

different phase of composition-performance. Each composition demands a different type of virtuosity and, to borrow Dunsby's term, it is the symbiosis of the composer and performer that determines the exact virtuosity type.

The essays of this book deepen our understanding of the concept of virtuosity and of different approaches. Some essays require previous knowledge of the source described to be fully comprehended. As a collection, the book re-evaluates virtuosity, specifically its given definitions and practices, through Liszt's own understanding in connection to his contemporaries. However, the topic of audience reception is not addressed much, and it could have enhanced further the conception of virtuosity. The question to what extent something is virtuosic when the external difficulty is not so visual has been raised in a similar vein by few authors. Could this feature be called something different? Is there more than one virtuosity? Some chapters hint, indirectly and directly, that indeed there are different conceptions of the term. One must also consider, though, that virtuosity and its definition as having a specific level of difficulty was comprehended differently not only by composers and performers but also by the audience when a work was first heard, even though today's audiences expect technical demanding works. There was a mutual collaboration between audiences, composers and performers for the conception and definition of virtuosity.

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Charles Youmans, ed. *Mahler in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). 344 pp. £84.99.

It's typical, isn't it. You wait ages for some new Mahler material and then 34 chapters come along at once. *Mahler in Context* is one of a new series launched by Cambridge University Press, in which a composer's life and times (to date, all still *his* life and times) are addressed through a succession of very short essays, each of no more than a few thousand words. The editor Charles Youmans points out that Mahler is the ideal subject for this kind of treatment. To place a composer in context is itself, in fact, a 'Mahlerian idea', since, as Mahler was well aware and repeatedly stated, it was the roiling 'external conditions' of his moment in European history that determined his personal, intellectual, and musical identities (Preface, xxi).

I certainly agree with this premise. The resulting text is eminently readable, thoroughly digestible, and frequently fascinating. Contributors, among them the very best and best-known of the Mahler scholars, have been forced by the short format to curtail what might otherwise be their more Proustian tendencies. Stick to the programme! Stick to the programme! As Cambridge is well aware, this will play well with students, class convenors, and, indeed, anyone who finds themselves in one of those 'too long, didn't read' kind of situations.

At their best, the book's chapters are short, provocative studies that manage to offer new information and use it to point towards a new understanding of Mahler.

I think in this regard of Caroline Kita's account of the numerous student groups in which the young Mahler moved and, for example, his early brush with the work of the peculiarly Viennese 'psychophysicist' Gustav Fechner, a then much-admired thinker with what (today, anyway) will seem rather odd ideas on life in and after death. Similarly revealing is Eva Giloi's presentation of 'celebrity genius' in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna and Mahler's years-long struggle with it, torn between the desire to revel in its rewards and to reject it as a rather vulgar oxymoron. Margaret Notley makes good use of a public letter written by the classicist Theodor Mommsen to distinguish between anti-Czech and antisemitic sentiment in Mahler's world, as well as reminding us that in other cases – Hungary, for one – new nationalisms and antisemitism certainly did converge. Timothy Freeze surprises with the proposal (p. 25) that there was probably very little secular Jewish music performed in Mahler's Iglau, and instead a 'context of musical overlap and mutual exchange that [also] characterized German and Czech repertoires'. (There are many other striking moments in many other chapters; I mean no disrespect in not mentioning all the authors in the volume here. The Notes to Contributors alone runs to nine full pages).

The short format works less well in other regards. Lots of chapters means lots of fresh starts – one, in fact, every eight pages or so – which lends a kind of Charleston rhythm to the reading experience and brings frequent repetitions of foundational facts and soundbites. 'Vienna, 1897–1907'; 'my time will yet come'; 'Siegfried Lipiner (1856–1911)': all these appear again and again, sometimes in consecutive chapters. To be fair, this is unlikely to trouble someone dipping into the book for the purposes of building an essay. Also, Youmans does state in the introduction (p. xxiii) that his editorial smoothing was minimal, allowing differences of 'methodology, writing style, and organization' to stand proud between authors. Nonetheless, it seemed to me that a bit more massaging might have eliminated the knots of factual redundancy and, conversely, strengthened the threads of content that run through the whole volume. The aforementioned Fechner, for example, appears in Michael Heidelberger's chapter devoted to him, as well as in Jeremy Barham's account of Mahler's literary enthusiasms and Carl Niekerk's of Mahler and death, but not in Morten Solvik's chapter on German idealism, where the challenge of making Fechner fit would bring out more of the idiosyncrasies that so animated his Viennese fans. I also twitched ever so slightly at Mahler's lifelong intellectual engagement with a 'bewildering array of written cultural artifacts, past and present' (in Jeremy Barham's chapter, p. 208) in light of his stodgy *volkstümlich* taste in poetry and his avoidance of the *Kaffeehäuser* circles (in Matthew Werley's, p. 274). I suppose, however, that is just the point. The reader is to draw their own conclusions about Mahler, even if (and especially when) the data seem conflicting.

