

## Book Reviews

**Music, Culture and Society: A reader** edited by D. B. Scott. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 238 pp, £35 hardback.

This collection presents succinct extracts from key texts which address the importance of sociological and cultural theory to music-historical studies. Many of them have been selected because they offer alternatives to the musicological mainstream. Although the Reader does not address the concerns of music education directly, it does explore some related areas that have relevance and interest for music educators. I shall concentrate on these areas in this review. The book is divided into five parts, each prefaced by a helpful introduction: Music and Language, Music and the Body, Music and Class, Music and Criticism, Music Production and Consumption. Each part contains between six and nine extracts from books and articles.

In his introduction, Derek Scott examines changes in perspective in musicological thought since the 1980s. He pays particular tribute to the pioneering work of Shepherd, Virden, Vulliamy and Wishart's *Whose Music?* (1977), which happened to address several key issues in music education within a broadly culturally relativist perspective. The key to socio-musicological interpretation during the last decade is identified as cultural relativism which holds 'that all values are relative, and that there are no independent standards of truth' (p. 17). Cultural relativism is contrasted with modernism which emphasises internationalism defined by the idea of a single culture with universal values. But in social terms, according to Scott, modernism as a broad artistic movement has failed: the twelve-bar blues has been of greater importance to twentieth-century music than the twelve-note row. However, Scott admits that one of the key problems of cultural relativism is finding a satisfactory explanation for artistic distinction.

The book's first part, Music and Language, illustrates something of the breadth of scholarship that is represented in the collection. It commences with an overview by Harold Powers of work that embraces the metaphor of music as language, and continues with extracts from Deryck Cooke's seminal work, *The Language of Music* (1959), through a Bernstein lecture on musical semantics, to considerations of musical structuralism (Patricia Tunstall), music and myth (Eero Tarasti), and the semiotics of music (Gino Stefani).



Music and the Body encompasses issues of gender, sexuality and ethnicity, and is concerned primarily to develop a theoretical framework that returns music to the body and to provide an understanding of cultural contexts. Two extracts of interest include Frith and McRobbie's pioneering article on sexuality in rock, which explores the notion of rock music as a means of sexual expression, and Hatch and Millward's paper 'On Black Music and Authenticity'. The latter extract questions what we understand as 'black music', bearing

in mind that the greatest musicians in the blues, soul, and rhythm and blues fields are not necessarily identified as the most obviously black in appearance. The point is that inverted racism is no less patronising than other forms of discrimination.

Music and Class examines subcultural style and hegemony. In particular there is a stimulating critique by Dave Harker of A. L. Lloyd's notion of industrial folk song. These songs at one time enjoyed something of a vogue in music classrooms. Harker points to a parallel between Lloyd and Cecil Sharp: both men knew a folk song when they heard one, and if the definition was challenged, they rested on their own authority. Many of these industrial songs were associated with the Second Folksong Revival of the 1950s and 1960s, and Harker indicates close links between this revival and the cultural policy of the Communist Party, which was intent on selecting and modifying elements of the musical culture of British workers in order to counterbalance the negative influence on working-class youths of the records of popular music from the US.

One of the most polemical extracts in this section will have a particular interest for music educators: 'On Grammar Schoolboy Music' by Dai Griffiths. Grammar schoolboy music is driven by academic achievement, its best friend is Schoenberg ('one day the masses are going to catch up'), one thing it loathes is pop music ('the music of the secondary modern') which has everything the grammar schoolboy music cannot handle: black people, accents, instant good-time sounds, camp, technology, levity, women etc. Griffiths's conclusion is that the home of 'grammar schoolboy music' is the university music department: 'No one else wants it'. The problem for music educators is the extent to which grammar schoolboy music becomes perpetuated in schools, when a large number from this tradition enrol as music teachers.

Music and Criticism commences with Graham Vulliamy's thoughts on music and the idea of mass culture. He argues that we need new aesthetic criteria for the new musical languages that have been developed in this century, particularly within the Afro-American tradition. Related to this is Lucy Green's contention, in an extract from *Music on Deaf Ears* (1988), that style is the medium by virtue of which we experience music. She discusses the terms 'inherent meanings' and 'delineated meanings', and reminds us that style is not solely to be understood in terms of inhering musical materials, but also in terms of the social experience which is outside of these materials. Style provides the pathway between the two meanings: it makes musical experience possible.

Finally, in *Music Production and Consumption*, Paddy Scannell investigates the division in the early years of the BBC between the Music Department's responsibility for the highbrow audience (who listened to symphonies and opera), and the Variety Department's responsibility for the lowbrow audience (those who preferred dance bands and cinema organs). The hierarchies of musical tastes in such ways run deep throughout our institutions (particularly schools). But music is not only a reflector of change and taste. In an extract from *Noise* (1985), Jacques Attali presents a more radical view of music's ability to effect change, with his thesis that music is prophetic, and that changes in music herald social changes: the violence in our cities was prophetically announced in the pop music of the 1960s. But definitions of what is popular are problematic according to Andrew Goodman, who addresses the issue of popular music and postmodernism. He resists the assertion that categories of high art and mass culture have collapsed, and takes as an example the music of Philip Glass, which, according to Goodman, reproduces the position of progressive rock and art-rock of the 1960s and 1970s. It is music for

college students and middle-class graduates who have the cultural capital to decode it, but although it shares an abstract principle with rock and roll in its use of repetitive structures, it hardly resembles that world at all.

