

## BOOKS

*Reconceiving Structure in Contemporary Music: New Tools in Music Theory and Analysis* by Judy Lochhead. Routledge, 2016. £90.00

This new monograph returns to the two poles around which Judy Lochhead has built her highly productive research career: the exploration of insights from post-structuralist philosophy, and their incorporation into the analysis of new music. The title declares her intention to rethink basic notions about contemporary music, and the abstract promises ‘new ways’ and ‘new approaches’ that will ‘def[y] the prediction of classical music’s death’ (a prediction which, it must be said, always sets my teeth on edge, mainly because it only ever seems to be reiterated by people claiming to defy it).

Lochhead’s primary claim is that the concepts of structure underpinning much musical theory and analysis are rooted unhelpfully in the modernist viewpoint of the immediate post-war period, and in particular in its idolisation of science as the basis of empirically verifiable truth. The aim of this book is to ‘reconceive’ the concept of structure for the analysis of new repertoire, primarily by catching up with the cultural changes that have affected composers themselves: ‘creators of recent music have been reconceiving the structuring of musical time, but the forms of critical engagement with music have not fully kept pace with these changes’ (p. 3). This aim is pursued through a combination of theory and practice. The first half of the book moves rapidly from an account of the mid-century origins of music analysis as a thoroughly modernist-rationalist practice, through discussions of the ontological and epistemological questions raised by existing viewpoints on musical structure, towards Lochhead’s ‘renovated’ conception of analytical activity. The second half is devoted to detailed analyses of four works – by Kaija Saariaho, Sofia Gubaidulina, Stacy Garrop and Anna Clyne – which serve as practical demonstrations, ‘performances’ (p. 9) of Lochhead’s conception.

There is certainly plenty of food for thought in the theoretical chapters. Lochhead argues for a ‘renovation’ of music analysis to make it equal to the demands of new music; this consists

in ‘the inclusion of a critical component’ which allows analysts ‘to examine both the analytical/theoretical concepts and methods and the experiential contexts that are the orienting background for the investigative process’ (p. 68). This reflective approach to analytical practice takes concrete form for Lochhead in three stages. First, we investigate our perceptions of the music – not only the ‘microperception’ of immediate sensory experience, but also the ‘macroperception’ of the cultural, social and historical context that surrounds a work and its human agents. Next, we experiment with different orderings of these experiences by creating maps of various kinds – diagrams, verbal descriptions, notational simplifications – that serve not as a representation of any pre-existing order but rather as a ‘recording of the analyst’s ongoing engagement with a musical work’ (p. 96). Finally, we use the material provided by these initial stages to produce a ‘speculative’ analysis – that is, an account that reflects our experiences with the work whilst preserving its multi-layered, emergent nature as a ‘network of sounding possibilities’ (p. 96).

Lochhead’s outline of these three stages was for me the most convincing of the theoretical passages in the book, demonstrating her long engagement with the complex trajectory of post-phenomenology and hermeneutics. Her whistle-stop tour of central thinkers in these fields (from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty to Habermas and Gadamer) draws useful connections between their work and questions of music perception, and reinforces her conception of ‘musical things’ – the ‘sounding events that enact a work’s structuring of musical time’ (p. 89) as dynamic and interlinked phenomena rather than fixed objects. Focus is placed squarely on music as a temporal, transient experience that draws composer, performer and listener together; the epistemological grounding Lochhead gives to her framework will be highly valuable to others who wish to proceed along similar lines.

