

Editorial

Twentieth-Century Music – Ten Years On

As this journal enters its second decade of publication, we might pause again to consider what is meant by ‘Twentieth-Century Music’. At a recent meeting of the Editorial Board the inevitable question was raised of how the journal relates to music in the twenty-first century. Is this a journal of a historical period now definitively closed, like *Eighteenth-Century Music*, for example? Or does its title imply a ‘long twentieth century’ akin to the long nineteenth, in which case how do we decide upon its constitutive boundaries? Or does it really mean ‘Music Since 1900’ (following the biennial conference of the same name) shaped by an ongoing interest in the new, in all its forms, without any historical endpoint? The lack of any clear or unitary answer to such questions is of course symptomatic of our field: we don’t yet know what the twentieth century is, where it starts or where it ends. This is a problem because, for ‘twentieth-century music’ to be a meaningful historical idea, as opposed to a merely chronological label, we would need some frameworks by which to understand the period as some kind of distinguishable entity, however messy, contested and porous.

But this problem can be viewed as a productive one. Addressing this foundational question is perhaps the principal purpose and value of a journal such as this. The contributions of individual scholars, from detailed and highly-focused empirical articles to wide-ranging theoretical pieces, take on an additional dimension within the context of the journal. If it is doing its job, *Twentieth-Century Music* should be more than the sum of its parts, attempting, through the evolving content of each volume, to understand the musical practices of the last hundred years or so and to elaborate a network of connections by which they make sense. In that respect, *Twentieth-Century Music* occupies a particularly exciting place in musical scholarship, helping to create the very frameworks through which we think a period of musical history that has yet to be defined. And if the question of historical boundaries were not challenging enough, how should we make sense of the apparently exponential spread of material musical practices, genres, repertoires, technologies, geographies – to say nothing of the diversity of methodological approaches that these have generated? The two things are of course related: the rapidly changing nature of what music is, how and where it is made and by whom, itself characterizes the music of the last hundred years or so.

The launch of *Twentieth-Century Music* on such a wide intellectual and disciplinary platform ten years ago was itself an acknowledgement and advocacy of this idea. The musical practices and repertoires embraced by the journal are those which have helped to define music in the period it covers. Possible foundational moments are as varied as the points of view they represent – Edison’s invention of the phonograph in 1877; the growth of popular music publishing in Tin Pan Alley after 1885; the first public screening of a moving picture

by the Lumière brothers in 1895; the spread of popular African-American music from the 1890s; the development of comparative musicology by Carl Stumpf and Erich von Hornbostel in the early 1900s; to say nothing of the plural stories of innovation and tradition in musical modernism unfolding from Russia to North America, Spain to Finland, and Ireland to Greece. A quite different set of stories, but with overlapping chronologies, are derived from the modern histories of regions and nations outside of Europe and North America.

The articles published in *Twentieth-Century Music* over the last ten years not only reflect this sense of the diversity of musical practice but have helped create the frameworks through which we might understand it better. Looking back over the last ten volumes, one is struck – not just by the sheer range of topics – but the productive overlap of methods of enquiry between genres often kept separate by the sub-disciplinary boundaries of more discretely defined journals. The impact of new technologies on the nature of the musical object, for example, has been explored in the pages of *TCM* in terms of how we produce, access and engage with all kinds of repertoire – from early music to contemporary pop and world music, from video installations to computer games – as well as its influence on the changing role of the performer and musical institutions in the context of new performance situations and audience expectations. Articles which explore aesthetic and analytical questions in relation to concert-hall music rub shoulders with those that assess the politics of musical performance, the marketing and reception of world music, or the complex interactions of the visual and the aural. Such an approach, crossing and questioning the borders of our discipline is admirably embodied by many articles appearing in the journal's first decade, none more so than Philip V Bohlman's 'Analysing Aporia' (*TCM* 8/2, 133–51) which was recently awarded the 2013 Jaap Kunst Prize by the Society for Ethnomusicology.

To be sure, this is a bewildering and heady mix. For some, it is exactly that of the twentieth century itself; for others, it suggests a heterogeneity of material practices and objects which it is the business of scholarship to order. More than a decade after the end of the twentieth century, scholars seem less sure of what it was than before, but that is perhaps equally true of earlier periods of music history, which have also been radically rethought in recent years. Making sense of the twentieth century is undoubtedly an evolving process without any definitive end. It is, however, a proper task for this journal and one we hope to see future issues tackle in direct ways. To that end, we envisage the regular appearance of themed issues in the coming volumes, with the aim of drawing out pivotal questions that cross genre and period boundaries.

The current issue adopts this approach, taking as its theme the idea of transcription. In 'Sonic Anthropology in 1900: The Challenge of Transcribing Non-Western Music and Language', Jann Pasler considers the issues raised by recordings made by Léon Azoulay at the Paris Exhibition of 1900. Azoulay made over 400 phonograph recordings of the speech, song and instrumental music of people from all over the world (now recently digitized). His attempts to transcribe some of them necessarily involved 'facing the crevices between the oral and the written' and 'coming to grips with the materiality of human difference as manifested in voice, language and music', tasks no less challenging for us more than a century later. A similar concern with the gap between the materiality of sound and its graphic notation is

explored by Erinn Knyt in 'Between Composition and Transcription: Ferruccio Busoni and Music Notation'. Knyt considers Busoni's attempts to develop a new layout of the musical stave that would relate more directly to the physical dimension of instrumental performance (specifically the piano) in order to lessen the misalignment of compositional idea, musical notation and performance. In her article 'Whose Bird Is it? Messiaen's Transcriptions of Australian Songbirds', Hollis Taylor deploys her ornithological expertise to analyse the characteristic traits of the composer's distinctive treatments of his avian subjects. Juxtaposing sonograms of Messiaen's original source recordings with both Messiaen's and Taylor's transcriptions makes clear the extent to which any attempt to translate from the oral to the written involves an act of composition.

In place of a fourth article, we have included in this issue a substantial Forum on Transcription, convened and edited by Jason Stanyek. In conversation with twelve participants, drawn from an unusually wide spread of sub-disciplinary approaches, Stanyek opens up a set of key questions key to the work of many colleagues – from the nuts and bolts of how one does transcription to the larger questions of why, and the ways in which our understanding of diverse musical practices is altered by engaging with them through transcription. His co-locutors include composers, ethnomusicologists, linguistic anthropologists, and scholars of popular music, as well as academics working on computer music technology, music cognition, commercial ringtones and gaming, and our understanding of the musicality of birdsong and animal calls. The results are fascinating, as much for their wide-ranging differences as for their surprisingly frequent points of contact.

The themes of future issues have yet to be determined, and in deciding upon them our goal is to remain responsive to emerging points of convergence and connection within current scholarship. If there are ways of making sense of twentieth-century music and our contemporary relation to it, they are certainly not to be drawn by any editorial foreword. As the journal enters its second decade it is more apparent than ever that the notions by which we understand our field arise from our collective work – here, among these pages, as elsewhere. To that end, *Twentieth-Century Music* remains a key forum for exploring our changing understanding of the history of the contemporary.

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