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Barbara L. Kelly and Kerry Murphy, eds., *Berlioz and Debussy: Sources, Contexts and Legacies. Essays in Honour of François Lesure*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. xix + 209 pp. Notes. £55.00 (cl). ISBN 978-0-7546-5392-9.

Review by Katharine Ellis, Royal Holloway, University of London.

Within this essay collection, in a study of Berlioz's attempt to be an impartial judge at the 1851 Great Exhibition (yet all the while "defending France"), Kerry Murphy provides some choice examples of cross-Channel rivalry. The English are snobbish, conservative, scheming and pompous towards the French, who appear shallow, disorganised and chauvinistic. Then, sin of all sins, they turn up late—and win for Érard the most coveted prize in piano-building from under the noses of Broadwood and Collard. In the daily press, Pre-Exhibition attempts at French–English *rapprochement* do not anticipate such outcomes, at once celebrating British victory over the French exhibition model and trumpeting a colonialist embrace of the 'whole civilized world' in London (*Spectator*, cited p. 70), while claiming to bury age-old national quarrels, especially with the French. More recently, musicology has engendered its fair share of Anglophone–Francophone tension, this time extending well beyond the Channel: so many Anglophones editing and generally rehabilitating Berlioz in the late twentieth century; ditto for Debussy. Is it an attempted takeover?

This book both exemplifies the trend and turns the tables. A dozen anglophone musicologists, from the UK, Australia, Israel and the United States, pay homage to a French scholar–librarian, musicologist and teacher whose devotion to educating the next generation of French academics was matched only by his generosity and openness to those of other nations. Within these pages, written by his former students, those who attended his seminars at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes, and those for whom he opened up new research avenues, we experience something of the formidable creative legacy of François Lesure.

Framed by two affectionate memoirs—an introduction to the scholar and teacher by Jeanice Brooks, and an account of the triumphs and tribulations of the Debussy *Œuvres complètes* by Roy Howat—the book has at its centre ten essays on composers who help cement the Anglophone–Francophone link: Berlioz and Debussy. It contains much more, however, in that complementary historical voices feature strongly: as models (David Charlton on Dalayrac, Richard Langham Smith on Bizet), as potential dragons to be slain (Benjamin Perl on Mozart, Michael Strasser on Grieg), as supportive cabal (Jann Pasler on the Apaches), and as radical rival or troubled inheritor of tradition (Barbara Kelly on Satie and Ravel). Berlioz and Debussy are thus seen as much through the eyes of others as through study of their own music and the sources associated with it (Hugh Macdonald on a newly-discovered libretto copy for *Les Troyens*; Julian Rushton on sources for *L'enfance du Christ*; Marie Rolf on Act 4/iv of *Pelléas*). As might be expected, the emphasis is on coal-face musicology of a kind of which the avowedly "scientifique" Lesure would have approved. And while perhaps inevitably uneven in quality, they are at their best a significant contribution to the field. More even than that, they exceed the sum of their parts.

Nevertheless, it would be too much to expect the two halves of the collection to speak to each other directly: as Lesure's own article on 'Debussy et Berlioz', published posthumously in the *Dictionnaire Berlioz* (2003), illustrates only too well, Debussy was not a Berlioz fan. Lesure, too, was somewhat baffled by Berlioz (and by British Berliozomania) and did not go out of his way to advocate his music: it was the historian, rather than the musician, that found Berlioz important as an object of study (Brooks, p. xvii). Yet one wonders whether the particular choice of Berliozian repertoire in this collection might have made Lesure think twice. For although, via Romain Rolland, the editors mention the composer in standard Romantic vein as the personification of a heroic and passionate element (contrasting with that of refinement and sensuality) in the French artistic *génie*, the essays that focus on Berlioz's music assiduously avoid the celebrated works that bear such interpretation. There is no sign of the *Fantastique*, *Lélio*, *Faust*, or the Requiem; and *Les Troyens* appears in literary, rather than musical, guise.

