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Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen. Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2009. xxii + 789 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendices, index. \$60.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-5202-5740-5.

Review by Jolanta T. Pekacz, Dalhousie University.

The idea of art serving public purposes determined by the state is hardly new, and a republican political regime provides a suitable case study, given the high level of state control and interference in public life that is supposed to be beneficial for the people. Such a topic can easily become a springboard for a propaganda piece rather than for a critical analysis, if the regime's rhetoric of "public utility" is taken at face value. One needs only to look at the French Revolution to appreciate the necessity of a critical distance vis-à-vis such rhetoric. More recently, the history of the post-World War II East European Soviet bloc provides equally compelling evidence.

Jann Pasler's book *Composing the Citizen* is about music as public utility in Third Republic France. Her purpose is to show that music occupied a central place in republican cultural policy, serving as a means to inculcate republican ideals and values. What can make such a project worthwhile is a critical analysis of how this republican project worked, what "utility" meant beyond mere political propaganda, who determined its parameters, and who eventually profited from it and how. However, Pasler seems to be more focused on the fact that the republicans engaged music in their political project than she is ready to explore critically this process. A guiding principle supposed to give coherence and justification to the republicans' effort is the concept of public utility, which Pasler incorrectly locates in the seventeenth century (p. xiv) and interchangeably uses with notions such as public good and general interest. They are by no means synonymous, but for an unsuspecting reader, they create an impression that each served a noble purpose. To show the extent to which music in Third Republic France served the purpose of public utility, Pasler states her objectives as reaching beyond an allegedly typical focus of scholars on "bohemia" and "avant-garde" to encompass non-elite musical organizations, audiences, and forms of musical expression. In addition, she promises to explore "a wide variety of genres, musical venues, and performance groups never before regarded as interconnected, compare elite and popular ensembles, interrogate the ephemeral as well as durable aspects of musical life, and seek out the networks constituting the musical world" (pp. xiii-xiv). This research agenda is meant to support conclusions that "call into question some of our most cherished assumptions: namely, that in the past, only the elites had access to or an interest in serious music; that serious and popular domains were distinct; that early mass culture had a necessarily deleterious effect on musical progress; and that art music performances by the major orchestras increasingly presented music by dead composers" (p. xiv). Pasler returns to the book's objectives again later (pp. 30-41), reiterating similar points and further emphasizing her originality: ". . . while other scholars have mostly focused on ensembles that played for the privileged few, I include popular orchestras, amateur choruses, and military bands, many of them also respected for their public utility, even if market-driven" (p. 34).

The formulation of this extensive agenda suggests that Pasler enters a *terra incognita* untouched by cultural historians and musicologists. This is by no means the case. Few musicologists would claim nowadays that only elites had access to "serious" music in the past. Limited as it was, it always existed—one need think only of church music by composers such as J. S. Bach that was both "serious" and

accessible to non-elite audiences. Nor is Pasler forging new ground by reaching beyond elite musical forms and ensembles.[1] It is hardly the case that present-day cultural historians and musicologists writing on the Third Republic are preoccupied exclusively with “bohemia” and “avant-garde,” and Pasler draws a great deal of information from their works. But she reinforces the impression of entering an unknown land by never discussing the existing scholarship on the topic and her own original contribution. Instead, she merely mentions – in a footnote (p. 29) – a few scholars who wrote on music in the Third Republic and lumps several dozen monographs into another, much larger, footnote (p. 41) with a comment that they “complement the larger picture offered in [her] book” (p. 41). Only in the process of reading does the reader realize that there is a substantial body of both present-day monographs and nineteenth-century printed sources from which Pasler draws heavily. The lack of bibliography makes it difficult to establish the actual source base of the book. Pasler herself states that she consulted “more than the typical primary sources” (p. 36) – assuming that there is such a thing – “looked in too often ignored sections of the press, *les nouvelles* and foreign news (about French and other music) reported from abroad, for clues as to what forces, internal and external to music, national and international, may have affected public perception of music. . . . Family music magazines, sheet music reproduced in newspapers, military band transcriptions, concert programs, and the statutes of amateur music societies . . .” (p. 37) That Pasler considers such sources as “untypical” suggests that she has insufficiently read and considered the works of cultural historians, who do not consider any of these sources untypical. Or it may suggest Pasler’s uncritical approach to her own work. In the course of reading it becomes clear that the book is based mainly on secondary sources and printed primary sources (many interpreted via secondary sources, not in the original). The amount of unpublished archival material is negligible.

