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William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. xv + 334 pp. Tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.00 U.S. (cl.) ISBN 978-0-521-88260-6.

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Although musicologists have long analyzed the programming practices of specific national and historical repertoires, William Weber is the first scholar to attempt a more complete history of programming practices; that is, a broad study of principles or strategies as they relate to the interaction between audience and composer/performer.[1] A study of programming practices can be valuable precisely because it can yield insight into how the performers and composer assessed both musical works, and the likelihood of audience appreciation of these works. As such, it can be understood as the intersection of reception studies (which focuses on audience response) and history of style (what was composed). By “packaging” a work—especially a new one—in a particular way, performers and composers simultaneously express their opinion of both the work and their audience.

William Weber is one of the leading social historians of music. His earlier work, *Music and the Middle Class* is in many ways a prelude to the present volume, providing a sound sociological basis for understanding musical developments in nineteenth-century Europe.[2] *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste* is far more ambitious than *Music and the Middle Class*, however, treating the period from 1750 to 1875 with an epilogue extending this period to 1914, and with a more complete geographical sampling. In addition to analyzing the obvious and necessary cities of London, Paris, and Vienna, Weber adds two others, Leipzig and Boston, that have been much less studied but whose programming practices yield rich insights. The expansion of the focus to these five cities on two continents allows for an understanding of how certain repertoires became internationalized, such as Handel’s oratorios, which became popular all over Europe in the final decades of the eighteenth century.

Weber’s work fits into an ongoing dialogue in modern musicology about the history of listening. The issues raised by James H. Johnson’s *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History*, have been countered in numerous articles by Weber and others, and *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste* is a more extensive contribution to this important debate.[3] For Weber, the history of programming is a necessary corollary to a history of listening.

This is an amply illustrated book which contains over a hundred reproductions or transcriptions of concert programs. These programs, many of them unknown prior to their inclusion in the present study, not only make it easier to follow Weber’s analyses, but they will also serve as raw material for future musicological research. Weber is to be commended for the clarity of his presentation of this material. For example, his addition of a cross next to the name of composers who were deceased at the time of a given concert is a simple yet extremely effective way to communicate one of the most important changes in programming practices during the period in question: the canonization of repertoires from earlier eras. In the 1770s, the organizers of the London “Concert of Antient [*sic*] Music” defined “ancient” as any music that was more than twenty-years old (p. 70). But as Weber demonstrates,

this attitude changed radically over the next few generations. When the young violinist Bartolomeo Campagnoli gave a concert in 1785, his repertoire spanned a thirty-year range; when Clara Schumann gave a recital in 1862, her repertoire spanned a 150-year range (p. 35). Similar patterns can be seen in orchestral programming. In the 1780s only eleven percent of the repertoire of the Leipzig Gewandhaus was composed by deceased composers, compared with eighty-five percent in the 1870 season of the Vienna Philharmonic (p. 169).

A critical factor in the survival of older works was the increased demand for repertoire in the expanding array of concert-giving venues and the more intensive seasons of established opera houses. The Paris Opéra, for example, was obliged to have a *tragédie* by Lully ready at any moment in the event of a failure in the ongoing repertoire (p. 66).

One of the most startling revelations offered by Weber's study is the extreme rarity of solo performer concerts before the second half of the nineteenth century. For example, in all of the musical performances documented in London during the period 1750-1800, only one concert given by a single musician can be identified: the performance by a French woman singer-pianist in a tavern (p. 65). Even the word "recital" came into general use only after 1840 (p. 160). On the contrary, the typical eighteenth-century program—whether in London, Paris, or Boston—would have included numerous musicians and a dozen different works from a variety of styles, alternating between overtures and songs, symphonies and quartets, and instrumental solos and operatic arias. The guiding principles here were those of "Miscellany and Collegiality," which happens to be the title of the first part of Weber's book.