This three-stage model is evident throughout the analyses themselves, which are rooted in a combination of detailed musical ‘close reading’ and wider-ranging philosophical or theoretical discussion. The analytical materials (presented in a generous selection of diagrammatic and

tabular ‘maps’ of different kinds) show deep engagement with this music as an unfolding experience, and the individuality of each account is also noteworthy: although there are certainly some parallels between them, the particular strategies adopted shift drastically in response to the unique characteristics of each piece. As a result, even the *kind* of musical knowledge being sought varies from analysis to analysis. For example, Lochhead’s reading of Saariaho’s *Lonh* (1996) is quite traditional in its focus upon aesthetic experience: she begins with the insight that this work seems to ‘project a sense of musical “radiance”’ (p. 105), and then demonstrates (quite expertly) how this radiance emerges out of interlocking timbral, formal and motivic processes. By contrast, her analysis of Gubaidulina’s Second String Quartet (1987) relates timbral and pitch processes to Deleuze’s philosophy of difference, resulting in the argument that this work ‘musically *thinks* difference’ (p. 126) – the sounds become agents in an argument that is primarily philosophical. At times (particularly in the final two chapters) the wealth of analytical detail becomes rather overwhelming, and as a result the broader interpretative points feel somewhat sidelined: it is hard to see the wood for the trees. But it seems churlish to criticise an analysis for containing too much detail, especially since most of these works have never been written about before; Lochhead’s focus on the sounding surface certainly provides a clear starting-point for listeners to engage with these pieces.

The same attention to detail is not always visible elsewhere, unfortunately. This is particularly evident in the first few chapters of the book, where the whole basis for the project is established – upon rather shaky ground, it must be said. The author’s denunciation of post-war compositional and analytical practice as modernist and outdated relies on the familiar narrative set out by Kerman in the 1980s and reiterated since (with varying degrees of nuance) by assorted musicologists and music historians, perhaps most prominently Richard Taruskin and Susan McClary: Darmstadt, *Die Reihe*, Princeton and *Perspectives of New Music* are lumped together as the joint mouthpiece of a new approach that places emphasis on ‘the rigorous empirical investigation of music, on the development of speculative theoretical models, and on the yoking of the creative project to such empirical-speculative work’ (p. 27).

Lochhead’s treatment is certainly more nuanced than many versions of this narrative, focussing on the broader sociocultural currents

that lay behind this phenomenon (particularly within the context of post-war American higher education); she dodges the kinds of unhelpful stylistic generalisations that have dogged commentators such as Kerman, where the rubric of ‘total serialism’ is used as a way to lump together composers as distinct as Babbitt, Boulez and Stockhausen. Nonetheless, the Darmstadt phenomenon is still being presented here (in Martin Iddon’s pungent characterisation) as ‘some sort of fatal other: a serial boogeyman, the sort of thing right-minded composers might scare their students with at bedtime’.<sup>1</sup> The work of scholars such as Iddon, Christopher Fox and M. J. Grant in the last decade has made clear just how much more complex was the phenomenon of the post-war avant-garde, and the vital critical dialogues it supported from its very outset; it is frustrating to see this important scholarship overlooked here in favour of easy but rather tired ideological pronouncements.

Even where key texts are included, their treatment sometimes raises parallel questions of detail and engagement. For example, Lochhead’s discussion of structure as an analytical concept is built upon two tables of heavily pruned quotations from leading musical and philosophical figures, which then form the basis for rapid-fire surveys: her treatment of mid-century structuralism, for example, zooms through Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Foucault, Derrida and Ricoeur in two breathless pages. I can’t help wondering how these writers would have felt about their work being boiled down in this way, particularly since it is this very kind of analytical reductionism (albeit in the sphere of musical rather than textual analysis) that is at stake in Lochhead’s argument. Likewise, although her critique touches frequently on questions of metaphor, she barely engages with the substantial body of existing musical literature on this subject, much of which has already answered some of the key questions raised by her critique.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Martin Iddon, ‘Darmstadt Schools: Darmstadt as Plural Phenomenon’, *TEMPO* 65:256 (2011), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> In particular, Robert Fink’s critique of the concept of surface and depth in Schenkerian theory and Robert Adlington’s exploration of alternatives to motion-based metaphors of structure both deal explicitly with the challenges contemporary music poses to spatial metaphors of form, and suggest possible solutions. See Robert Fink, ‘Going Flat: Post-Hierarchical Music Theory and the Musical Surface’, in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 102–37; and Robert Adlington, ‘Moving Beyond Motion: Metaphors for Changing Sound’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 128:2 (2003), pp. 297–318.