The most striking characteristic of *Composing the Citizen* is its length. Its nearly 800 pages make demands upon the reader’s time and attention that are not justified in terms of the arguments pursued. There is a large quantity of data pertaining to aspects of musical life compiled both from nineteenth-century and present-day secondary sources, presented against the background of political developments; there is no shortage of sections of musical analysis whose relevance is not always clear; and there is some original iconography—all presented from the perspective of a good republican. What is missing, however, is a critical distance going beyond the strictures of a “good republican’s” talk, especially beyond the republican rhetoric of “liberty, equality, fraternity” taken at face value. To be meaningful, nineteenth-century French republican lingo and declared goals must be “unpacked”—just as the French Revolution’s rhetoric has been scrutinized and the revolutionaries’ linguistic abuses are now well known. But there is very little of such scrutiny in Pasler’s book. Rather, because the republican language is accepted uncritically, the argument proceeds in a quite predictable fashion. It is not only this predictability that stands in the way of the book’s meaningful and reliable contribution to the social and cultural history of music. There are also problems with methodology, documentation, and presentation. The remainder of this review focuses on selected examples of these problems.

The discussion of the notion of public utility (*utilité publique*)—the conceptual backbone of the book—in chapter one is misleading. The most problematic section begins with Pasler’s interpretation of public utility as necessarily superseding private/individual utility, thus making it necessary for the society to accomplish what individuals cannot (p. 70). But from then on, she makes a false equation between society, on the one hand, and the state and the government, on the other, which implies that the state’s/government’s interest legitimately takes precedence over individual interests (p. 70). Thus, she equates the notion of public utility with the co-optation of public utility for reasons of state.

It is by no means true that the French *philosophes* argued for such co-optation, as Pasler implies (p. 71). Without denying that “public utility is the supreme law,” physiocrat Turgot stated, “The collective good must be the result of each private individual’s efforts to serve his own interest” and challenged the idea “that the state should take responsibility for the public utility and that private individuals should choose it as their goal.” According to the physiocrats, “it was not appropriate for the state to engage in

promoting such principles” and the role of the state was “to provide the right conditions for the unfettered activity of all its citizens.”[2]

The French Revolution, of course, co-opted the notions of public utility and common good for reasons of state. Once this co-optation took place, the revolutionary state had the power to define what constituted public utility/good and made these notions entirely bound to the state. This definition was a blatant violation of Rousseau’s political theory, including his concept of the “general will.” Rousseau’s concept of *volonté générale* was incompatible with a representative form of government. Contrary to what Pasler states, in the 1791 Constitution the revolutionaries did not make “the nation the ‘principle of sovereignty’” (p. 78), but with the concept of “active” and “passive” citizens and an electoral system based on property qualifications, the revolutionaries promulgated inequality and made a mockery of the sovereignty of the people. This move was an equally blatant violation of Rousseau’s political theory.[3] As Maurice Cranston reminds us, “In the French Revolution, the republican leaders never conferred sovereignty on the people, but only pretended to do so.”[4] Later in the French Revolution, the principle of public utility was used to justify the most extravagant abuses of power of the revolutionaries, including the expropriation of the church (in this case, it was done in the name of “public necessity”).

The Third Republic co-opted the idea of public utility and masked the expression of common good as a principle of social cohesion. This does not mean, however, that the state co-optation and determination of public utility and public good were embraced by all, except for the political enemies of the Third Republic. Emile Durkheim, for example, clearly distinguished between the state and society and presented a view that public good derives from the society, not from the state. “It is not the State’s responsibility,” wrote Durkheim, “to create that community of ideas and feelings without which there would be no society; society must constitute itself, and the State can only sanction and maintain it and make its citizens more fully aware of it.”[5] For Durkheim, the state should exist independently of society, and the relations between the two should be as limited as possible.