Instead, both Charlton and Rushton focus on Berlioz as a more private, domestic, composer capable of touching restraint: Charlton focuses on his inheritance of the *romance* from eighteenth-century opéra-comique; Rushton argues for *L'enfance du Christ* as the devotional oratorio of an unbeliever nostalgic for his own childhood faith. These are unusual representatives of the composer's output. However, quite apart from their modest proportions (Rushton notes in particular the chamber-like scoring in *L'enfance*), together, they also raise crucial questions about Berlioz's ideology and practice as a composer of texted music, since they challenge the idea, which permeates his writings, of his weddedness to localised dramatic fidelity. Charlton analyses two very different interpretations (both dating from around 1850) of the same text—as "Le matin" and as "Petit oiseau. Chanson de paysan"—pointing out the importance for Berlioz of portraying the background "scenario" (*à la* Dalayrac) to the performed song in the latter case, and the increasing use of word painting in the former. Likewise, as Rushton notes, in writing the libretto and music for *L'enfance*, Berlioz avoided the "miracle" scenes provided by his literary sources (which would have provided obvious pictorial catalysts) and concentrated instead on an atmosphere of simple family domesticity more in line with Marian iconographical tradition and his mother's faith than with his father's scientific rationality, and which could be sustained by simple and generalised means: evocation of the carol, the rural bagpipe drone, and a distant pseudo-modal melodic past. That such simplicity characterised a form of religious music with which Berlioz could empathise is amply demonstrated by another of the collection's essays: Perl's discussion of Berlioz's response to Mozart's "divine" *Ave, verum corpus* in comparison with his "odious and idiotic" Requiem (p. 24, 28).

Tension-filled relationships to the past permeate the volume. At one extreme, Kelly persuasively argues for Ravel's eclecticism of the 1920s as a series of attempts to escape Debussy's posthumous shadow; at the other, Perl interprets Berlioz's often arch Mozart criticism as that of a composer caught between admiration of technical fluency and fear of his own inadequacy. In between, Strasser suggests there is circumstantial evidence for placing Grieg (specifically as a string-quartet composer) as a counterpart to Wagner in Debussy's emerging career: a composer "whose influence he felt all too keenly" (p. 105); and Marie Rolf rehearses Debussy's ambivalence towards the Wagnerian leitmotif in an essay which deftly illustrates both what she terms his "additive variation" technique, and his gradual move towards a tritone-based pitch-centricity associated with Symbolist-inspired works from Dukas to Bartók but containing antecedents in both Weber and the *Ring* (p. 144-7). The circle is closed again by Kelly, who notes how in an interview of 1931 Ravel distanced his "contrapuntal" (and therefore modern) quartet from that of Debussy, which was "harmonic" (and therefore rooted in the nineteenth century) (p. 173). Throughout these essays, and in part because of their authors' close readings of primary sources, one sees Berlioz, Debussy (and Ravel too) discovering themselves, constructing themselves, and finding ways to conceal their vulnerabilities.

Winding their way through the book are other pasts, and conflations of the past and the primitive. Chief among them we find the exotic and its changing portrayal during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For if in *L'enfance du Christ* Berlioz invented pseudo-modal melodies to create a sense of biblical “couleur locale” without the slightest nod towards historical authenticity, as Richard Langham Smith illustrates, in *Rodrigue et Chimène* Debussy was aware that he could not follow the nineteenth-century realism of *Carmen* in evoking his Spanish subject, and opted instead for a “stock” orientalism (probably inspired by another Bizet opera, *Djamileh*), in which the medieval context of *El Cid* could be evoked by association (p. 91-3). Thus, Berlioz renders the exotic familiar much in the manner of Italian painters whose backgrounds to nativity scenes featured Lake Trasimeno and other local beauty spots. Bizet distinguishes between the exotic that can be captured via popular song and that which must rely on weight of association (complete with drones and sinuous “snake-charmer” modes); and in stripped-down vein, Debussy follows suit. In the face of such orientalist treatments (including Ravel’s own *Shéhérazade*) it is, as Kelly rightly remarks, with a sense of shock that we encounter “Aoua!”, the first of the *Chansons madécasses* of 1926, in which the colonised turns on the coloniser both textually and musically, and explodes those comfortable musical tropes of the “exotic/distant primitive”—not least the ubiquitous drone fifth (p. 178).

