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Simon Trezise, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to French Music*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014. xix + 417 pp. \$33.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-521-70176-1.

Review by Richard Langham Smith, Royal College of Music, London.

Few devotees of French music and culture will not find a treasure-trove of enlightening information in this brilliantly cast multi-author book. How “Companions” have changed! It’s an appellation which has lasted a long time, beginning as a book on the shelves of such places as the smoking-rooms of gentlemen dilettantes but now a much more serious affair. Trezise’s carefully planned volume is a model of what a modern one should be: informed by scholars with enough experience to give an overview of latest thought, who communicate it directly and give copious—but focused—advice on more detailed reading.

The slice of what “Companions” are expected to cover, especially with a wide tranche of period such as this, has also increased. Thus the present volume includes sparkling chapters on Folk Music (with copious musical examples) and Popular Music (John Loosely) with a good deal of reflection on what the differences are, especially since in French they both go under the title of *la musique populaire*. These two chapters will encourage would-be listeners to search the internet for recordings for the host of artists they mention, and maybe to dig deeper in *phonothèques* for historical recordings as well as on YouTube where there is surely a rich archive. Loosely’s is a particularly appetite-whetting contribution. These two are assigned to a Part three, entitled “Other Musics,” after a parade of nine historical chapters and two complementary chapters on staged spectacle, respectively by Jacqueline Waeber and Steven Heubner.

There is a Part four, too, entitled “Themes and Topics,” with two more specialised chapters amplifying the earlier sections on the Middle Ages (by Alice V. Clark and Lawrence Earp). The four chapters together form a particularly rich introduction to early liturgical practice and the beginnings of Polyphony which any student of this period would be unwise to ignore, not least because of their examples, all in both original text and translation, and all refreshing in that they are not those which have been repeatedly paraded in previous literature. In this respect they set a precedent for the subsequent authors in that their overview is informed by the latest thought much of which each writer captures by citing key articles both into the endnotes to their chapters, and also in a copious bibliography at the end of the book.

While of necessity there is a tendency of some parts to become a list of relevant music (only in a few cases uncritical), these latter chapters redress earlier imbalances: John Haines’s chapter on “Manuscript Sources and Calligraphy” (with a lot of distinction between neumes) emphasizes the imperative of producing beautiful manuscripts, sometimes over the need to notate quality music. Andrew Tomasello charts the evolution of the complex relationship between Church and State (and therefore Music and State) which is a recurrent theme of the entire volume right up to the last chapters featuring important political figures who have channelled money into various ventures (and buildings) which have changed the shape of French culture in the twentieth century and beyond: Malraux, Jack Lang, Marcel Landowski and even Mitterrand.

Treize is to be congratulated on the planning of this book although readers need to see how it is shaped before advancing into it to discover where it says what. Read from the beginning and you may be surprised that the chapter on the *Grand Siècle* has only a hint of what happened on the stage, which, as several writers (including Treize) admit, was the major obsession of France ever since the turn of the sixteenth century. Strange to be plunged straight into Church Music here and elsewhere. The reader need not fear, as the two heavyweights already mentioned cover the evolution of French spectacle with considerable experience and skill: Waeber on “Opera and Ballet up to the death of Gluck” and Huebner from then on to the present day.

For the earlier period, the subject is supplemented by a further chapter by Jeanice Brooks in the “Themes and Topics” section. Again, these three chapters give us a three-aspect perspective on the roots of French stage music from era of Louis XIII and XIV, and on the evolution of the various *querelles* of the eighteenth century. Waeber is particularly informed about what happened on the streets as well as on stage, and brings particular expertise; Huebner comes in from an unusual but highly effective angle: “the path to the Opéra-Bastille,” beginning with the institutions and pressures of the present day, and moving back to the nineteenth century. His is an approach less driven by a parade of repertoire than by political and hence institutional change.

These are examples of “star” chapters but all are interesting and highly informed. This is to some degree due to the approach of Treize to the whole volume, which, in his concise introduction, comes straight to the essential question: What is French Music? His assumption is “that France is and has been a recognisable entity over many centuries” but he does not leave this assertion unchallenged. Quite the reverse! Others return to the problem in varying degrees. Lawrence Earp reminds us that the early history of music is in fact all French, the first music from elsewhere to make its mark on the overall evolution of Western Music not occurring until the Battle of Agincourt after which the English, as he puts it, “gain[ed] traction” and Dunstable’s music insinuated itself into the big picture (p. 35).