Had she been a more careful reader of Rousseau, Pasler might display more distance to the republican rhetoric of public utility and public good. After all, it was Rousseau himself who “predicted the holders of government office in a republic would trespass more and more on the province of sovereignty until they have taken it over completely.”[6]

With her unproblematic equation of public utility with Third Republic’s co-optation of public utility, Pasler does not consider public utility outside of reasons of state, that is, a situation where public utility is a challenge to the state. This lacuna is paired with her lack of critical distance to the republican rhetoric of public utility. Thus, she is bound to show state control and interference in the name of the public utility as legitimate. Such an approach excludes the possibility that the republican regime used music as a form of manipulation, political indoctrination, a way of diverting people from internal or external problems of the state (which is a form of “utility” from the state’s perspective), or as another form of social engineering. It also excludes the possibility that musical culture was contested terrain, a site of conflict and heterogeneity.

In order to present the republican cultural policy as superior, compared to earlier stages of French history (with the exception of the French Revolution), Pasler is trying to prove that the republican government, despite its interference and control, was nevertheless culturally liberal by “allowing” a variety of aesthetic approaches and musical forms, open-minded, ready to embrace innovation, and supportive of musical needs of all sorts of audiences. But such a rosy picture is out of tune with what turned out to be the case at the end of the century. As Pasler herself notes, art was not accessible to the poor; few working-class women had opportunities to participate in an amateur choral movement; orchestras only “began to perform for a wide range of audiences”; and “the government required the

Opéra to offer the low-cost Saturday performances for families” (p. 680). Does this mean that the republican cultural policy prior to the 1890s was a fiasco?

Pasler would have avoided many such pitfalls had she engaged more directly with the existing scholarship and identified the ambiguities and nuances of republican discourse. For example, Laura Mason’s book *Singing the French Revolution* provides valuable critical perspectives and demonstrates an ambiguity, and eventually a failure, of French Revolutionaries’ attempts to impose “representational homogeneity” on a politically and socially diverse population.<sup>[7]</sup> But the conceptual framework and critical insights of Mason’s book are absent from Pasler’s discussion of the French Revolution and later of the Third Republic, and the book is merely mentioned in a few footnotes. Similarly, musicologist Jane Fulcher’s *French Cultural Politics and Music. From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), which covers much of the same ground as Pasler, is mentioned only in a couple of footnotes, and its arguments are not substantially addressed. Pasler’s tendency to relegate other scholars’ relevant works to footnotes raises questions as to how significantly she has engaged their arguments.

The extent to which the book achieves its stated goals is limited by often insufficient grounding in specific data and evidence. To make an informed judgment about the impact of the republican cultural policies, one needs to have some knowledge of who had access to culture: what was the composition of the cultural public in Paris in terms of social groups, professions, level of education, aesthetic preferences, leisure time, disposable income, and buying power. Considering the workers’ often unregulated working hours, women’s employment and child labor, and an overwhelming poverty of most city dwellers, who had access to musical goods and how often? Did aesthetic preferences correspond to social classes? Pasler seems to support this idea, but was it really the case? These questions are not addressed, and more often than not, unsubstantiated generalizations substitute for analysis based on hard-core evidence. An arbitrary attribution of social groups to certain cultural institutions and musical genres does not suffice for a society that was in a constant state of flux.<sup>[8]</sup> And speculating about the possible mental world of “the people” is inadequate.<sup>[9]</sup>

By the same token, we need to know the attendance figures in specific music institutions, the ticket prices and their affordability for various groups, number and membership of choirs and music societies. For example, Pasler claims that Padeloup’s concert seats were available to workers (p. 464) but does not give any example of their prices. When she mentions 50 centimes for a *concert-promenade* ticket (p. 472) she does not explain the buying power of this money. Nor does she explain the buying power of 40,000 francs—an annual subsidy to private music societies in 1879 (p. 294). A statement that “giving everyone the right to culture helped democratize taste, spread values, and build community” (p. 205) needs to be proven not merely stated. And when the author observes, “It is . . . difficult to know whether these attitudes to music took hold among ordinary people,” this very point, in fact, is what needs established. Similarly, claims that choirs contributed to the formation of taste (p. 210) are unconvincing unless the author discusses their repertoires to demonstrate this, which Pasler fails to do. Perhaps this lack of specificity is a consequence of Pasler’s research method. As she declares, she approached her research “non teleologically, particularly when working in archives, moving through ‘question spaces’ and from one kind of material to the next, as if in the Parisian landscape” (p. 39).