Music education is inextricably linked to the relationships between music, culture and society. It is somewhat surprising therefore that there has not developed a greater research tradition focusing upon the sociological and cultural connections with music in formal and informal educational settings. Music educators could profitably dip into this book, which the author has likened to a compilation album of 'juicy bits', and ponder what readings a further section might include which was devoted to music education and its relation to culture and society.

GORDON COX

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**Music in Everyday Life** by Tia DeNora.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 181 pp, £35.00 hardback; £12.95 paperback.

This is an extremely interesting book. It is thought provoking and well written. I have never subscribed to the prejudice that implies that sociological writing is boring, impenetrable, obscure and irrelevant. Like writing in most fields, sociological writing varies from the execrable to the excellent. Tia DeNora's writing is in the latter category. She is clear, makes her points well and whilst she uses the technical language of the discipline she does so in the way that takes the reader with her. Some people object to the new coinings or linguistic adaptations of sociology, feeling that books should be written in plain, simple language. Yet, it is surely better to encapsulate a particular idea in a newly coined or adapted word than continually to restate that idea. This is part of the way language evolves and develops.

Another common criticism of sociology is that in dealing with the commonplace it simply states the obvious. Tia DeNora deals with things in her book that are part and parcel of everyday experience, such as the use of music in shops. Yet she does it in such a way that the reader's understanding of that commonplace experience is enhanced. DeNora deals with the 'everyday' in a subtle and closely observed way and which leaves us richer from after the encounter.

*Music in Everyday Life* is about what it says. It documents and analyses some of the numerous uses people make of music. It is an essay in understanding in which DeNora sets herself two central problems. The first is to do with agency, meaning something like the ability of people to change, influence and direct things. If music has a dynamic relationship with social life how does music help to 'invoke, stabilise and change' the way we are influenced and can influence others? She sees this as a largely hitherto ignored topic in sociology, a topic that is 'focused on the social distribution of access to control over the sonic dimension of social settings'. This she would see as part of 'a sociology of musical power'.

The second important topic in such a sociology is to do with that greasy pig, the meaningfulness of music and the power associated with it, with 'how to specify music's semiotic force'. This area concerns the linking of music to forms of feeling and to social and embodied meanings, to the ways we respond to music, to the ways music has power to engage, enlist and change us. 'At the level of the listening experience, for example', DeNora writes, 'music seems imbued with affect while, at the level of analysis, it seems perpetually capable of eluding attempts to specify just what kind of meaning music holds and just how it will affect its hearers.' These are fascinating areas of research, and, it seems to me, central to any developed understanding of music in our lives. DeNora pursues them with analytical skill and an obvious delight in the subject.

In the second chapter, DeNora proposes 'a theory of musical affect in practice'. To DeNora, the piece of music does not exist in or for itself. It is always socially situated. 'Interpretative work and/or many other forms of mediation serve as accomplices to the work's meanings, to its effects'. Thus the works of any composer are not simply the notes as printed or performed, they are the residue of books, articles, programme notes about the composer, in fact the whole discourse that surrounds his or her works. Such power can reach iconic status, as is the case with what previous generations referred to as 'the three Bs'.

DeNora mounts a strong critique of what we could term ungrounded musical speculation – the idea motivating a lot of musical analysis and criticism that the meanings of a piece are inherent in that piece and that the job of the analysis is simply to reveal them. DeNora distances herself from such speculation, seeing her task as 'to conceptualise musical forms for the organisation of experience, as referents for action, feeling and knowledge formation'. Thus there is a gap between what a musicologist can tell us about a piece of music and what an empirical investigation into how music is interpreted and used will reveal, a gap often filled by the imagination of the musicologist who feels (one assumes because of some perhaps unconscious assumption of divine knowledge) that he or she 'knows'. In short music's semiotic force, its ability to create meanings and response in the listener, cannot be understood simply from the music itself, although that is an essential element of the meaning-making process. It is the music as used, as appropriated, as made to do social 'work' that should be the centre of our study.

These (and other) themes DeNora explores through a series of case studies and scenarios. This richly stimulating book takes us into places we did not expect to visit, via unexpected turns. We go to a karaoke and a music therapy session, aerobics classes, shops, airports and

aircraft, we meet people making personal use of music to get them in the mood for an event or a night out, or listening to their walkmen (is that the plural of walkman? whatever, it is the subject of the wonderful and colourful front cover), even the way people use music at time of personal intimacy! (Personally, I would find music far too distracting!)

In taking music use and music consumption as its focus the book is not about the 'ownership' of music through performance, memorisation or intimate knowledge of a score. This focus on use is fine because it deals with such a neglected but significant area. However, I was left with the feeling that the relationship between musical activity and musical consumption, although hinted at, needs much more attention than DeNora gives it. After all, a lot of money is given away by arts' funding bodies on the assumption that a dynamic and healthy relationship exists between musical activity and consumption. It may do, but I am not sure we know much about the nature of that relationship.

