

## Score Review

Anton Reicha, *Die Harmonie der Sphären*. Edited by Daniel Obluda. Recent Researches in the Music of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, 72 (Middleton, Wisconsin: A-R Editions, 2017). xii + 42 pp. \$90.

Many composers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries experimented with a wide palette of sounds, often inspired by rapid technological developments in instrument manufacturing. The timpani were part of this trend. Musical manuscripts and documents dating back to middle of the eighteenth century refers to concertos, partitas and symphonies that require more than the standard pair of timpani that were typical in this period. These include, among others, Johann Christoph Graupner's *Sinfonia a 2 corni, 6 timpani, 2 violini, viola e cembalo* (1749), Johann Carl Christian Fischer's *Symphonie mit acht obligaten Pauken* (c. 1780s), and Georg Druschetzky's *Concerto per il oboa e timpani* (late 1790s). Some documents dating from the late 1790s even refer to timpani concertos written for 16 drums.<sup>1</sup> Ludwig van Beethoven and Hector Berlioz are often credited with expanding the role of the timpani in orchestral music; consequently composers such as Anton Reicha and Georg Druschetzky, both of whom wrote works with parts for up to eight timpani, are often overlooked. Daniel Obluda introduces us to Reicha's *Die Harmonie der Sphären* (c. 1818–24), an extraordinary work written for eight-part chorus, strings and eight timpani. The edition itself is based on the only known source of the work, which appears at the end of the second volume of Reicha's treatise on composition (*Traité de haute composition musicale*, 1824–26). Carl Czerny's 1834 translation of the treatise into German also contains a copy of the score with several minor revisions made by Czerny himself.

The introductory essay provides an overview of Reicha's time as a teacher at the Paris Conservatoire, the contextual background of the work in terms of its history and influence, and issues of performance practice. The editor discusses the largely unknown history of earlier multiple-timpani works in which the drums were used melodically, sometimes even to create a full octave of notes. Reicha presents us with 'the first known piece in which more than two timpani are used harmonically to create fully voiced triads' (p. vii). Of particular interest is the likely influence of Reicha's treatise, and therefore his multiple-timpani writing, on Berlioz's compositional style. It should also be noted that Jean-Georges Kastner's *Traité général d'instrumentation* (1837) and *Méthode complète et raisonnée de timbales* (1845), which mention works for multiple timpani, were also very influential on

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of such works see Harrison Powley, 'Symphonic Music for Multiple Timpani from the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', in *Perkussionsinstrumente in der Kunstmusik vom 16. bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts: XXXV. Wissenschaftliche Arbeitstagung und 28. Musikinstrumentenbau-Symposium Michaelstein 4. bis 7. Oktober 2007*, ed. Monika Lustig and Boje Schmuhl (Augsburg: Wissner, 2010): 437–63. See also Sam Girling, 'Curious Virtuosity: The Emergence and Decline of Unconventional Repertory for Timpani and Percussion in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries' (PhD diss., University of Auckland, 2018): 20–67.

Berlioz.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the similarities between the timpani parts in Reicha's *Die Harmonie der Sphären* with the final eight bars of the fourth movement ('Marche au supplice') in Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830) is striking. I could go further here: a discussion of Reicha's timpani writing in relation to Berlioz's *Grand messe des morts* (1837), which also uses timpani to create chordal harmony, would be welcome. No standalone publication of *Die Harmonie der Sphären* exists, and Obluda doubts that it was ever performed during Reicha's lifetime owing to the considerable number of drums that it requires (p. viii). However, the prospect of accessing eight timpani in Paris during the 1820s–1830s should not be completely ruled out, given that Giacomo Meyerbeer wrote for four timpani in his 1831 opera *Robert le diable* and Berlioz states in his 1834 treatise that the Paris Opéra owned three. The possibility that resources were shared between institutions should not be discounted.<sup>3</sup>

The edition offers performers a variety of stylistic approaches to early nineteenth-century timpani parts. Obluda, presumably drawing on his own experiences as a percussionist, discusses six fundamental issues, including stage arrangement, drumheads, dampening, tuning, mallets and dynamic balance. Many of these observations are impeccably detailed, especially the recommendation to position the drums in the middle of the stage in order for the sound to blend suitably with either the orchestra or chorus. Furthermore, the subject of sound quality is raised: in all likelihood early nineteenth-century timpani were less resonant than modern counterparts. Therefore, if the performer is playing on plastic timpani heads, Obluda suggests using self-adhesive dampening gels and gel pads in order to create 'a slightly dull and muffled natural sound' that realizes the clear triads that Reicha wanted (p. ix). Timpanists could apply many of Obluda's ideas relating to performance practice to other contemporaneous works.

The editor includes an English translation of the work's text by Ludwig Gotthard Kosegarten, incorrectly attributed to Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller in Reicha's original. What follows is a fascinating description of the 'music of the spheres' and the likely role the timpani play in representing the sonorous movement of the planets (pp. x–xi). There is also a translation of the composer's prefatory notes, which explains how the four pairs of timpani should be distributed among players and tuned accordingly. The edition is largely based on Reicha's original score, and the extensive critical commentary indicates where the version found in Czerny's translation is followed and the reasons for doing so. Some necessary modifications have been made on the score, particularly in terms of roll execution; tremolo markings are altered on the timpani part to indicate that rolls are rearticulated on each new chord, as per early-nineteenth-century and present-day customs (p. 41). Rehearsal markings have been added by the editor and a complete set of orchestral parts, including a choral score, are currently in preparation.

This new publication by A-R Editions, part of their series *Recent Researches in the Music of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, is a welcome addition to both

<sup>2</sup> See David Cairns, *Berlioz: Servitude and Greatness, 1832–1869* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000): 190; see also Inge van Rij, *The Other Worlds of Hector Berlioz: Travels with the Orchestra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 48.

<sup>3</sup> See Giacomo Meyerbeer, in *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*, ed. H. Becker (Berlin: Der Gruyter, 1970): 121. See also Jeremy Montagu, *Timpani and Percussion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002): 115, and Hugh MacDonald, *Berlioz's Orchestration Treatise: A Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 267.

the choral and timpani repertory. It is hoped that it will inspire further performances of this intriguing, yet hitherto neglected, work. For the enthusiast and scholar it highlights the often forgotten history of the timpani and how the instrument helped shape the rich, diverse musical landscape of the early nineteenth century.

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