Pasler’s proclivity to attribute certain views or actions to unspecific entities such as “many,” “some” or “scholars” (for example, p. 479) without giving examples does not build the reader’s confidence. Many critics were impressed with Javanese music—Pasler claims (p. 573) but does not give any example. Similarly, the use of collective categories, such as “republicans” and giving only one example (as on p. 85) or no examples, makes the reader wonder what the source base is for the author’s generalizations. Once this practice becomes almost a rule, the reader may conclude that this source base is rather thin.

Incorrect statements and dubious inferences do not build the reader's confidence either. For example, it is not true that "the main concerts' organizations from 1789 to 1814 continued to serve the old elites . . . [as] social events at which to see and be seen" (p. 134); in fact, it was primarily the new elite that attended them in order to display their newly acquired wealth.[10] The aristocracy and haute bourgeoisie were brought together by Greffulhe's concerts not because of their "shared taste" (p. 684) but because of the ambience offered by the concerts, an exclusivity largely due to a high admission fee. "Religious practices" do not "drive wedges into our societies" (p. 697)—but fanaticism does. What makes Tiersot's *Histoire de la chanson populaire* and his *J.-J. Rousseau* examples of "revolutionary music"? And what makes Pougin's *Rousseau* such an example? (Appendix C, p. 726).

There are a number of factual errors. Napoleon was not crowned Emperor in 1806, but crowned himself in 1804 (p. 210); Winnaretta Singer was not an aristocrat (p. 509); *Rerum novarum* was not a papal "manifesto" (p. 614) but an encyclical; the pope is infallible only in matters of faith or morals (p. 615); Gregorian chant had traditionally been sung by men and boys, not by women (p. 673). Further, there are a large number of undocumented quotations and attributions,[11] and persistent editorial problems.[12] Finally, the index is incomplete.[13]

In conclusion, the book undertakes a topic of potentially great interest to many audiences. However, apart from the lack of critical depth, Pasler loses her grasp on the subject by lengthy compilations, lack of solid grounding in evidence, superfluous or irrelevant footnotes, and a lack of conciseness. The book ends abruptly, despite its length, without reaching the boundaries of the Third Republic in 1940 as the title promises.

## NOTES

[1] To mention just a few examples: William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class. The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris and Vienna*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate 2004); Jolanta T. Pekacz, *Music in the Culture of Polish Galicia, 1771-1914* (Rochester, N.J.: Rochester University Press, 2002); Dave Russel, *Popular Music in England, 1840-1914. A Social History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

[2] Alain Guéry, "The State. The Tool of the Common Good," in *Rethinking France. Les Lieux de Mémoire*, vol. 1 *The State*, trans. by Mary Trouille (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 32, 31.

[3] William H. Sewell, Jr., "Le citoyen/la citoyenne: Activity, Passivity and the Revolutionary Concept of Citizenship," in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, 105-123. See also Robert Wokler, "Ancient Postmodernism in the Philosophy of Rousseau," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*, ed. by Patrick Riley (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 418-443.

[4] Maurice Cranston, "The Sovereignty of the Nation," in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, volume 2: *The Political Culture of the French Revolution*, ed. by Colin Lucas (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), 103.

[5] Emile Durkheim, *Education et sociologie* [posthumously published in 1922], as quoted by Guéry, "The State. The Tool of the Common Good," 41.

[6] Cranston, "The Sovereignty of the Nation," 103.

[7] Laura Mason, *Singing the French Revolution. Popular Culture and Politics, 1787-1799* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996).