The notion of consumption the book conveys is no passive business, it is about conscious selection and rejection, appropriation and use, it is about using music to do things and to get things done. In an area where much writing has viewed consumption as fundamentally unhealthy, DeNora's vision is an optimistic one. It is a vision of how individuals 'not only experience culture but also how they mobilise culture for being, doing and feeling. Anything less cannot address and begin to describe or account for the mechanisms through which cultural materials get into social psychological life.' Yet, there remain problems. When are we manipulating and when are we being manipulated? Agency (a central notion in the book) can be controlled by us or work on us, and I think a clearer distinction between the two than DeNora achieves is needed. This said, she has done a wonderful job in opening up the area for analysis.

Ultimately the place that DeNora accords to music in our lives is a central one. We use music as an organising device, implicit in the ways we can change and influence things. We use music to think with, individuals finding metaphors for themselves in musical functions and structures. Music is more than an accompaniment to our activities, it is constitutive of those activities, it is a 'prosthetic technology', it extends the body's capacities. It is used to set a particular ambience in 'materially and aesthetically configured spaces'. Music is seen as a material of social organisation that works on both individual and collective levels.

It is hard to convey the richness of this exciting book, firmly grounded in everyday life yet at times soaring above it. If we are going to understand our subject fully and teach it adequately we need to accept the implicit challenge the book gives us. We need to make connections between the case studies, theoretical interpretations, and our teaching. This can be done, but we may find that the way we understand and think about our subject is changed in the process. Music will not be diminished by this, it will be greatly enhanced.

Note: This book is listed in some places under the title *Music's Social Powers*. It seems there may have been a late and fortunate change in the title.

VIC GAMMON

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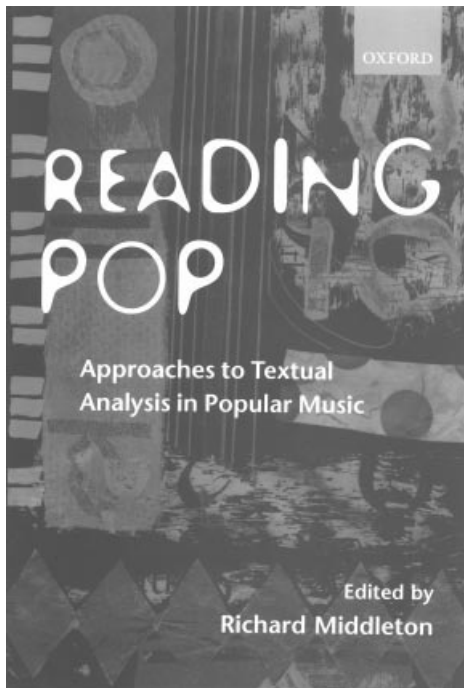
**Reading Pop: Approaches to textual analysis in popular music** edited by Richard Middleton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 388 pp, £40.00 hardback; £14.99 paperback.

It seems good practice to start a book with the press publicity – at least then one knows what its various producers presumably think it's for. According to Oxford University Press *Reading Pop* will be required for students of popular

music, whatever their discipline, and offers their teachers an unrivalled resource.

Reviewing it here, then, seems a justifiable proposition. On what grounds, though, might a collection of articles previously published in the discipline's leading journal, *Popular Music*, warrant republication, directed (in part, at least) at educators? One criterion might be their sheer beauty of expression and, although academic writing rarely aspires to such heights, there is some evidence of attainment here. A second criterion might be to cover material that educators ought to know, in other words to partake in the erection of some sort of cultural canon. Fortunately, resistance to such a project among scholars is quite high and, although the music of both Chuck Berry and Bruce Springsteen are addressed at length in more than one place, they do not emerge as intrinsically of greater significance than others. The third criterion, then, and how the articles here would truly act as a resource, is in their transferability. To what extent can we find models of approach which can be adapted to our use?

The book contains sixteen articles, all of which address the texts of popular music in some respect, and a newly written preface by the editor. This extensive introduction is particularly valuable in its situating of the activity represented here within larger contexts. Not only does Middleton explore the crucially problematic issue of the ontology of the text, he provides a valuable summary of the history of 'reading pop', together with discussion of the questioning of the text's status offered by subcultural theory (Dick Hebdige *et al.*), denial of its presence (Hennion), Marxist, feminist and, most crucially, dialogical approaches. It is in the development of Bakhtin's line of thinking that Middleton finds the only candidate for an emergent analytic paradigm, and moreover a means for evading a Derridean formalism. The articles are grouped into three sections, although the division over-demarcates what is a



heterogeneous collection. Thus 'Analysing the music' contains six articles emphasising sonic events, 'Words and music' four articles containing a certain emphasis on lyrics, and 'Modes of representation' a final six articles with a certain emphasis on context. This is not to say, of course, that none of the articles fails to address each of these three areas at least in passing. Unfortunately, we are given no information as to the original date of publication of any of the articles (actually anywhere between 1982 and 1994) and, as the introduction states, a great deal has changed during that period.