More recently, the question may be re-phrased. Is music French if it is by anyone who wrote music in modern-day France, despite its regional divides and the fact that much of what is now France didn’t speak French until well into the nineteenth century or even the twentieth? Was French music set in French, the *lingua franca*, spoken by the higher echelons of much of Europe in the Middle Ages? Many of the writers follow Treize’s lead on this, coming back to this thorny question across the centuries. It might be posed as far forward as Boulez’s music emerging from the Second World War when he was so explicitly aligned to the Second Viennese School. It might (though it’s not in the present volume) even be asked in the case of the twentieth-century opera that everyone considers the apex of modern-day French opera, Debussy’s *Pelléas*, which is very much a setting of a Belgian play and far removed from French literary traditions. As several commentators have observed, Maeterlinck was a writer who happened to speak French and write in it, but he thought in Flemish. Fabrice Fitch, for example, in a virtuosic chapter on the Renaissance asks us to bear the question in mind as we read through. To the North there was a Flemish tradition; to the south heavy transalpine influence: what can really be called French is called into question because so much art music set French text, wherever their composers hailed from or were schooled.

The chapter, rich with examples, gives us a considered but clear overview of the period which borders on the Baroque, and covers the all-important *Balet comique de la royne*, a key event to be returned to several times in subsequent chapters. He reminds us of the Italian roots of the *Quatre-vingt violons du Roy* (just in case we think of them as an unquestionably French institution): a subject revisited by Jeanette Brooks when she points out not only that Lully and Beaujoyeux were of Italian origin but that the French court was full of foreign ambassadors and their trains, and the lasting influence of Catherine de Médicis (whose sons were Italian speakers) also diluted any notion of the purely French. Fitch isolates overarching Renaissance thought about the societal function of Music in an era when musical

literacy was not only a “mark of breeding” (p. 54) but also possessed a “deep moral purpose . . . essential for the improvement and proper conduct of individuals” (p. 55).

Thus although the chapter on the *Grand Siècle* (by Peter Bennett and Georgina Cowart) might seem to have no need to address the question (and it doesn't) even this is undermined by other writers. Debra Nagy (1715–1789), and Michael McClellan and Trezise (“The Revolution and Romanticism to 1848”) and both Waeber and Huebner continue to address these essential questions of nationality, and point out the paucity of French music and the incursion of Italian models and German ones respectively: the ascendancy of Rossini and Beethoven in the early nineteenth century. Berlioz, particularly his *Symphonie Fantastique*, is singled out as the one great work of French Romanticism. Even if the repertoire list thins out over the turn of the eighteenth century (hardly surprisingly in view of the bloody instability of the period) the rise of serious musical journalism is given some attention, as is the rise of republican institutions (both for education and for performance). These are charted in some detail: a subject returned to in the “Themes and Topics” essays by Georgina Cowart (“Musical aesthetics of the *Siècle des Lumières*”) and Katherine Ellis (“Paris and the regions from the Revolution to the First World War”). This latter essay in particular corrects the Parisian centrality of virtually all that has gone before with the exception of the folk music chapter that by necessity is driven by regionalism (Luc Charles-Dominique’s “Traditional music and its ethnomusicological study”).

The twentieth century is covered by an excellent and unusually formed essay by Andy Fry who divides his chapter into wittily titled sections focusing on key-works: “The *Parade* ground”; “At sixes and sevens” (the seventh being Satie himself); “Older and Wiser” (as the “naughty boys” grew up). Stravinsky, of course is not forgotten. Jonathan Goldman follows by returning to the “querelle” idea (“Cultural and generational *querelles* in the musical domain: music from the Second World War”) charting the rise of Boulez and his ideas, but bringing out those composers who were eclipsed because of his predominance. Three major “pillars” are isolated in Goldman’s informed perspective: Messiaen (of course) and Leibowitz (who taught Boulez) and Pierre Schaeffer, the father of electronic music as far as France was concerned.

Are there weaknesses? Only those age-old questions identified by Dahlhaus, essentially pointing out how difficult it is to write Musical History. Trezise addresses this in his preface, reminding us that we “are in a time of intense topical specialisation and anxiety about the very act of telling a historical story” (p. xvii). The alternative, perhaps considered and (wisely) rejected, to organize the book by genre, instruments, voices and their combinations, might have resulted in the filling of a few gaps in the repertoire: there isn’t an awful lot about the organ music of the *Grand Siècle* nor the importance of France in instrument manufacture and development. Minor quibbles! This excellent book is much more than a springboard and will provide an invaluable key for any Francophile wanting to deepen their knowledge of issues, periods and repertoire with which they are not so familiar: questions addressed by the contributors to this learned and expert volume.

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