

Paul A. Merkle, ed. *Music and Patronage*.

The Library of Essays on Music, Politics and Society. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012. xxvii + 598 pp. \$325. ISBN: 978-1-4094-3106-0.

Music and Patronage is an installment of the Ashgate series The Library of Essays on Music, Politics and Society, which series editor Mark Carroll describes as surveying “the horizon of scholarly enquiry into the intersection of music — art and vernacular, Western and non-Western — and politics” (xi). It is also part of Ashgate’s ongoing strategy of republishing seminal essays in topical anthologies, so this book is (with the exception of one chapter) a reader rather than a compendium of new research. Although the editor, Paul Merkeley, is well known for his scrupulously detailed archival reconstruction of music patronage in Renaissance Milan, this book is extremely broad in its chronological and geographical scope and the Renaissance element is small: just five of the twenty-three essays fall within the span from 1400 to 1650. On the numbers alone, the Renaissance specialist would be better advised to invest in another product of Ashgate’s republication strategy, *Institutions and Patronage in Renaissance Music* edited by Thomas Schmidt-Beste (2012), part of the series A Library of Essays on Renaissance Music under the stewardship of Stanley Boorman.

The reader who hopes that *Music and Patronage* might supply a much-needed musical counterpart to the stimulating art historical anthologies on Renaissance patronage — such as the classic *Patronage, Art and Society in Renaissance Italy* (ed. F. W. Kent and Patricia Simons [1987]), or the innovative *The Patron’s Payoff* (ed. Jonathan Nelson and Richard J. Zeckhauser [2008]) — will be disappointed. The Renaissance essays chosen by Merkeley are all worthy contributions: Iain Fenlon’s recent article on music patronage in Novellara, a survey of Chinese imperial music patronage by Joseph Lam, a new essay on Milan by Merkeley himself, John Kmetz on the business activities of German musicians in the context of economic change in the sixteenth century, and a chapter from Beth L. Glixon and Jonathan E. Glixon’s

book on the business of opera in seventeenth-century Venice. However, as a representative sample of essential reading on Renaissance music patronage they are a slightly peculiar group, chosen apparently because they are (in most cases) recent, rather than because they are classics of their kind.

Missing are a number of scholars whose publications, though now in some cases decades old, remain staples of Renaissance music patronage studies, both in the literature and in the classroom — and in this respect Schmidt-Beste's *Institutions and Patronage* offers the more useful selection. The broad scope of *Music and Patronage* also, of course, inflects the general comments on music patronage offered in Merkeley's introduction. He defines patronage rather loosely, incorporating "not only the sponsorship of music by courts, aristocrats and soft-drink companies, but also the forces (largely economic) that play a role in the production, performance and distribution of music" (xiv). It quickly becomes clear that, as in Merkeley's own scholarship, the emphasis is on the painstaking documentary reconstruction of the mechanisms of patronage, and the influence of these mechanisms on "the production of music and musical style" (xiii). It is a little disappointing that this is pretty much all the theorization of patronage that Merkeley feels moved to offer.

In sum, the Renaissance specialist must be careful not to let Merkeley's profile as a scholar lead them into judging this book according to an agenda that it was never intended to serve — a trap that I have struggled to avoid in writing this review. At the same time, Merkeley's broad brief undoubtedly limits the value of the book from a Renaissance perspective. It is certainly interesting to see Renaissance music patronage placed in such wide chronological and geographical perspective, but the Renaissance coverage is too limited, and the introductory theorization too sketchy, to warrant purchase. Indeed, a book priced at \$325 is destined to be purchased almost exclusively by university libraries, and herein lies the final conundrum. Fenlon's article can already be accessed online through almost any university library; and the combined price of Joseph Lam's book-length study of Ming dynasty music patronage, the Glixons' book on opera, and the edited volume containing the Kmetz essay, is (at time of writing) only just north of \$100.

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