

Reference

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A History of Singing by John Potter and Neil Sorrell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 349 pp., hardback. £78. ISBN 9780521817059.

In the introduction to this scholarly volume, the authors unequivocally state that it represents 'a history of singing, not *the* history'. This is not merely false modesty on their part, as the main reasons for this are clearly explained in their opening paragraphs. Firstly, the impossibility of encompassing sufficient content to represent a 'comprehensive history of all the singing in the world' is recognised. Secondly, there is also the impossibility of being at all certain of any historical detail regarding performance style or singing technique, especially with reference to vocal tone and choral blend, which must obviously be a matter for conjecture in the pre-recording era. Thirdly, the difficulty of achieving a universally agreed definition of what actually constitutes 'singing' is acknowledged. This means that there exists the additional challenge of deciding which aspects of vocal performance should be included in such a history. For the purposes of this book, a relatively inclusive definition of singing has been applied, with very interesting results.

The book is divided into three main sections. Part One is entitled 'Imagined Voices' to reflect the fact that any commentary regarding the voices of earlier

singers, their vocal technique, and indeed very early repertoire, must be largely based on speculation due to the aforementioned lack of recording technology. Part Two, 'Historical Voices', describes the 'genesis of the Western classical tradition'; the emergence of the soloist and the primacy of the lyrical text; the rise of the virtuoso soloist as a cultural icon; and the '19th-century revolution', which partly came about due to the loss of the castrato voice, the rising popularity of more conventional male voices, and the changing roles of female singers in society. Part Three describes the advent of the recording studio and the revolutionary changes this ushered into the world of singing. In this section a wide spectrum of vocal styles and musical genres are covered, including the role of the Jewish cantor; Indian classical music; jazz, swing and 'crooning'; rock and roll; 20th century classical singing; chanson, cabaret and the avant-garde. The book finishes with a celebration of singers and songs of the non-English speaking world, including descriptions of Fado and Flamenco; Mongolian overtone singing; the folk songs of the former Soviet bloc; the popular songs of South America; the traditional music of Africa and Australia; the globalisation of Bollywood; and some of the exciting fusions that have resulted from the colonisation and urbanisation of various communities around the world. Throughout the book, the chronological development of singing as an art form and the changing conventions of vocal performance are placed, as far as possible, within the relevant socio-political, geographical and cultural context.

The authors point out that much of the documented research into the worldwide phenomenon of singing is in the English language, and that Western viewpoints have therefore often predominated. However, they also indicate that histories of vocal

performance, even within Western music, are still comparatively rare: hence the need for this thorough exploration of the development of singing through the ages. Although Western classical singing still tends to take precedence for extended portions of the book (mainly, as discussed, due to the availability of written sources during the preceding two millennia), one of the aims of this volume is to 'touch upon issues from less familiar traditions in various parts of the world, which may help the lay reader to form a historical image or a series of converging images to inflect and enrich those already acquired from the process of enculturation'.

Within the limitations acknowledged by the authors in their introduction, the above aim is successfully achieved, as well as their stated goal of broadly explaining their own specialist areas. John Potter is a widely experienced singer and writer on vocal pedagogy, specialising in Western choral music, whilst having an extensive performance portfolio which includes a broad range of musical styles and genres. Neil Sorrell specialises in Asian music, working as a writer and lecturer on Indian and Javanese music. Some of the chapters have been individually authored, and others have been written collaboratively. On the whole, this has been an effective approach for a volume of this scope and scale. However, at times, the resulting structure of the book is potentially confusing for the reader. For example, the long-awaited section on recorded voices (arriving after two substantial sections in which the authors emphasise the lack of certainty about many aspects of earlier vocal performances) opens with a lengthy chapter on Indian music, much of which pre-dated the dawn of the recording industry. Admittedly, at the end of this chapter some of the major recording artists of the subcontinent are introduced to

the reader, but the majority of the chapter concentrates on the longstanding oral tradition of the genre.