It seems to me that there is a more interesting dialogue taking place within these pages than that indicated by the book's organisation, and which we can approach through the metaphorical pairing 'inside/outside'. Thus, and notwithstanding the introduction, separate positions are taken up with respect to whether the meaning of a particular song can be ascertained purely with

reference to the song itself, or whether it is necessary to seek outside it. Separate positions are also taken up with regard to whether understanding is only possible from inside the cultural grouping which gives rise to the song, or whether understanding can be obtained from the outside. For instance, Barbara Bradby and Brian Torode's lengthy examination of Buddy Holly's 'Peggy Sue' focuses on the rhythms to which the lyrics are set and, more particularly, the rhythms of individual words. This enables them to suggest a 'meaning' for the rhythm of the instrumental break, wherein they find that 'Holly constitutes "Peggy Sue" as an object of pity' (p. 225). In so doing, they argue explicitly that their approach denies the autonomy of the music itself, but in making no reference to Holly's idiolect, they none the less constitute 'Peggy Sue' as an autonomous expression. Indeed, and especially in respect of Middleton's insistence on 'pertinence' (p. 5), the most disappointing aspect of many of the articles is their failure to situate individual songs within idiolectal constraints, which appear to me the most globally pertinent super-ordinate context for the discussion of texts. In contrast, Ellie Hisama's discussion of the construction of the Oriental 'other' as both desirable and inaccessible is powerful because of the pertinence she erects – her own identity as an Asian-American. Truly explanatory writing which does not pretend to a false objectivity is comparatively rare, and the engagement offered in this essay makes it a powerful reading experience.

Autonomous accounts appear within other articles but normally within the context of wider questions. Thus, Stan Hawkins's discussion of Prince's 'Anna Stesia' elucidates its harmonic patterns within the context of production decisions. Timothy Taylor's close reading of Chuck Berry's 'Johnny B. Goode' benefits from consideration of its autobiographical aspects, but his acceptance of a homological relation between its backbeat



and 'the socio-politico-cultural status quo' (p. 174) is unconvincing. The autonomy present in Sheila Whiteley's discussion of 'psychedelic coding' in the music of Jimi Hendrix is of a different order. She argues that the various forms, and dispositions, of distortion within his music literally encode the effects of experience under the influence of LSD and marijuana respectively such that, presumably, a full understanding of this music is barred to those without analogous experiences. Again, the proffered homology here is too easy (Middleton himself comments on this problem (p. 8)). Dai Griffiths's discussion of Bruce Springsteen's 'The river' is founded very much on this particular song, and indeed on its lyrics. As a model of exegesis, however, it is exemplary (and there *are* times when we are simply moved to understand why we react to a particularly powerful song) in demonstrating how shadows of foreign discourses can be brought to bear on the experience at hand. It also makes for a thoroughly enjoyable read.

The remaining articles approach the other pole of my metaphorical pair. Peter Winkler's identification of Randy Newman's idiolect makes reference to a wide variety of styles from barbershop harmony through gospel and the blues, but with the overriding aim of demonstrating the irony apparent in Newman's usage. Both Umberto Fiori's discussion of Peter Gabriel's 'I have the touch' and Sean Cubitt's essay on Chuck Berry's 'Maybellene' make valuable contributions to that most intractable of analytic issues: how to characterise the way the human voice is used, and how it means. Cubitt makes thorough use of Saussurean semiotics to this end, and his explanation of the value of such techniques in the absence of musicological skills is worthwhile and, in all likelihood, transferable to other contexts. Other essays, while illuminating in their own right, offer little of obvious value that can be used in this way. Charles Hamm's discussion of genre in Irving Berlin does not really add to what we

now know of genre. Richard Leppert's and George Lipsitz's discussion of Hank Williams's aesthetic undermining post-war constructions of masculinity helps explain the connection between whites and blacks only at a particular historical juncture. John Moore's powerful explanation of the function of torch songs takes place through concentration on the lyrics alone, and does not offer a method for the exploration of other genres.

Four essays truly offer potential for transferability of their method to other material. David Brackett employs Henry Louis Gates's powerful metaphor of 'Signifyin(g)' to explore not only the intertextuality present in James Brown's 'Superbad', but also the necessity of approaching black US music analytically through this trope. In this approach, such normally ignored features as Brown's idiosyncratic interjections assume their rightful role. It is admittedly difficult to demonstrate, but Brackett seems to be closer to unearthing a meaning normally hidden to the outsider than to reading into the text something that is only in the writer's mind. Richard Middleton's call for an analytic methodology which extends rhythm into discussion of gesture as a fundamental paradigm offers fascinating possibilities, but the time is not there yet. As his explications show, a high degree of skill is necessary to handle the mix of individual (gestural) and communal (connotational) knowledge which he employs. A strength of his proposals, however, is that he only builds on, rather than dismantles, the body of theory analysts already have at their disposal.

The remaining two essays offer, it seems to me, the most. Alf Bjornberg's discussion of the relationship between music and images in music video is very strong in setting out a body of theory which he then employs in discussion of four case studies, and which is easily transferable. His concern, inevitably, is with narrativity (an under-discussed topic in music theory anyway) and with the different types of narrative which can be, and are, employed. In

the process, he also elegantly demonstrates the falsity of the widely held assumption that the visual dominates the aural in pop videos. The remaining essay, Philip Tagg's 'Analysing popular music: Theory, method and practice' is already a classic and it is vitally important to have it accessible once again.

