



REVIEW: BOOK

Antoine Reicha and the Making of the Nineteenth-Century Composer

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Who was Antoine Reicha, anyway? Born 1770 in Prague, he was educated in Bavaria, served the court of Elector Maximilian Franz in Bonn, escaped Napoleonic aggression by moving to Hamburg, laboured as a composer in Vienna and finally settled in Paris, where he was appointed the Conservatoire's professor of counterpoint and fugue. An unapologetic careerist, he was a tireless innovator, an unsuccessful opera composer and a brilliant if freewheeling pedagogue. He adored Haydn, had a cordial relationship with Beethoven, sparred with his colleagues Fétis and Cherubini and mentored such luminaries as Liszt, Berlioz and Franck. Though his name is now largely forgotten, in the musical world of the nineteenth century, all roads led to Reicha.

No wonder, then, that in our age of networks, Reicha is staging a comeback. With *Antoine Reicha and the Making of the Nineteenth-Century Composer*, editors Fabio Morabito and Louise Bernard de Raymond have aimed to capture Reicha in his 'efforts to navigate a variety of contexts, negotiating at the same time personal, financial, geographical, social, musical, professional and other priorities of self-representation' (xix). Comprising seven essays in English and four in French, the book is a welcome addition to the growing literature on the composer, offering many perspectives that will engage scholars of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music.

Morabito (chapter 1) draws attention to Haydn's outsized role in Reicha's autobiography. Central to Reicha's historiographical project, Morabito argues, was his role as a symbolic link between Haydn and later generations of composers. Morabito characterizes Haydn as a modernist, arguing that for Reicha, 'playing [the role of] Haydn' amounted to 'being yourself musically' (19). Reicha's *Trente-six fugues composées d'après un nouveau système* (1803) were his most systematic and radical attempt to follow 'the unruly Haydn blueprint' (19), but the collection was poorly received. These eccentric fugues, Morabito suggests, were off-putting to Reicha's contemporaries because of their didactic pretension as much as their novelty.

Reicha's fascination with fugue is further explored by Muriel Boulan (chapter 9), who investigates seven French treatises on 'school fugues' written between 1805 and 1840. These texts, she argues, reflect competing ideologies. While Francois-Joseph Fétis in his *Traité du contrepoint et de la fugue* (1824) characterized fugue as the summit of tradition, Reicha in his *Traité de haute composition musicale* (1826) viewed it as the essence of modern composition. Rather than including fugal examples by the likes of Palestrina, Handel and Bach in his treatise, Reicha quoted from works composed by himself and his former students. In so doing, he sought to demonstrate fugue's relevance to the nineteenth-century composer, emphasizing, in his own words, 'the effects produced by the fugal material' rather than 'the insignificant fugues with which students in counterpoint classes busy themselves' (286; my translation).

This iconoclastic stance is elaborated in Étienne Jardin's essay on Reicha's career as a professor (chapter 6). Unlike his colleague Fétis, Reicha was relatively autonomous in his operations with respect to the Conservatoire. He did not necessarily prepare his students to win prizes and advance through the school's ranks, but rather sought to form them as composers (a theme that cuts through several chapters; see especially Boulan and William O'Hara, the latter discussed below). Many who completed Reicha's counterpoint classes went on to publish at least one work, even if they did not take the Conservatoire's senior classes in composition. Jardin's essay emphasizes that Reicha was a significant presence at the Conservatoire, despite the fact that he never penetrated the highest echelons of the organization.

As Alban Ramaut details (chapter 8), three of Reicha's students – Henry Lemoine, Philippe Musard and Hippolyte Collet – dedicated treatises to their mentor. These pupils, he shows, leveraged their connections with Reicha as a form of self-promotion. The case of Musard is especially interesting, since Reicha wrote a letter, presumably intended for publication, in which he endorsed Musard's project and lauded the latter's abilities. Ramaut suggests that this public endorsement was a way for the ageing Reicha to assert his own relevance when his influence was waning.

Louise Bernard de Raymond (chapter 7) investigates the composition notebooks of Léonie Boursault, a fourteen-year-old girl who studied with Reicha contemporaneously with the twelve-year-old César Franck, whose notebooks also survive. Reicha, she argues, had different pedagogical aims in mind for these two students: while Franck's lessons prepared him to enter the Conservatoire, Boursault's were less structured and more exploratory. Bernard de Raymond's close readings of these archival treasures offer an engaging look at the relationship between gender and musical formation in the nineteenth century.

