

REVIEWS



BOOKS

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DIETRICH BARTEL, TRANS. AND ED.

ANDREAS WERCKMEISTER'S MUSICALISCHE PARADOXAL-DISOURSE: A WELL-TEMPERED UNIVERSE

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Still regularly, and incorrectly, credited as being the first theorist to have defined equal temperament, Andreas Werckmeister (1645–1706) has enjoyed the dubious honour of being better known for what he did not write than that which he actually did. In fact, his writings engage with a surprisingly eclectic range of issues. In addition to his better-known texts concerning tuning systems and organology, Werckmeister also proffered contributions to counterpoint, notation and liturgical practice, as well as to the long-running discourse regarding music's relationship with theology and metaphysics. He was clearly highly regarded by his contemporaries. In one of a pair of congratulatory poems appended to Werckmeister's *Harmonologia musica* (Leipzig: Calvisius, 1702), Dieterich Buxtehude praised the author for his efforts on behalf of his fellow musicians:

He [Werckmeister], my Friend, has considered well,
in the book, and excerpted,
what is most useful to art,
honestly and unfeignedly,
he has also become workmaster,
Praiseworthy in the order of muses.

(English translation in Kerala Snyder, *Dieterich Buxtehude: Organist in Lübeck* (New York: Schirmer, 1987), 127).

His own limited successes as a composer notwithstanding, Werckmeister's name has most frequently appeared in modern times within the footnotes of Bach scholarship. He has been cited particularly by scholars whose work explores the connections between number and theology in Bach's music, notably including Eric Chafe and Ruth Tatlow. (See Chafe, *Tonal Allegory in the Vocal Music of J.S. Bach* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), *Analyzing Bach Cantatas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) and *J.S. Bach's Johannine Theology: The St. John Passion and the Cantatas for Spring 1725* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), and Tatlow, *Bach's Numbers: Compositional Proportion and Significance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).).

Werckmeister was born forty years before Bach, in the Thuringian town of Benneckenstein – just sixty miles from Bach's birthplace, Eisenach. His biography bears many resemblances to that of the man who was to become Thomaskantor in 1723. Both were received into musical families, gaining from their elder relatives the formative training that would enable them to become celebrated organists. While neither Werckmeister nor Bach enjoyed a university education, or had any reason to venture far beyond their homeland, both became respected figures of the German-speaking musical world of the early eighteenth century.



Dietrich Bartel's translation of Werckmeister's final text, the posthumously published *Musicalische Paradoxal-Discourse* (Quedlinburg: Theodor Philipp Calvisius, 1707; hereafter *MPD*), is one of the most recent volumes in the Contextual Bach Studies series (general editor, Robin Leaver). The prefatory material stresses how the series aims to present texts which approach the theological and liturgical contexts surrounding Bach's music, as well as that of his predecessors and successors. Bartel's translation fulfils these ambitions on several levels, allowing English-speaking readers to gain, for the first time, a direct insight into Werckmeister's text, and thus a useful sense of the kinds of values espoused by orthodox Lutheran musicians of the late seventeenth century.

Werckmeister's final publication is paradoxical in many respects, bringing together a progressive rationalism with some decidedly antiquated metaphysical positions. Its twenty-six chapters deal with a wide range of subjects, from the modal system and the limitations of stave notation to the 'abuse of music' and the poor-quality singing of hymns. A palpable evangelical fervour is detectable throughout Werckmeister's writings, but this is particularly evident in the *Musicalische Paradoxal-Discourse*. In his sixth chapter ('On the abuse of music, Which the authorities could abolish') Werckmeister preaches that 'all musicians should strive for the fear of the Lord with greatest zeal, in order that they might offer their music to the glory of God' (79). The *MPD* portrays Werckmeister as a Janus-faced character who largely regarded music from a medieval, speculative perspective, while simultaneously gazing forwards and evincing shades of the post-Keplerian mindset that would characterize the discussion of music by Enlightenment thinkers, such as Mattheson, whose own writings make explicit reference to Werckmeister.

