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Vincent d'Indy, *Cours de composition musicale*, Volume 1. Translated from French, edited, and with an introduction by Gail Hilson Woldu. Comparative analysis by Merle Montgomery. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. xviii + 379 pp. Musical examples, figures, notes, and index. \$50.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-08061-4134-3.

Review by Andrew Deruchie, University of Otago, New Zealand.

An aesthetic manifesto, a comprehensive history of Western art music, a treatise on music theory, a lucid account of music's role in society, and, of course, a composition manual all rolled into one, Vincent d'Indy's *Cours de composition musicale* was and remains a unique document. Based upon the composition lectures d'Indy gave at the Schola cantorum in the late 1890s, its three "books"—the second split into two volumes, making for four tomes in all—offer a rich trove of source material for anyone researching, or simply wanting to learn more about, these and other facets of French musical culture in d'Indy's day. [1] And now, for the first time, it is available in English, thanks to Gail Hilson Woldu's recent translation. Sort of, at least: the present volume brings to fruition an initiative which began two-thirds of a century ago by Merle Montgomery, who translated some of d'Indy's text for her 1946 doctoral dissertation. Oxford University Press accepted the translation, but Durand, d'Indy's French editor, scuttled its publication by demanding a steep royalty, leaving it to languish in relatively inaccessible dissertation form. Woldu's translation is entirely new, but the volume nonetheless pays homage to Montgomery by reprinting the "Comparative Analysis" of the *Cours* that rounded out her doctoral submission.

"Sort of" also because Woldu has translated just the first of d'Indy's three books. Plans are afoot to undertake the remaining two, though we will have to wait (understandably, given the magnitude of the task), possibly for a long time. Woldu need not necessarily have started at the beginning—one does not have to read the *Cours* sequentially—but her decision to do so seems sensible. Here, d'Indy lays out his theoretical ideas on melody, harmony, and rhythm. He also overviews the development of musical notation, summarizes (in eight pages) the history of harmonic theory, and begins his survey of musical genres with detailed discussions of early monody and the polyphonic motet, chanson, and madrigal. Likely of greater interest to most readers, d'Indy establishes in the first book many of the vertebrae in the *Cours*' ideological backbone. These include his unwavering convictions that music must seek above all to teach and better humankind and that faith in God must form the basis of all art, and also his historicist model of progress, which demanded that the composer propel music history forward by building upon the immutable foundations of Tradition.

D'Indy also introduces an unusual, tripartite division of music history into a golden "rhythmo-monodic" era (from early Christian times to the thirteenth century), an equally golden "polyphonic era" (extending through the sixteenth century), and finally a decadent "metered era" (the seventeenth century to d'Indy's time) during which scientific reason sapped music of its divine mystery and an ethos of individualism deflected it from its proper goals. By structuring history in this way, d'Indy implied a teleology (and positioned himself as a messianic figure): any composer who followed his teachings would

contribute to the revival of good, healthy music. This artistic convalescence, he fervently believed, would bring about a parallel one for the French nation. For as the foregoing overview of the *Cours*'s touchstone ideas perhaps suggests (and as its readers familiar with the basics of French history will quickly deduce), the aristocratic, monarchist, anti-Semitic, and staunchly Catholic d'Indy espoused an eminently conservative ensemble of values. And in the name of humanity's greater good, he sought, during the heady Republican days of the century's end, to propagate them through music. Indeed, the *Cours* fascinates not least for its treatment of the musical work as a social text and the ways it draws lines between musical form and style on the one hand and social values on the other. In this way, it articulates an elegant theory of musical meaning, one that although emerging from the opposite end of the political spectrum, prefigures certain premises and "methods" informing Theodor Adorno's writing, which has played a pivotal role in musicology, especially since the late 1980s.

This first book, however, by no means gives a complete exposition d'Indy's ideas. Some of the *Cours*'s most important elements remain entirely absent or largely incipient until the second and third. Readers will find virtually nothing on Beethoven, Wagner, or César Franck, the great triumvirate (or trinity) of composers d'Indy considered the indispensable bases of any viable modern music. Nor will they learn about the pivotal importance he attributed to cyclic form (whereby thematic connections unite the separate movements of symphonies, sonatas, and chamber works). Nor will they encounter D'Indy's fascinating understanding of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century instrumental music as drama or narrative (another aspect of the *Cours* that links up with recent musicological trends). And readers will suffer through little of the disturbing anti-Semitism that streaks the subsequent books, especially the third.