Thomas Christensen (chapter 10) considers pedagogy from a different angle, focusing on Reicha's *Cours de composition musicale* (1818). The *Cours* was a continuation of earlier projects that had, in Reicha's view, insufficiently addressed the problem of how to combine melody and harmony effectively. The solution was 'one of relentless exemplification and iteration' (293). Christensen describes this method as 'frustratingly unsystematic', noting that Reicha 'introduces topics in no particular order, often initially in examples, long before formally explaining them to the student' (304). Indeed, he argues, the *Cours* may be more interesting as a record of Reicha's classroom practice – dynamic, improvisatory, brimming with examples – than as a composition manual.

Ellen Lockhart (chapter 4) examines Reicha's penchant for exemplification through a scientific lens. The chapter begins with a glimpse at Reicha's probate inventory, the list of his personal effects at the time of his death in 1836. Though Lockhart queries the usefulness of such inventories, she calls attention to the passion for medical matters that Reicha's effects reveal. This leads her to consider his use of both quasi-scientific terms – such as *idée mère*, for a principal thematic idea, and *décomposition*, for the separation of a theme into its constituent parts – and meticulous diagrams in his treatises. Although one might trace this taxonomic bent to Enlightenment tracts like the *Encyclopédie*, Lockhart finds closer parallels in the chemistry and entomology texts that Reicha himself owned. She observes that Reicha shared with contemporary Parisian scientists 'a commitment to the ontology of minutia[e]' (104), noting similarities between, for instance, Reicha's melodic and formal segmentations and the insect dissections of contemporary entomologist Pierre-André Latreille.

William O'Hara (chapter 5) picks up where Lockhart left off, examining Reicha's most famous formal diagram, the *grande coupe binaire*. As O'Hara explains, Reicha's conception of sonata form is striking insofar as he lavishes attention on the development section, whereas modern theories privilege the exposition. O'Hara considers how, in the *Traité de haute composition musicale*, Reicha 'decomposes' and 'recomposes' Mozart's *Figaro* overture, creating two alternative development sections for a work that originally had none. He concludes that Reicha's theory of development is more

than a set of rules to follow; rather, Reicha ‘demonstrates a working method and a set of skills’ (136), encouraging composers to solve problems creatively.

Morabito and Michael B. Ward (chapter 2) also engage with sonata form, proposing that texture be recognized as a form-defining element in string quartets by Rodolphe Kreutzer, Pierre Rode and Reicha. The broader contention here is that *quatuors concertants* and *quatuors brillants*, which privilege melody and virtuosity, tend to eschew the norms of sonata form – a factor that has led to their critical devaluation. The authors suggest approaching these pieces as if they were concertos, arguing that the alternation of solo and tutti textures is ‘a fundamental organising principle of the form, instead of a sign of superficiality or structural deficiency’ (29). While this densely analytical chapter fits somewhat oddly within the book’s overarching framework, it succeeds in opening up a new viewpoint on quartets that fall outside the narrow aesthetic bounds to which we have become accustomed.

A less familiar genre, the melodrama, is the focus of Annette Richards’s essay (chapter 3). During his Vienna sojourn, Reicha composed a pair of works for the blind glass-harmonica virtuosa Marianna Kirchgessner. One of these, *Johanna’s Abschied von ihrer Heimath* (Joan of Arc’s Farewell to Her Homeland), was a melodrama based on a monologue from Schiller’s popular play *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* (The Maid of Orleans). Richards positions this melodrama against previous Joan of Arc settings composed for Kirchgessner and her ethereal instrument, emphasizing the monologue’s political overtones in the wake of the Napoleonic occupation of Vienna in late 1805. Her chapter shows how Reicha’s and Kirchgessner’s collaboration not only responded to the political moment but also had an unexpected afterlife, inspiring the melodrama in Beethoven’s *Leonore Prohaska* (1814).

Some of the most striking arguments in *Antoine Reicha and the Making of the Nineteenth-Century Composer* involve Reicha’s explicit attempts to modernize music, whether in his treatises or his compositions. Indeed, one conclusion to be drawn from this excellent book is that Reicha was an advocate of musical progress in all its forms. If, as the editors suggest in the Introduction, narratives of musical progress – with their teleological implications – have become a historiographical bugbear, then the case of Reicha reminds us that such narratives were central to nineteenth-century thought about music. As this volume reveals, taking a wider view of the nineteenth-century composer provides an opportunity to interrogate long-standing notions of musical style and development without sacrificing the tools and techniques that have traditionally distinguished the enterprise of historical musicology.

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