Tagg lays out a detailed approach to the understanding of meaning derived from Eco's brand of semiotics, and which he demonstrates with reference to Abba's 'Fernando' and the theme tune to the 1970s TV show 'Kojak'. Although the method he outlines is long-winded, it is efficacious, and it is not too difficult to see where short cuts might be taken for pragmatic purposes. The method itself is, for example, sufficiently powerful for him to convincingly argue the deceitful relationship between music and lyrics in the Abba song.

The book is nicely produced (although errors occur in one or two of the diagrams) and the paperback price is worth it for the introduction, and the Bjornberg and Tagg essays, alone.

ALLAN MOORE

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**Stravinsky: a creative spring. Russia and France, 1882–1934** by Stephen Walsh. London: Jonathan Cape, 1999. £30.00, 699 pp.

This book is the first of a two-volume biography of Igor Stravinsky and covers fifty-two years of his life. Some twelve years ago, Stephen Walsh published an acclaimed book on *The Music of Stravinsky*. Since then, the industry for Stravinsky scholarship has expanded and diversified at an alarming rate. Among the many studies that have appeared, the enormously rich and detailed volumes by the American Richard Taruskin (1996) stand out most impressively. This reader finds Taruskin stimulating in small doses, but his fierce writing style and sheer attention to detail make the

1,800 pages of *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* somewhat intimidating. However, Walsh is clearly indebted to Taruskin's revelations about the composer's roots. Walsh also writes at length, but has a lighter touch, wit, and gift for telling a story that make this present book such an absorbing and enjoyable read.

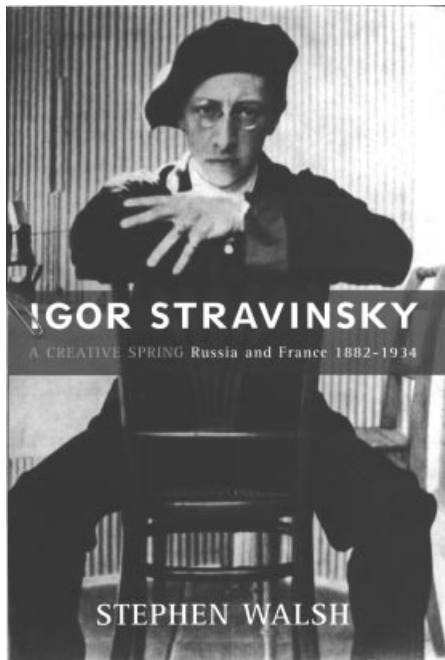
The other major development to have taken place since the publication of Walsh's earlier study has been the easier access to Russia for researchers, following the end of the Cold War. The amount of biographical information about Stravinsky has multiplied exponentially, but Walsh has coped with this expansion with flair and dedication. He has visited Russia, searching for *loci in quo* and finding original documents and family correspondence. He has made contact with the composer's surviving relatives and with the new generation of Russian musicologists fascinated by their former exiled compatriot. Walsh presents this daunting mass of information with control and narrative clarity.

Stravinsky himself produced a number of autobiographical accounts. On the surface, it would seem that the composer had documented thoroughly the events in his crowded and varied life. However, Stravinsky's memory was flawed and selective. There are simple factual errors in his recollections, but the composer also tended to reinvent and embroider his past. This was especially the case with the *Conversation* books that he wrote with Robert Craft in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These, to quote Walsh's Introduction, 'form such a bright flashing mirror in the eyes of anyone trying to glimpse the realities behind them'. Stravinsky, in the vulgar jargon of contemporary politics, was a spin-doctor *par excellence*.

Walsh's method throughout is characterised by a painstaking ferreting for the facts. He recounts Stravinsky's upbringing in a buttoned-up but not unloving middle-class



family in St Petersburg in the final years of the nineteenth century. He shows that the rancour the ageing Stravinsky directed to the memory of his parents in the *Conversations* was both disingenuous and deeply unfair. It is true that, although musicians themselves, his parents had little inkling of where Igor's real talent lay. But how could they have done? He was no infant prodigy and had composed very little until his late teens.



Igor's cautious parents advised him to study law at university, and, despite supporting his growing passion for music by paying for piano lessons, the young man received no training in theory or composition. So when Igor started, relatively late, to compose in earnest, his attempts lacked the technical fluency and harmonic sureness of a Conservatoire trained composer. When he finally plucked up courage to present some of his attempts to Rimsky-Korsakov in the hope of becoming his pupil, the dry, non-committal older composer seemed less than impressed:

Yet Rimsky must have sensed something out of the ordinary, something that caught his interest. Perhaps it was the very gaucheness of the writing, compared with the sheer technical fluency of so many of the students he say day in, day out at the Conservatoire. (p. 61)