Taken as a whole, I'm not sure this project could really be called a 'renovation' of music analysis. A degree of critical self-reflection has been a visible feature of the discipline for a long time, for those willing to look beyond the set-theory and Schenkerian textbooks,<sup>3</sup> and I don't think Lochhead's rather one-sided presentation of music history really does her argument any favours. Perhaps it's best to think of it as a kind of analytical *Technique de mon langage musical* (à la Messiaen): what we have here is not so much a renewal of the field, nor even necessarily a general statement about it. Rather, it is a personal defence of the kind of open, listener-focused, critically engaged analysis which is increasingly becoming the dominant approach, from the perspective of one of its long-time exponents. It may be frustrating at times, but it's rarely less than thought-provoking.

Mark Hutchinson

---

*Sensing Sound: Singing & Listening as Vibrational Practice* by Nina Sun Eidsheim. Duke University Press, 2015. \$89.95 (cloth); \$24.95 (paperback)

'If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?' Nina Sun Eidsheim opens her new book with this familiar, centuries-old aphorism but immediately asks us to push beyond the question. For a start, if you're anywhere near a falling tree you'll probably have more pressing concerns: the suddenly darkening sky, the dust stinging your eyes, the vibrations thumping through your body. Unless you're a musicologist, then, thinking about sound may miss the point entirely. *Sensing Sound* argues that music scholarship needs to keep looking well beyond the simple facts of sound towards the broader chain of actions and assumptions surrounding it, the 'thick description' as American anthropologist Clifford Geertz would put it. In other words, to look and listen not just for the falling tree or even the woods surrounding it but the entire ecology that led to its falling in the first place.

<sup>3</sup> One excellent place to start is the work of Marion Guck, who as long ago as 1983 wrote of her concern that the desire for music theory 'to emulate the kind and degree of rigor evident in theories of the physical sciences' would end up 'limiting music theory to those features of musical structure that lend themselves to quantification or formal-logical expression ... creative thinkers need not apply'. See Marianne Kielian-Gilbert and Marion Guck, 'Reflections on Music Theory', *Perspectives of New Music* 22:1–2 (1983), pp. 581–2.

In recent decades musicology has been doing this. Authors as divergent as Jacques Attali, Susan McClary and Joseph Kerman have looked well beyond formalist analysis and the dominance of the written score to examine the complex influences and intersections of politics, gender and identity. Eidsheim not only continues this expansion but also nudges it towards the rapidly growing scholarship around sound, with its links to energies, vital materiality and the sensorium. Her great contribution is that she connects these two broad fields, still largely separated – one centred on music, the other more broadly on contemporary art – and does so with refreshing vigour, open-mindedness and originality.

*Sensing Sound* moves beyond musicology's tendency towards positivism in order to articulate a 'vibrational theory of music ... [and] an alternative analytical framework for that offered by the figure of sound' (p. 9), suggesting that we understand music not as a collection of fixed 'things' (the work, the score; independent of the listener) but as material exchanges of vibration transferred between bodies. Such an exchange is not, however, to be thought of as a blank gesture but one encoded with the cultural logic of its subjects: the identities and intentions of composers, performers and listeners. Viewed through this framework, music cannot help but operate beyond the merely auditory and indeed already exists (both in intention and literally, in time) before its sound is even heard.

Eidsheim's vibrational theory further positions music as an action: 'If sound and music have been reduced to static nouns', the author states, 'then the practice of vibration is a verb – regenerating its energy through material transmission and transduction within a continuous field' (p. 156). This draws on the term 'musicising' established by the New Zealand musicologist Christopher Small in his 1998 book *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. According to his framework, a piano recital is not just a dialogue between composer and pianist, or a *ménage à trois* that shyly invites the listener; it is an active process, of 'musicising', within an expansive field of relations that implicates not only the three parties mentioned but also, for example, the piano tuner, the stagehand, the ticket seller and the casual passer-by.

Eidsheim's thesis of music as vibration, as action and as 'thick event' stretches across five chapters. The first four address four orthodoxies or assumptions within music: that sound's standard transmission is through the air; that space sits apart from compositional concerns; that sound