This kind of organisational challenge within the overall structure of the book raises the question of whether two volumes might have been more effective, allowing an even more comprehensive approach. There are a number of potentially fascinating anecdotes regarding celebrated vocal exponents, which are either curtailed or not fully developed, presumably due to considerations of space within the book as a whole. Two volumes would have allowed more room for Potter to expound upon the history of Western classical singing, and to indulge the reader with more details about some of the singers' lives and vocal idiosyncrasies. A second volume would also have given Sorrell more freedom to detail the broader worldwide development of singing, as some of the later descriptions of singing in the wider cultural context were disappointingly brief.

Both authors rise to the challenge of attempting to trace the development of an ephemeral art form in the absence of any direct aural data from earlier periods. In the section discussing singers and vocal practices of the pre-recording age, evidence about performance style and vocal conventions is drawn from sources such as written records of performances, critical reviews, letters, studies by early researchers, and vocal treatises from the 11th century onwards. The references to singing manuals written by such well-renowned teachers and singers as Garcia and Marchesi, as well as earlier writers such as Bassano and Caccini, are particularly enlightening. These provide many clues about preferred vocal tone, performance styles, the use of ornamentation, and the role of the written score in earlier times. The evolution of the composer–singer dyad is also of particular

interest. Potter and Sorrell chart the changing role of singers, firstly depicted as improvisers and innovators, before moving through an extended stage in which singers and composers collaborated, with composers often creating songs as custom-made vehicles for soloists. Throughout the development of the Western classical tradition, the roles of singers and composers became more distinct, and written music became increasingly prescriptive. During the 20th century this was counteracted, to some extent, by the emergence of genres such as jazz and the avant-garde.

Once this intriguing journey through the vocal ages of the human race had finally reached the era of studio recordings, there was sometimes a sense of frustration that at least a few recorded examples had not been supplied along with the printed volume. However, it is recognised that this would have necessitated a more complex, multi-media approach to the project. Fortunately, there is a very helpful 'sources and references' section, full of suggestions of relevant recordings to enhance the reader's experience of this written history. It also provides a useful set of recommendations for further study, which could no doubt be used to follow up some of the tantalising anecdotes which were hinted at in the body of the text, and to augment the relatively compressed descriptions of some of the non-English song traditions. The scholarly approach of the book as a whole, along with the detailed references for further reading and listening, makes it a valuable resource for anyone interested in developing their own research in this ever-expanding field of human achievement. On a personal note, I have certainly been inspired to pursue a number of the references to less familiar forms of singing, and have greatly appreciated the opportunity to be inducted

into a wider perspective on vocal performance.

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Studio-based Instrumental Learning by Kim Burwell. Farnham: Ashgate, 2012. 242 pp., hardback. £55.00. ISBN 9781409447658.

This book makes a significant contribution to deepening understanding of behaviours and interactions within the one-to-one instrumental lesson. Building on previous work undertaken by the author (Burwell, 2005, 2006) and with colleagues (Young *et al.*, 2003; Burwell *et al.*, 2004), Burwell's analyses of collaborative activities within the lesson are contextualised within detailed accounts of the epistemology of instrumental teaching and learning, which discuss both the philosophical and practical perspectives concerning skill and apprenticeship. These are followed by in-depth examination of literature relating to the instrumental lesson, and by substantial analyses of two instrumental lessons.

After an introductory chapter positioning the instrumental teacher as reflective practitioner and introducing the author and the research aims, Chapter 2 explores the epistemology of instrumental teaching and learning, setting the scene for the research with comprehensive discussions of skill and apprenticeship. Burwell acknowledges the difficulties in verbalising skill, focusing on components such as 'talent', 'sense' and 'feel' which make up the 'complex and intriguing phenomenon' (p. 12) before moving through discussions of 'knowing how and knowing that', tacit and explicit knowledge, levels of skill, reflection in action, situated learning and scaffolding.