Walsh speculates fascinatingly here. Rimsky himself was also 'untaught in the traditional techniques with which so many "natural" musicians grew up to be expected to master them, in the diploma sense, now' (p. 62). Perhaps Rimsky had recognised in the young Stravinsky a kindred spirit, one who would not necessarily flourish in an institutionalised setting. (Rimsky advised Stravinsky not to enter the Conservatoire.) Besides, this innocence of formal training kept Stravinsky's ear open to an amazing diversity of influences throughout his creative life. One of the most interesting archival finds of the past decade is a letter by Nadya, the widow of Rimsky-Korsakov that compares Stravinsky with his more conventionally gifted fellow composition student (and friend and rival) Maximilian Steinberg. Walsh is masterly here in reading the prophetic sub-text of which Nadya herself was possibly only dimly aware:

The comparison is loaded and, at bottom, prejudiced. Nadya, like her late husband, was suspicious of modernism, and – perhaps less like him – was content with the safe haven of her schoolroom values. But she is also perceptive. In a sense, and by her own lights, her remarks are accurate and truthful. Indeed, their honesty is disconcerting. Steinberg was her son-in-law; and yet she admits that 'in general' she would not place him above Stravinsky, while, if her husband did in fact do so, it was a close-run thing. Filter out the provincialism and the characteristically Russian lurchings to and fro and the portrait is not ungenerous. (p. 101)

Within the space of a few years Stravinsky grew from the callow, inexperienced youngster to

become the composer of *The Firebird*. This must have been one of the steepest learning gradients undergone by any individual in the history of Western music. 'What was new about *The Firebird* was the astonishing mastery of resource and technique on the part of a composer of such limited experience. . . . It is hard to explain the sheer precision of sonority in most of *The Firebird* except in terms of an instinctive grasp of the properties of instrumental sound, an almost infallible inner ear' (p. 136). Equally astonishing is the account of the first meeting with Diaghilev in 1909, where the impresario heard the young composer's early *Scherzo Fantastique* (interestingly in the same programme as the Russian première of Elgar's First Symphony). To call this 'the right man in the right place' is surely going to the extremes of understatement. The encounter was to change the young composer's life (and the course of musical history) for ever.

One striking characteristic of the composer's personality was the way in which Stravinsky's often turbulent private life and the political cataclysms of the first half of the twentieth century did not seem to affect his rate of work. 'Always a creature of routine', Stravinsky composed regularly, in a self-disciplined way throughout his working life. Outside the peaceful domestic and working environment, Stravinsky's life was indeed turbulent. Some of the turbulence was through circumstance. Uprooted from his home country by war and revolution, he did not return there until he was an old man. His family suffered from poor health and there were problems with money, particularly during the aftermath of the First World War. 'The anxiety which, for the world, was such a weighty consequence of the economic crash of October 1929 had been with Stravinsky almost ever since he could remember' (p. 498).

However, many problems were of Stravinsky's own making. He had affairs with

Coco Chanel, the dancer Lydia Lopukhova and above all with Vera Sudeykina whom he married after his wife Katya died in the late 1930s. These infidelities were disruptive both to the stability of his marriage and to the upbringing of his children. Stravinsky could be warm and generous to friends but equally spiteful and devious to his enemies. One unsavoury trait, which he sadly shared with many otherwise decent and well-informed people who had no idea where the implications of their beliefs would eventually lead, was the composer's unthinking anti-Semitism. All these, together with his opportunism and spin-doctoring might seem to add up to a portrait of a thoroughly unpleasant person. Yet Walsh refuses to be judgmental about these traits. On the other side of the balance sheet, Stravinsky was clearly a man who, throughout his life, both inspired and gave affection. The long-suffering Katya was the one person who cherished and understood him perhaps beyond anyone else. It was a love that despite his many betrayals of trust, Igor, deep down, reciprocated. Walsh is clearly moved by the ageing composer's tribute to the closeness of the relationship: 'Nothing else in Stravinsky's memoirs rings so true' (p. 43).

If he were alive to hear the story Walsh has to tell, Stravinsky might well disapprove of Walsh's matter-of-fact frankness. However, he would, I am sure, have enjoyed the writer's dry wit and keen eye for absurdity. The following account of the American première of *Apollon musagète* in 1928 could have come from a novel by Evelyn Waugh:

Presumably out of consideration for the finer feelings of Mrs Coolidge and the other Washington ladies, Apollo's birth was not presented, and instead a thurifer appeared in front of the curtain and placed a censor on a tripod in the middle of the stage. The sacred flame ascended and the curtains parted. (p. 466)

Some of Walsh's jokes are quite up-to-date, too, and include calling the chapter on *Les Noces* 'Four Pianos and a Wedding'. Despite the light surface to his writing, there are telling moments in the narrative when a passion for the music wells up:

The truth is that *Persephone* is a work that astonishes by its richness and variety more than by its unity, and one which incidentally makes nonsense of the popular theory that Stravinsky could not write tunes. A more melodious score hardly exists in the repertoire of modernism. (p. 534)

Walsh's previous book concentrated on the music rather than the life of Stravinsky. It persuaded me to revisit many pieces that I knew and to try others that I knew less well. In the present work, there is neither the space nor the scope for the analytical insights of the 1988 volume. Yet, despite the absence of technical detail or quotations from the music itself, *Igor Stravinsky: a creative spring* curiously seems to have had the same effect, whetting my appetite and encouraging me to listen in new ways. Walsh loves the music and, despite his unsparring revelations of his subject's all too human qualities, clearly loves him, too. Early in the book, Walsh rightly calls Stravinsky 'The greatest rhythmic thinker since Beethoven' (p. 41). The image-conscious Stravinsky would not have countenanced such a comparison for most of his professional life. But the more I read this book and listen again to the music, the more I am persuaded of the resemblance between Stravinsky and the composer who similarly dominated the century before him. Stravinsky is the one twentieth-century composer who more than any other, unfailingly leaves this listener with the feeling that it is good to be alive. Such a feeling can only come from someone who lived life to the full. I await the second volume with keen anticipation.