[8] According to Pasler, opera was an elite affair (pp. 257, 265); operetta “tended to attract mostly the middle class” (p. 253); wind bands, *orphéons*, and choral societies drew from the “working classes” (p. 167). And while *orphéons*’ members represented rudimentary musical knowledge, amateur choruses of bourgeois and aristocratic men and women “considered [singing lessons] a form of continuing education” and “performed more and more difficult music” (pp. 198-199). Pasler admits that “In Third Republic France, some form of opera was available to all classes” (p. 267) but does not discuss the dissemination of opera among non-elite groups.

[9] For example, “Increasingly available in schools, concert halls, and city parks, music became part of many people’s lives, including those of the socially and economically disadvantaged. It could be brought into the home and shared with family or experienced in public. . . . Shared experiences could lead to compassion and shared taste, a connection similar to the common will. Like political practices, musical practices, especially singing in groups, could transform individual identity into communal identity” (p. 204).

[10] For example, the concerts at the Feydeau theater served as fashion shows for *nouveaux riches* women during the Directory. See, for example, *Le Concert de la rue Feydeau ou la Folie du jour*, par les citoyens René Perrin et Cammille. Ambigu-Comique. Pluviôse an III, as quoted by Edmond et Jules Goncourt, *Histoire de la société française pendant le Directoire*, nouvelle édition (Paris: Charpentier, 1914), 367.

[11] For example, p. 134 (quotation from Mona Ozouf without a reference); p. 231 (no reference to the quotation from an Austrian newspaper); p. 334 (who stated that Rousseau and Voltaire were “the fathers of the Revolution”?); p. 337 (no reference to Olivier Ihl’s statements); p. 340 (unacknowledged quotation about Méhul); pp. 363; 377; 660-661 (unacknowledged attribution to Saint-Saëns); pp. 467, 486 (figures are given without sources); 508 (no source of statement that the public sat in “religious silence”); p. 565 (no sources of quotations preceding note 48); p. 614 (lack of source to the statement cardinal Lavigerie made to the French navy); p. 616 (no reference to Tiersot’s quotation); p. 616 (no reference to *Figaro*’s publication); p. 645 (no pages given to quotations); p. 657 (no reference to Edouard Schuré’s quotation); pp. 660-1 (no sources of quotations from Saint-Saëns); p. 670 (no reference to *L’Illustration*); p. 670 (pages missing in note 80); p. 679 (no reference to the statement about the popularity of the public lectures); p. 682 (no pages for quote of Leygues; Roujon not mentioned in the text); p. 682 n125 (Gabriel Tarde—what is his original work quoted? do we have to go to R. Williams’ book to find out?); p. 683 (who is quoted on the first half of that page?); p. 686 (edition/volume of *Petit Robert* missing); p. 688 (source of Jullien’s statement missing); p. 692 (in which work did Taine write about the public in medical terms?); p. 693 (pages missing in note 165).

[12] ] For example, the lack of dates for historical photographs in the Introduction and inconsistencies in spelling and in translations. Why Napoléon, métro, façade but not bâtiments (in *Conseil des batiments civils*, p. 21), and why “Federation” and not “Fédération” (in caption to Fig. 18, p. 109)? A character in Leo Delibes’s opera *Lakmé*, Gérald, appears as Gérald (p. 422) then Gerald several times, then Gérald again (p. 423), then Gerald and Gérald on the same page, and on the next Gerald in the caption and Gérald in the text. And as Gerald on p. 524. In the footnotes or in the text, some French titles are translated (for example, n. 67 p. 114; pp. 318; 341) but typically they are not; in the text, French originals are given to some English translations (pp. 274; 525 n92; 625 n105) but mostly not. And for the sake of consistency, why use French versions of works which are translated into English (for example, François Furet, *Penser la Révolution française*), especially since in other cases English translations are used (for example, Mona Ozouf, *Festivals in the French Revolution*)? There are also inconsistencies in punctuation, for example, in the separation of “too” and “however” by commas, and in using hyphens (missing hyphens: pp. 195; 212; 218 (“working class children”); p. 267 (“Third Republic France”); p. 344 (“clerically minded”); p. 586 (“classically oriented”); p. 702 (“poorly defined”).

[13] For example, Laura Mason appears on pp. 210n and 337n; Jane Fulcher appears on pp. 596n and 678n.

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