There are also the larger questions of what makes an appropriate context and how contexts are chosen. In theory contexts are infinite, and all contexts shed some kind of light. But in musicological practice, of course, some contexts prove more equal than others. Most here are 'straightforward' (Youmans's word, p. xxiii), from a biographical-musicological perspective: Education (*Bildung*), Performance, Creation, Thought, and Influence loosely form the five main sections of the book. This approach, however, leaves some very appealing avenues untrodden. Consider, for example, Emil Freund, who is passed over very quickly in a biographical appendix (p. 18) to Reinhold Kubik's chapter on Mahler's early friends and teachers. Freund became Mahler's lawyer, financial manager and executor, and the brief outline of his career raises the question of whether, cutting straight

across the big context categories above, Mahler and Habsburg law might have formed a productive line of enquiry. This would make sense, bearing in mind the legal issues that dogged emancipation and, for example, the 'illegal' marriages of Mahler's forebears and his parents' right to purchase property in Iglau (McClatchie, p. 3 and p. 173). It might also illuminate more of the struggles faced by the Viennese 'celebrity genius' of Jewish heritage, to return to Eva Giloi's chapter.

I suspect, too, that some readers may be frustrated by the less-than-comprehensive way in which some of the book's contexts are treated. In the Performance section, for example, Peter Revers addresses Mahler's life and work as a conductor, but only so far as Kassel (1883–5). Prague, Leipzig and Budapest – still, arguably, the 'early years' promised by the chapter title – are never reached and, in fact, appear only rarely in the book in terms of Mahler's conducting practice. Sometimes, also, the historiography within chapters is a little limited. David Larkin certainly does a good job of telling the history of the late nineteenth-century symphony through Dahlhaus. Yet, while he accepts also that the Dahlhausian 'circumpolar' orbit model has been much challenged, his examples of Mahlerian symphonic context are limited to Bruckner and Sibelius and Brahms. What about those symphonists whom Dahlhaus wouldn't clear for launch into orbit, because they weren't a manful part of the 'strong' history of the genre as he saw it? What about Hermann Bischoff, his symphonies as bizarre and exuberant and playful as anything Mahler could conceive, and sometimes appearing alongside them on the same new music bill? And what about Mahler's close friend and lifelong inspiration, the tragic Hans Rott? Rott, the curious young composer whose room in Vienna (so Youmans tells us, p. 44) was furnished only by 'a string of sausages'? I wish he were featured here. His symphony is an absolute banger.

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Perhaps the thing that struck me hardest in reading *Mahler in Context* is how much we – the vague international academic we, seemingly whatever our scholarly background – want to *like* Mahler. I don't really even mean his music, although that is part of it. I mean the person that winks back at us through the many shards of discourse that *in Context* books like this one present. Mahler's diverse cultural knowledge and facility; his acutely intelligent, discerning, questioning mind; his tendency to smile condescendingly and poke fun at the haute bourgeoisie of which he obviously formed a part; his apparent inclination to what might be a 'leftwing'; possibly even his entanglement with the cult of public genius, at once as distasteful as it is magnetic. We recognize him in the crowd, and he sees us: Mahler the mirror for the *Weltschmerz* of many a contemporary academic.

From the very first chapters of *Mahler in Context* onwards, this *sympatisch* Mahler is generally identified with his inheritance from his mother. Stephen McClatchie reminds us of Mahler's close attachment to the frail, sensitive, poignant, gentle Marie, and Freud's analysis of the twitching foot that harked back to maternal lameness. But I did also wonder this: what if we allowed Mahler to identify with his 'brutal' father, the person who clearly had so much more influence on him than his 'love of reading' (McClatchie, p. 5, p. 7) alone? Actually the book is shot through with references to the possibility of just such a Mahlerian ruthless side, and yet it rarely clatters to the surface, instead dismissed in brief or in fun. I think, to cite only a few examples of many, of the Mahler who was 'tyrannical to the point of heartlessness' (Youmans, p. 40,

citing Marie Lorenz) and ‘the most gruesome of despots’ (Celenza, p. 79, after Leo Slezak); also the Mahler who bore down upon the Court Opera in Vienna like a ‘natural disaster’ (Pippal, p. 142, after Franz Schmidt), and whose dictatorial demands got as far as the press in Sacramento, California (Painter, p. 166). It isn’t only a matter of directorial style, however. Youmans retakes the box-seat for a chapter euphemistically titled ‘Romantic Relationships’, in which we are reminded not only that Mahler banned Alma from composition, but also that he was known to turn his students into lovers, all the while asserting his masculine authority by shaming his string of young women charges intellectually and artistically.