PIERS SPENCER

**JazzSolal! A complete introduction to jazz styles for solo piano** by Martial Solal.

London: Boosey & Hawkes. 67 pp, £8.99.

The veteran French-Algerian jazz pianist Martial Solal was one of my heroes when, as a teenager, I tuned into the *France 1* in the early 1960s and heard, over the crackly airwaves, a European pianist whose virtuosity and harmonic daring equalled those of the greatest Americans. Here was someone who boldly went where most pianists feared to go in the post-bop days of right-hand dominated jazz piano, a player who used the whole range and colours of the keyboard with an appetite for pungent and obscure dissonances, yet managed to swing like crazy.

I was therefore intrigued to review this collection of sixty short pieces. Solal's introduction states two aims. First, the pieces 'are intended for people who are already familiar with the piano and who wish to acquire a knowledge of certain rhythmic and melodic formulae inherited from the jazz tradition'. Second, Solal declares his intention to develop a player's facility at improvisation: 'This fascinating aspect is touched on in several pieces. Yet although certain rules can be explained and some hints given in these pieces, it is obviously your own imagination and careful listening to different musicians which will give you the musical vocabulary – as varied as possible – which will perhaps turn you into a true jazz improviser.' Solal succeeds admirably in achieving the first of these aims, but I have reservations about his success in the second.

When an abrasive musician like Solal turns his hand to creating a book such as this, one immediately looks for comparisons with influential 'classical' composers who have similarly composed stylistically uncompromising material for learner pianists. One thinks of the great Hungarians, Bartók and Kurtág, also published by Boosey and Hawkes. How does Solal's collection, as a tool for

learning and extending both a pianist's repertoire, stylistic awareness and technique, measure up to the mighty achievements of *Mikrokósmos* or *Játékok*?

Musically, this anthology does not disappoint. From the start, Solal makes no concessions to the blandness and 'easy listening' that characterise so much 'educational jazz'. As with the Hungarian masters, this is not material for the faint-hearted. Even the five-finger exercises that open the collection feature rhythmic pitfalls, melodic twists and semitonal chord-clusters to stimulate the adventurous ear. However, there are more immediately winning pieces, such as a *Lullaby* (No. 52) and a *bossa nova* (No. 54) that charm the player while still reflecting the author's musical preoccupations.

But is this collection educationally sound? First, I am concerned about the speed at which the set progresses in its demands on the player both as a pianist and as a reader. As Solal says, this is not a collection for beginners. Although



always enjoyable *as music* if played by a confident and sophisticated player with a clear background knowledge of jazz styles, the pieces do not really tackle the processes of learning that Bartók and Kurtág exploit so intimately and thoughtfully in their much longer and more slowly progressing collections. Solal gives little pause for thought about how the uninitiated pianist can approach jazz in a truly *playful* manner. One daunting pitfall is the often complex notation. Those with receptive and attentive ears for jazz sonority may yet find it hard to struggle with reading the sharps and flats that crowd the increasingly chromatic harmony. There is little of the fun that a learner pianist will have in exploring notation through Kurtág's often wacky and humorous takes on graphic symbols in *Játékok*, a Hungarian title which, incidentally, translates as 'Games'.

Second, despite Solal's stated intention of developing fluency in improvisation, these pieces, by themselves, give little guidance about how to do this. Solal is highly imaginative in creating his own material, but has given less thought about stimulating the imagination and awakening the creative faculties of those he has written for. One misses the formal clarity and evocative titles of the pieces from *Mikrokósmos*, that I, as a teacher, have found to be such effective models for composing and improvisation. However, *JazzSolal* does contain excellent material for advanced sight-reading.

Jazz Education is still a young field of endeavour. To make comparisons with Bartók and Kurtág who worked within a centuries-old tradition of pedagogy may seem a little hard. But the musically bracing Solal is worthy of comparison with these masters. What is now needed are collections of jazz pieces that are truly sensitive to learning contexts, whose authors understand that learning to read the dots on the page must be made as playful and enjoyable as absorbing the sounds. Above all, we need jazz educators who have really

thought through *how* to stimulate the fluency of and imagination of those playing.

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**The Early Horn: A practical guide** by John Humphries. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 138 pp, £11.95, paperback.

This latest addition to the admirable *Cambridge Handbooks to the Historical Performance of Music* is lively, authoritative and disappointingly short. John Humphries packs his wealth of knowledge and erudition into four main chapters, covering historical background; equipment (i.e. the instruments and all the bits and pieces that are attached); technique; and 'the language of musical style'. The book ends with some case studies: well-known examples from the repertoire of horn music, which he uses to further the discussion of issues raised in the earlier chapters.