The *Cours* stands as d'Indy's most substantial, and arguably his most significant, writing. Woldu's translation makes a very welcome addition to the growing body of source material on Belle-époque French music now available in English, and it comes at a good time. Musicologists and performers alike have long consigned d'Indy to the margins. Late twentieth-century master narratives of music history cast him as the progressive Debussy's antithesis, a dogmatic advocate of outdated genres and expressive ideals. After the Second World War, most of his music drifted into obscurity, in part because of this and probably in greater measure because of his outspoken nationalism, espousal of cultural and biological determinism, and his notorious anti-Semitism. Yet d'Indy's contemporaries, on account of his rare musical talent and tireless work as a pedagogue and administrator, considered him one of the nation's most influential musicians and, at least until the turn of the century, one of its most progressive and innovative composers. Accordingly, Jann Pasler, Steven Huebner, Manuela Schwartz, and others have begun reappraising d'Indy, and a more nuanced and balanced account of him is now emerging in the musicological literature. Availability of *Cours* in English will hopefully encourage this trend and further nurture the ongoing project of developing a sensitive understanding of the richly variegated and rapidly changing musical culture of Third Republic France.

Woldu's volume evinces some felicitous editorial decisions. It retains the original graphics for all of the *Cours*' many figures, diagrams, and musical examples. Particularly with respect to the latter, this was a well-advised move, since some of these contain quirky, and potentially revealing, phrase markings and articulations which do not correspond to published editions. At times, the image quality leaves something to be desired. Although this detracts slightly from the appearance of the book, the graphics remain clear enough to be read easily, with a few excessively small exceptions, such as the examples in the footnote on p. 82, which demand eyes better than my relatively good ones. An index of names, publications, and important concepts is included, a feature the original *Cours* lacks (for this reason, even proficient readers of French may find the volume useful). It is, however, incomplete. Without looking very hard, I found references to Beethoven on pp. 48, 63, and 64 that do not appear in the index.

On the whole, Woldu's translation succeeds admirably. She attempts to stay as close to d'Indy's formulations as possible, frequently preserving his sentence structure and usually giving more or less literal renditions of his locutions. This carries the advantage of offering the reader a very direct representation of d'Indy's voice, but it comes at the (modest) cost of a text that often reads as a translation (Woldu, for example, tends to preserve d'Indy's copious passive constructions). It also occasionally makes for some mildly clunky English. She perhaps need not have pursued this approach quite so vigorously. D'Indy organized the *Cours* with great care and rigorous logic, but, particularly when compared to his books on Franck and Beethoven, the writing seems uneven and sometimes suggests haste rather than a purposefully cultivated style.^[2]

The translation is not perfectly accurate; spot checks reveal plenty of minor errors. Woldu, for example, incorrectly translates "Les nécessités de l'exécution d'ensemble obligent à discerner par le geste les temps de la mesure ..." as "(t)he performance of a work in its entirety requires us to distinguish the beat of the measure by one single gesture... (p. 56).^[3] D'Indy actually means that, in order for all the musicians or singers in an ensemble to perform together, it is necessary to show the beat through gesture (i.e., the movement of the conductor's hand).

Elsewhere, d'Indy writes: "On conçoit, en effet, que cet éternel problème du Nombre, clé véritable de la genèse mondiale, soit apparu, dès l'origine, à l'intelligence humaine, consciente d'elle-même et de son principe divin, comme la plus mystérieuse et la plus abstraite de toutes les connaissances auxquelles cette merveilleuse faculté soit susceptible de s'élever." (p. 133)

The translation reads: "It is conceivable, therefore, that this ageless issue of the Number--the true key to the genesis of the world, aware of itself and of its divine origin--was from the beginning of human understanding the most mysterious and most abstract of all the disciplines that this extraordinary power is able to exalt" (p. 166). Woldu momentarily gets lost in d'Indy's labyrinth of sub-clauses and parenthetical enclosures. It is human intelligence--not the genesis of the world--that is self-conscious and aware of its divine origins. Additionally, "disciplines" seems a vague translation of "connaissances" (here meaning "forms of knowledge"), and the remainder of the sentence should probably read something like "that this marvelous faculty [referring to human intelligence] is capable of achieving." Perhaps the most spectacular miss comes on p. 55, where Woldu translates "la contraction des oreillettes" (p. 25), the last word meaning the heart's atria, as "the contraction of the inner ear."