As Howat demonstrates, Lesure was an editor of palpable devotion to reasoned argument and objective evidence. Yet he was also open to new interpretations, to unorthodox solutions, and, although not a performer himself, to editorial conclusions catalysed by performance. Two other essays in the collection deal intriguingly with such matters, via discussions of *Les Troyens* and *Carmen*. Hugh Macdonald gives a detailed account of a newly-discovered fair-copy libretto of the former, with annotations by Berlioz, now conserved at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels. The libretto, which is surely not the final piece of the jigsaw of extant sources for *Les Troyens*, is a working document containing revisions extending well beyond the first performance. Not only does it contain new passages for which no music is known to exist, but for Macdonald it provides proof for conjectures made when editing the opera for the *New Berlioz Edition* in 1969-70. For that reason alone, this essay is sure to become essential reading alongside the critical apparatus Macdonald prepared some forty years ago. It also, of course, attests to the enduring thrill of the editorial chase.

More controversial—and avowedly so—is Richard Langham Smith’s discussion, in an essay on Spanish operas by Debussy and Bizet, of the idea of a “performance *Urtext*” which includes, as part of his new edition of *Carmen*, the content of available staging manuals, and which will, by the end of 2009, have been used in three international productions. Smith questions both the relevance of the “composer’s last intention” theory in a collaborative genre, and the idea that a “definitive” text for a nineteenth-century opera is possible. His aim is to capture “what was done in the first run, after the performances had matured a little” (p. 99), which sounds rather reminiscent of Jerome McGann’s concept of the “socialized text.” Operas are complex and moving targets, as *Carmen* itself demonstrates to a fault. And while it would have too much of a digression in this particular context to engage in a full-blown discussion of current thinking on the subject, it is worth noting that where opera is concerned, this topic is hot, and getting hotter.

Fittingly, the volume ends with three evocations of artistic networks: the Apaches (self-styled as new-generation Hugoliens cheering *Pelléas* rather than *Hernani*), the postwar Parisian scene, and the editorial camaraderie of the Debussy *Œuvres complètes*. The complementary essays of Pasler and Kelly painstakingly disentangle questions of education and upbringing, early influence and mature ideological positioning, leading to historical explanations that take account of how those of diverse educational inheritance can nevertheless band together in

common cause. By the time Kelly takes up the story, Ravel has found to his dismay that the support structure offered to vulnerable composers by the Apaches up to the period of the War was painfully absent in the fractious 1920s, where the internationalisation of Neoclassicism by Stravinsky in particular sat uneasily with the more nostalgic voices of French classicism on the one hand and the power struggles of Les Six and an ageing but still radicalised Satie on the other.

This homage to Lesure, then, touches on several core musicological questions relating to French music of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the communication of its messages to the musicians and scholars of the twenty-first. It also, in what may be an instance of collective accident, reinscribes the traditional image of what is French about French music—simplicity, refinement, sensuality, economy, restraint—despite pairing supposed opposites in Berlioz and Debussy. The *dépouillement* of French music after the War receives particular emphasis from Kelly, providing the context in which Ravel steps forward as the unspoken third hero of the collection; but it appears almost everywhere else, too: in Smith's comparison of *Djamileh* and *Rodrigue*; in Charlton's exploration of Berlioz's relationship to *opéra comique*, and in the collage of acidic *Pelléas* critique with which Jann Pasler begins her sociology of the Apaches.

Yet in its most extreme form, such restraint becomes powerfully mute: witness Marie Rolf's sensitive highlighting of the intensity of the Debussyan silence during the climactic scene of *Pelléas's* death. Can the brass-crazy Berlioz really match any of that? No one in the volume tries to argue the point explicitly; and yet we know how susceptible Berlioz was to gentle melancholy (the Hero–Ursule duo from *Béatrice*), unspoken emotion (the orchestral lovers in *Roméo*) and the pathos of orchestral silence amid fragmentation (the *Roméo* tomb scene); and we should perhaps recall Berlioz's citation, in 1838, of *Hamlet's* closing line to convey the expressive charge after the closing bars of the Andante from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony: "the rest is silence." In the reciprocal impact of this collection, there is more than first meets the eye.

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