Weber singles out several key figures as having been particularly influential in shaping concert programming during the long period under scrutiny. He rightfully acknowledges the seminal importance of the quartet concerts led by the Viennese violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh (1776-1830).[4] Prior to these concerts, Viennese programs invariably featured vocal music, interspersed with instrumental works. Schuppanzigh's programs, serious evenings of exclusively string quartet music, amounted to a "declaration of independence" from earlier programming assumptions (p. 123). He was largely responsible for the view held by many today that the chamber music concert is the purist musical performance event. Even the inclusion of the piano in quartet concerts led by the Parisian violinist Pierre Baillot (1771-1842) was rare as the instrument was considered tainted by its commercial appeal to amateurs (p. 132). A later figure who became extremely important for her approach to programming was the composer and pianist Clara Wieck Schumann (1819-1896). Her performances of works by Bach, Beethoven, and her husband Robert Schumann made for especially challenging concerts for audiences of her time. She was one of the first to perform Beethoven's piano sonatas in public in the period before 1850 (p. 164).

Indeed, Weber convincingly shows how a number of our modern assumptions about classical music have their roots in the programming practices of earlier times. For example, the "Antient Concerts" in eighteenth-century London attracted a predominantly aristocratic subscriber base; presaging the strong link between elite publics and canonical repertoires that characterised the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (p. 70). Similarly, the programming model of today's "new music" concert has its roots in many heterogeneous chamber music programs from the early nineteenth century.

One of the predictable results of a book such as this is that one appreciates the degree to which certain composers and works deemed secondary today were overwhelmingly popular in earlier times. We learn, for example, that Michel-Richard de Lalande (1657-1726), was by far the most frequently performed composer in France in the decades following his death (pp. 73-74), and that Louis Spohr (1784-1859) and George Onslow (1784-1853) were much more important figures than we often realize. Weber is to be commended above all for his attempt to explain why these lesser-known composers and their works appealed to a given public. In relating the fact that Cherubini's overture to *Anacréon* (1803) was the most performed work in the repertoire of the London Philharmonic Society during their first half century of

existence, Weber also notes “audiences were captivated by the contrast between its heavily sensuous main theme and several boisterous climaxes, one of which anticipates the storm at the end of Act I” (p. 174). Without such explanations, Weber’s study would give the impression of a tedious series of programs and tables.

Musical sensitivity is rare in historians, and there are few places in this book that betray any lack of musicological knowledge. That said, one wonders why, in reference to Mozart’s fairly well-known 1789 replacement aria “Al desio di chi t’adora” from *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Weber cites an article from [www.mozartforum.com](http://www.mozartforum.com) as opposed to any number of the standard sources in Mozart scholarship (p. 182). Similarly, Weber repeatedly uses the generic term “ballad” without ever providing a definition, which is rather problematic for non-specialist readers. These are of course minor matters, which in no way detract from the overall clarity of Weber’s style and persuasiveness of his arguments.

#### NOTES

[1] For exemplary studies of programming practices of specialized repertoires, see: Clarence Brenner, *The Théâtre Italien: Its Repertory, 1716-1793*, University of California Publications in Modern Philology, vol. 63 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963); Constant Pierre, *Histoire du Concert Spirituel 1725-1790* (Paris: Société française de musicologie, 1975); Mary Sue Morrow, *Concert Life in Haydn's Vienna: Aspects of a Developing Musical and Social Institution*, Sociology of Music No. 7 (Pendragon: Stuyvesant, N.Y., 1988). For corrections and additions to Morrow’s list of public concert programs, see Dexter Edge’s review article, “Mary Sue Morrow”, *Concert Life in Haydn's Vienna*, in *The Haydn Yearbook XVII* (1992), pp. 108-166; Neal Zaslaw, *Mozart's Symphonies: Context, Performance Practice, Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); and Simon McVeigh, *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[2] *Music and the Middle Class: The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris, and Vienna, 1830-1848* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2003).

[3] James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). See for example, William Weber, “Did People Listen in the Eighteenth Century?” *Early Music* 25(1997):678-691.

[4] See Robert Adelson, “Beethoven’s String Quartet in E Flat Op. 127: A Study of the First Performances” *Music & Letters* 79/2(May 1998):219-23.

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