Without saying so directly, Humphries' presentation rests on an assumption that his readers will know something about horns. He does not explain what a hand horn is or how different types of valves work, and nor does he provide any glossary for technical terms such as 'bore', 'throat' or 'crook'. This will limit the readership to cognoscenti to some extent, but not drastically so. Any listener who recognises and loves the sound of the horn will soon be drawn into the narrative. For the book really is a kind of narrative: an intriguing tale of human ingenuity spiced by moments of mystery. The journey between the French hunting horn, a coil of tubing which a huntsman rested on his forearm to blare his fanfare, to the sophisticated and beguiling instrument of today is punctuated by moments of inspiration and obscurity.

Humphries has explored every available source to ensure that his account is authentic. By quoting extensively from treatises, books of

instructions and anecdotal accounts, he transports his readers into the horn-playing world of yesterday elegantly and convincingly.

The main events of 'yesterday' occurred in the late eighteenth century and the whole of the nineteenth century. During this period, the horn came out of the cold into the salon and concert hall. Players had to temper the wayward intonation of the natural harmonic series and to sharpen their techniques to meet the demands of composers and discriminating listeners. These imperatives led to the discovery of using the right hand to 'bend' the pitch of notes. The horn player Hampel is accredited with the invention of hand-stopping proper, a technique that made the full chromatic scale available to skilled players. Had he not brought about this refinement, Mozart would almost certainly not have bothered to write concertos for the instrument. Having said that, J. S. Bach used the earlier Baroque horn effectively in many works, the first Brandenburg Concerto and the 'Quoniam' from the B Minor Mass being the best-known examples.

All this is familiar to those in the business, but two mysteries stand out. Why did players who were required to play fiendishly difficult passages on occasion spend so much of their time 'filling in' in most orchestral music? And why did not Hampel write about the essentials of his remarkable new technique? Humphries also asks this question but cannot offer an answer. The first treatises explaining hand horn playing appeared much later, only a few years before the invention of the valve challenged the very existence of the hand horn itself. This leads to a further question. Why, when the valved horn could play virtually anything, did the hand horn survive for much longer than might be imagined? Although the valved horn appeared around 1815, the hand horn was still being taught at the Paris Conservatoire almost a century later, not as a historical oddity but as a living technique. It seems likely that the contrast between 'open' and 'stopped' notes,



the feature that attracted so much opprobrium when the hand horn first appeared, was later regarded as the principal source of its magic.

As an ex-professional horn player, I found the book fascinating and illuminating in many respects, but not all of my questions were answered. For example, Wagner, who certainly favoured the valved horn, sometimes demanded a change of crook *between notes*. He allowed no time for the crook to be changed. If the crook change simply indicated that the player had to depress a valve to *create the effect* of a changed crook, Wagner must have accepted that hand horn playing was still the norm. Another unsolved mystery: many French composers, including Ravel, ask for a mute to be inserted, again without allowing time for the action to occur. This might be interpreted as a lazy instruction to hand-stop a passage or note, but the same composers used other signs (usually + or *cuivre*) to denote hand-stopping. It is intriguing that uncertainty surrounds even quite recent practice.

Humphries dwells at some length on modern techniques of historical performance. If this observation suggests tension between the use of the words 'modern' and 'historical', contemporary use of 'nodal vents' helps to explain the dilemma. Nodal vents are tiny holes pierced in the tubing of a recently constructed 'historical' horn. These holes can be covered or left uncovered by the player's fingers. If they are uncovered, certain notoriously out-of-tune notes are corrected automatically, and some trills are easier to produce. Humphries explains the science behind the technique, but he does not explore its implications. He says that no evidence from genuine Baroque or later instruments has been found to show that players in those earlier times used the technique, so we must assume that they did not. Is it 'cheating', therefore, to use it now? The issue becomes increasingly insistent. Professional musicians in the historical field know well that subterfuge is rife. Metal strings



are used widely, especially by violinists, 'Baroque' organs are fuelled by electricity and amplification in concert halls is the norm. I am reminded of a talented acquaintance who makes perfect Sheraton furniture.

So the question of authenticity hangs in the air, not that Humphries uses the word 'authentic'. He argues that music of the past should be performed in a way that composers, were they to spring to life again, might at least recognise their own compositions. Who could argue with that? For more advanced students, those studying A-level music for instance, this book should be very stimulating. It raises questions that they should be asking, whether about the horn, other instruments, or re-creating the musical past in any guise.

For me, the historical performance of music is encapsulated in an event which took place when I was fifteen years of age. I attended a rehearsal and concert in which one of the greatest of horn players, Dennis Brain,



was playing. He took a kindly interest in me and invited me to play his horn. I tried, but made an ass of myself. He played an Alexander horn in B flat. I played a horn in F. But worse than that, his horn had such stiff springs, my

fingers were too weak to depress the valve levers. Now, who knew that Dennis Brain had super-strong springs fitted to his valves? That's a tiny part of the history of the horn.

WILLIAM SALAMAN