A musicologist by profession, Woldu seems oddly prone to errors and overly literal renditions when translating specialized passages. For example, "...le temps léger ou le temps lourd peuvent être formés eux-mêmes d'un groupe de plusieurs notes ou *neume*" (p. 26; emphasis in original) becomes "the light or heavy beats can themselves be formed into a group of several notes or neumes." She interprets "note" and "neume" as synonyms, whereas d'Indy defines a neume as a group of notes, its normative meaning. Explaining one of Jean-Philippe Rameau's contributions to music theory, d'Indy writes that a chord may be reduced to an "état fondamental" (p.135). Woldu translates this as "elemental state" (p. 167), but those familiar with musical rudiments will know this abstraction as "root position." Fortunately, these and other errors are relatively inconsequential and hardly obscure the main substance of d'Indy's text, which remains accurately represented. Scholars citing the translation, however, might consider double-checking it against the original French.

While the translation should earn the volume shelf space in all self-respecting academic music libraries, Woldu's introductory essay and Montgomery's comparative analysis, which together make up about a third of the volume, come as something of a disappointment. The former lays out background issues and adumbrates the *Cours'* contents well enough. But it offers little new insight and it is mainly pieced

together from existing secondary sources, Jane Fulcher's problematic *French Cultural Politics and Music* chief among them.[4] By contrast, Jann Pasler's incisive new perspectives on d'Indy, which would provide readers some crucial context, remain relatively muted, and Woldu does not draw upon or even mention relevant studies by Steven Huebner and Catrina Flint de Médicis.[5] This essay might also occasionally mislead the uninitiated. On the first page, for example, Woldu makes the claim—overstated, or at very least lacking context—that d'Indy “influenced” the twentieth-century avant-garde composers Edgard Varèse and Olivier Messiaen. On p. 24, she implies an aesthetic kinship with Camille Saint-Saëns, who “shared some of d'Indy's views on the nature of art and artistry at the turn of the century ... [and likewise] considered with contempt any disregard for the importance of rules in artistry”. The same could be said of virtually any composer or critic. Much vigorous debate, however, did center on the rules themselves. And as it happened, Saint-Saëns differed considerably with d'Indy on what they were, as his overwhelmingly negative, 10,000-word review of the *Cours* amply testifies.[6]

Montgomery's hundred-page “comparative analysis” positions d'Indy's discussions of rhythm, melody, harmony, tonality, and form against the theories of Thomas Morley (1557-1602), Johann Georg Albrechtsberger (1763-1809), Carl Czerny (1791-1857), and Paul Hindemith (1895-1963). This was doubtless a fine piece of scholarship by the standards of a nascent North American musicology in 1946, but the history of music theory, now a vibrant branch of the discipline, has come a long way since then. Compared to the highly sophisticated insights that (for example) Thomas Christiansen has brought to the theories of Rameau and François-Joseph Fétis, Montgomery's observations seem unfortunately coarse and obvious. One can hardly fault her; the discipline has simply moved forward. Although the inclusion of Montgomery's text benevolently acknowledges a pioneering *Cours* scholar, I therefore cannot not help but see it as a missed opportunity. The likes of Christensen have taken too little notice the *Cours*. We stand to learn much, for example, from a substantial study, employing up-to-date methods, of the evident relationships between d'Indy's formulations on harmony, tonality, and form and those of the German theorist Hugo Riemann (1849-1919), one of his immediate sources. Other issues remain inadequately addressed, not the least important of which are potentially thorny questions of agency and authorship. D'Indy prepared much of the *Cours* with the assistance of Auguste Sérieyx, his fellow teacher at the Schola and a former student. The exact nature and extent of Sérieyx's role, however, remains unclear. Similarly pressing questions hang over Book Three, redacted by Guy de Lioncourt and published nearly two decades after d'Indy's death.

NOTES

[1] These were separately published in Paris by Durand in 1903, 1909, 1933, and 1950.

[2] Vincent d'Indy, *Beethoven* (Paris: H. Laurens, 1911), and d'Indy, *César Franck* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1906).

[3] Vincent d'Indy, *Cours de composition musicale*, Book 1 (Paris: A. Durand, 1912), p. 27. All subsequent quotations of d'Indy's original French are taken from this edition.

[4] Jane Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music from the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[5] See especially Jann Pasler, “Deconstructing d'Indy, or, the Problem of a Composer's Reputation,” *19th Century Music* 30(2007): 230-256; Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 301-350; Heubner, “Striptease as Ideology,” *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 1(2004): 3-25; and Catrina Flint de Médicis, “The Schola

Cantorum, Early Music, and French Nationalism from 1894 to 1914” (Ph.D. Diss., McGill University, 2006).

[6] Camille Saint-Saëns, *Les idées de M. Vincent d'Indy* (Paris: P. Lafitte, 1919).

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