There is certainly some punch-pulling here, courtesy of contradictory phrases about ‘love blossom[ing]’ in Mahler’s ‘preferred hunting ground’ (p. 218, on coaching Johanna Richter), and a ‘grooming process’ that tempered fury with praise (p. 222, on Anna von Mildenburg). I also don’t doubt that ‘abuse of power’ was the ‘norm’ for influential men in Mahler’s world (p. 222). But isn’t it still? And doesn’t that mean that it would make sense to broach another powerful and provocative context, something along the lines of ‘Mahler and (toxic) masculinity’? Mahler’s authoritarianism could be read through the circumstances in which he was forced early to adopt the role of head of the family and subsequently hated himself for the patriarchal cruelty he showed (McClatchie, pp. 8–9). It could also be understood in terms of his own situation as victim, brutalized by society and legislature in Austria and beyond, and redirected into aggression within the areas of his life over which he did retain jurisdiction – not least his musical-professional practices and all the hammer-blows that echo out of them.

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*Erbarmen! ... vernichte mich dass ich vergesse ... !* It was perhaps in search for refuge from such heavy thoughts that I turned to the fifth and final part of *Mahler in Context* (‘Influence’), where I was struck by just how much there is to say about the twentieth century and especially what might loosely be called the ‘Mahler Renaissance’ of the 1960s and beyond. In some ways unexpectedly, this is one of the strongest suits the book has to lay down. Certainly, some of its lines are well-established in Mahler scholarship. Several authors offer accounts of reception up to about 1945, extending the similar chapters found earlier in the volume (under ‘Creation’): Stephen Downes considers the Bruckner Society of America, oddly absent from Karen Painter’s chapter on ‘Mahler’s Press from London to Los Angeles’, while Wolfgang Rathert returns to the Second Viennese School image of Mahler as saint, raised earlier in the chapter by Kevin Karnes. Roger Allen gives a detailed overview of Adorno’s critical challenge to dewy-eyed thinking about Mahler after the war. The section also branches into all kinds of fascinating artistic responses from the latter half of the twentieth century, be they composerly (Thomas Peattie’s chapter), filmic (Peter Franklin), or literary (Matthew Werley). In short, it pleasingly demonstrates Adorno’s point in a way that would irritate him: far from becoming an obsolete relic, Mahler retained the potential to be a critical thorn throughout the twentieth century, including within the phenomena of popular (counter)culture.

In discussing Mahler on record, both James Zychowicz and Richard Wattenbarger miss a trick, I feel, in omitting mention of the electrifying cover art for the vinyl releases of the 1960s, all goddesses and rainbows and chubby cherubs and stuff. It is left to Peter Franklin’s chapter, this many-chaptered book’s parting

shot, to supply one of those images – actually a rather sedate one by Barbara Hatch – as part of its survey of a ‘popularly modern and youthful “avant-garde”’ of the 1960s, lapping up Mahler as much as ‘experiences of Zen, magic mushrooms, and LSD’ (p. 291). Characteristically, Franklin weaves a brilliant web, equating Ken Russell’s vulgarity (in the 1974 biopic *Mahler*) with Mahler’s own as noted by his critics, and tying the reader in self-critical knots with remarks on the perennial ability of Mahler’s music to ‘shock and excite’ even as that tendency always seems to need explaining away, to ‘save us from worrying too much about our own readiness to identify with it’ (p. 297).

Talking of this shocking excitement, as well as Zen and LSD, I wondered if Franklin, or someone, might have gone as far as to think about Mahler and psychedelic-progressive rock. There are lots of cute connections here: apparently Phil Lesh, the Grateful Dead’s bass player, spent a semester studying with – get this – Berio (see Thomas Peattie’s chapter for an account of Berio’s close engagement with Mahler). It isn’t just a matter of straightforward personal influence and inheritance chains, though, but also the ‘second nature’ (as Wattenbarger puts it, p. 285) of the symphonies on record as rekindling an interest in processes of musical creation and combination in the studio. In any case, it is quite a trip to listen to wavy-gravy sixties psychedelia with Mahler in mind. It is another nod, indeed, to the post-war discovery of Mahlerian ‘richness and vitality that testified to a newfound directness of communicated experience’ (Franklin, p. 292), a perspective unlocked by the last chapters of *Mahler in Context* to its credit. Sometimes ‘vitality’ isn’t quite the right word for the Mahlerian trace, however. The Dead, again: the utopia of their music is always qualified by an ‘if’ or a ‘perhaps’, or a ‘not really’; their songs of wayfarers are very often about death, lying down next to the river to hear its sweet songs until expiration, in a release from all humanity’s broken tunes played on busted harps. ‘Let it be known’, sings Jerry Garcia in 1970, ‘there is a fountain/that was not made/by the hands of men’. Does Mahler’s music, at base, proclaim anything else?

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Since the centennial of women’s suffrage in the UK in 2018, interest in Ethel Smyth’s music has increased exponentially. Not only has this interest resulted in increasing numbers of performances (*The Wreckers* alone was staged twice on both sides of the Atlantic in 2022), but several new recordings and scholarly editions have been released. John L. Snyder’s scholarly edition of Smyth’s *Serenade in D major*, published by A-R Editions in 2021, is a welcome contribution to this