of traditional music history. Part 1, entitled “Nationalism and Politics,” contains four chapters, the focus of which correlates the role of nationalism with the development of musical institutions from the mid-nineteenth century until World War II. In the first chapter, Jann Pasler explores the intersection of these two issues by focusing upon colonialism in France. She illustrates how the research of the early French ethnomusicologists supported the political agenda of an expanding, colonial France. The next three chapters examine nationalism and politics in Finland. Lauri Väkevö studies the advancement of Finnish music education from the mid-nineteenth century to the present; in the following chapter, Mantere identifies the broad and diverse areas of study of Ilmari Krohn, Finland’s first professional musicologist, and illustrates his significance to the development of Finnish music scholarship (notably that of Jean Sibelius); and finally, Ulla-Britta Broman-Kananen challenges the prevailing nationalist narrative underlying the development of Finnish national opera during the 1870s, arguing that the development of the art form was far more nuanced than this simple theme—that is, an interaction between works written in the Finnish language and works imported from the repertory of the Swedish Royal Opera of Stockholm.

Part 2, entitled “Silenced and Sidetracked,” also contains four chapters. The central theme is the exploration of musical narratives that for a variety of reasons—political, racial and geographical—have played only a small role and were subsumed within the larger narratives of the past. Veijo Murtomäki’s chapter confronts the conventional account that late eighteenth/early nineteenth-century Viennese classicism was a style based on German masters—that is, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven—arguing that at least half of the Viennese composers from this time period were Bohemian and Moravian by nationality.

Frequently, the outlines used by western musicologists are of minimal utility when applied to the historical narratives of non-western musical idioms. Martin Lodge’s essay on the music cultures of New Zealand offers a new perspective for writing its musical history, largely by concentrating on the plurality of musical styles, rather than utilizing one large meta-narrative to account for the country’s historical legacy.



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A common feature of historiographies that emphasize musical nationalism is to underscore such genres as folk-influenced symphonic or choral music. However, popular music or the music of minorities, which can also play an important role, is missing from such narratives. The remaining two chapters by Risto Pekka Pennanen and Vesa Kurkela are contributions that fill this paucity of literature by examining the popular musics of early twentieth-century Bosnia and Finland, respectively.

The five chapters in part 3, entitled “Updating Historiographical Concepts,” reconsider such vital models of musicological scholarship as Orientalism, evolutionism, and authenticity. In the first chapter, Derek Scott contemplates the possibility of finding an Eastern Occidentalism that works in a similar manner to Western Orientalism. By using examples of popular music from the Balkan countries as his *modus operandi*, Scott’s underlying thesis is not to negate or replace theories of orientalism, but rather, to erase cultural boundaries between East and West.

George Kennaway challenges a fundamental principal of a historically informed performance (HIP)—namely the authenticity of such a performance. He suggests that since the historical data supporting an HIP interpretation is either curtailed or equivocal (or, at times, both), performers must choose some historical possibilities over others. The upshot is that there is an inherent paradox in an HIP performance: one’s performance is frequently proclaimed as less inauthentic than another; yet it is inevitably always relative, dictated by the decisions made by the contemporary performer.

In his study of the folk-influenced choral works by the Serbian composer Stevan Mokranjac, Srđan Atanasovski proposes that these choral works should not be viewed from the traditional lens of mere folk song arrangements—and, thus, not a true exemplar of the composer’s “originality.” Rather, he argues that Mokranjac’s choral works should not be viewed pejoratively, but seen to have an important place in the canon of national music.

Alexandra Kertz-Welzel explores the association of music with figures in history—and specifically, music’s relation with the devil. By contextualizing the centuries-old myth of *diabolus in musica* within Thomas Mann’s novel *Doktor Faustus*, Kertz-Welzel argues that the author’s conception of the devil should not be interpreted simply as a metaphor for the totalitarian regime of Hitler’s Germany, but extends to issues such as the uneasy relationship between the ideologies of cultural administration and the freedom and creativity of music educators.

In the final chapter of part 3, Ana Petrov evaluates Max Weber’s thesis of music’s rationality in terms of postcolonial theory. She argues that Weber’s conviction of the rationality and complexity of western music is reflective of the larger western power discourse—a vital line of socio-political thought in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet despite the inherent challenges of this perspective, Petrov argues that elements of it continue to endure in contemporary musicological discourses.

The final part of this collection is entitled “Probing Canons.” The theme underlying all four chapters is how the changing or removal of traditional musical canons is never neutral and is often politically driven. For instance, in the first chapter, Johannes Brusila discusses the role of Finland’s Swedish-speaking minority in earlier historiographical narratives. In particular, he points out that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Swedish was considered the language of the intelligentsia and

the elite, even though Swedes represented only five percent of the entire country's population. However, as the importance of the Finnish language gradually became aligned with the nationalist narrative, the Swedish-speaking minority was described as "Finnish." Brusila's work calls for a re-examination of the Swedish-speaking minority's position in Finland's history.

Kenneth Gloag's fascinating chapter takes on a major challenge to postmodern musicological scholarship. Specifically, Gloag identifies an inherent irony in this work: by criticizing and dismantling traditional canons and ideologies that generated their formation, postmodern scholars have constructed their own canons and orthodoxies.

Joseph Knowles puts forward rationales for the posthumous canonizations of composers. To illustrate, he cites the late sixteenth-century composer Carlo Gesualdo—who was absent from most music histories until twentieth-century composers such as Igor Stravinsky included him in the canon of historicized music. Knowles argues that Gesualdo's unusual music and independent personality served to fulfill a larger agenda: namely, to provide historical precedents for the modernist music written by composers such as Stravinsky.

In the final chapter, Christopher Wiley discusses the term "muse" as an element in composers' biographical narratives. Women were frequently viewed as natural muses—tender, caring and inspiring characters serving in the background of male genius. By definition, a muse is a dependent; consequently, a woman's professionalism as a musician or a composer was often impossible.

The text of *Critical Music Historiography* is extremely readable and the quality of the scholarship very high—not surprising, given the strength of the contributors and prominence of the two editors. The examples are clear and support the arguments well. There is an extensive bibliography—twenty-five pages—followed by nearly three pages of web citations, a discography, and an index. Unfortunately, I am unable to comment upon the binding or appearance of the actual book, as the publisher was only willing to provide an e-book version of the text—a lamentable decision now enforced by Ashgate's marketing division. (I might add that this is the only publisher of which I am aware that has embarked on such a practice.)

The organization of the overall text is sound: the introduction clearly states the aims and goals of the study; and the flow of the book is most satisfying. The quality of the editorial work is uniformly excellent. The text is appropriate enough for the music enthusiast; at the same time, the degree of analytical discourse will appeal to the specialist/scholar. In other words, the level of the prose will appeal to a wide readership interested in the topics of musical historiography and postmodern music scholarship. In sum, this is an impressive collection of essays by important scholars, and I predict that the collection will be read and referenced for years to come.

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