Even in his own time, Werckmeister's idiosyncratic syntax was perceived as difficult. In 1739 Bach's colleague Lorenz Christoph Mizler criticized Werckmeister's style as being 'rather disordered and un-German'. Recent years have seen the gradual appearance of Werckmeister's theoretical works in English translation, notably the *Cribrum Musicum* (1700) and *Harmonologia musica* (1702), issued together with parallel German and English texts, translated by Casey Mongoven (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon, 2013). However, considering the breadth of its content and the complexity of the issues it discusses, the *MPD* poses some particularly acute challenges for translators. Werckmeister's chapters are built on the strength of cumulative, self-referencing predicates, whose word order might appear incomprehensible even to native German speakers after multiple readings. Bartel deftly untangles Werckmeister's idiomatic constructions with real linguistic nuance, allowing his frequently complex ideas to resonate relatively clearly in English. For example, in the third chapter, 'How the mortal body and soul are harmonically created, and furthermore on the influence of the stars', Bartel lends Werckmeister's knotty prose an almost poetic guise:

Whereas the external is harmonic, finding its origin in and being created out of the internal, it must follow that God the almighty Creator himself is a harmonic and agreeable being, for the external finds its origin in the internal and spiritual. For a being invariably produces and begets its likeness, which has an affinity and similitude with itself, delighting moreover in its likeness as its own image. (66)

In addition to his translation, Bartel also provides a comprehensive Introduction framing the *MPD* in the context of Werckmeister's life and his other theoretical writings. This is an extension of the material in Bartel's introduction to the facsimile edition of the *MPD* issued by Laaber Verlag in 2007. Bartel encourages the reader to use his translation in conjunction with the original, citing the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek copy now available online via the Munich Digitization Centre (<https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/resolve/display/bsb10527832.html>), providing the corresponding page numbers of the 1707 text within the body of his translation. While attempting to read the two versions in parallel would be a commendable exercise for graduate students, it also serves to emphasize the extent of Bartel's achievement in rendering the text in such lucid English. Bartel also retains many of the most important musical examples and diagrams in their original forms, enhancing the reader's sense of direct engagement with Werckmeister.

Although he was not university-educated, Werckmeister was clearly extremely well read, and the *MPD* is replete with frequently opaque classical and biblical references. Throughout the text, Bartel gives extensive



and informative footnotes, providing extremely useful literary and biographical contexts for Werckmeister's often oblique citations and presenting a number of particularly salient quotations in the original German. However, one of the real successes of Bartel's translation lies in the way it manages succinctly to articulate the text's occasionally elusive unifying themes. These are essentially based upon Werckmeister's understanding of music as the validation of God's existence, with its numerical basis being proof of intelligent design. An advocate of a 'third way' in contemporary debates as to whether music was best understood as being governed by *sensus* or *ratio* (that is, by the senses or by rationalism), Werckmeister drew on ideas from both camps, fusing them together in the course of his own writing.

In his Preface, Bartel proposes that Werckmeister should be studied in undergraduate curricula and considered as a figure of central importance in musical history, in light of the way his writings probe the 'ethical, spiritual, and philosophical questions concerning music' (xiv). Bartel attempts to show that, in the ways it responds to the fundamental issues regarding music's status in the universe, Werckmeister's theory – and the *MPD* in particular – might come to be seen as one of the main bridges linking the medieval and modern musical worlds. According to Bartel, Werckmeister's willingness to address the "so what" questions' is evidence of his place in 'the Great Tradition, of Kepler and of Galileo . . . of Kant and of Herder, of Schopenhauer and of Nietzsche' (xiv). This is surely stretching it a bit. While Werckmeister appears to have been remarkably well acquainted with the work of the preceding generation of German theorists – variously name-checking Lippius, Praetorius, Baryphonus, Printz and Kuhnau, in addition to Artusi and Zarlino – he reveals a surprising antipathy towards the latest developments by Italian musicians and theorists. Indeed, Werckmeister goes as far as to describe how his Italian contemporaries apparently 'remain mired in darkness and obscurity in their religion, [and] it appears as if God does not yet wish to remove this blanket of darkness from them' (117). In his attempt to rescue Werckmeister from being dismissed as a parochial figure, it is a little disappointing that Bartel does not attempt a substantive comparison between Werckmeister's ideas and those of contemporary luminaries beyond the German-speaking Lutheran world, such as Rameau, whose writings on harmony have obviously received far greater attention and scrutiny. As Thomas Christensen has shown, even in the relatively conservative theoretical tradition that persisted, many of Rameau's ideas concerning harmony were adopted by German theorists in the first half of the eighteenth century – even more so than in France (*Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 87–90). Considering the status of Werckmeister's legacy in light of this might have extended the scope of Bartel's claims.

None the less, this volume presents a significant addition to the bibliography. The quality of Bartel's work and the depth of context it provides will surely prove invaluable in helping to make Werckmeister's mature thinking accessible to both scholars and students alike. While much of Werckmeister's reasoning might come across as specious sophistry, this translation makes a strong case for his being a figure worthy of greater consideration in relation to broader questions concerning musical and cultural modernity, framing the tensions concerning *Ordnung* and *Ratio* that would characterize the musical Enlightenment. And though he remains unlikely to be granted immediate admittance into the pantheon of musical thinkers, this volume will undoubtedly help him to step out of the footnotes.

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