



BOOK REVIEW

## Kevorkian, Tanya. *Music and Urban Life in Baroque Germany*

Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2022. Pp. xii+352.

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Johann Sebastian Bach's last pupil, Johann Gottfried M $\ddot{u}$ thel (1728–88) spent the final two decades of his life as a church organist in the Baltic city of Riga, far to the northeast of the three central German cities (Erfurt, Gotha, and Leipzig in the Lutheran—and Bach family—heartland) and two Bavarian ones (bi-confessional Augsburg and Catholic Munich) brought to sounding life in Tanya Kevorkian's vigorously researched, resonantly detailed, and often tuneful book. The organ that M $\ddot{u}$ thel presided over in Riga's Petruskirche rose some three stories up the west wall and was an orchestra unto itself. Kevorkian's previous book, *Baroque Piety: Religion, Society, and Music in Leipzig, 1650–1750* (Routledge, 2016) was animated by the sometimes unruly churchgoing practices and behaviors of Bach's time; in the present book, she confirms that, whatever the artistic imperatives of the organist, his main purpose was to bring order to full-throated and often chaotic congregational singing. To fulfill this task, his instrument had to be loud. But, as Kevorkian also shows, it was not just the organ that organized people: a multi-layered “mix”—as modern sound designers might say—shaped temporal, social, and political structures, sonically enmeshing people from different classes, neighborhoods, professions, and religious persuasions.

M $\ddot{u}$ thel was also a renowned player of the clavichord, hailed by its devotees as the most expressive keyboard. It was also the quietest. Intent on having his ruminative fantasies undisturbed by the clattering of carts over cobblestones and kindred urban annoyances, M $\ddot{u}$ thel refused to play his clavichord for friends except when snow blanketed the city. The blaring of trumpets and tolling of bells would also likely have perturbed Riga's resident keyboard genius when sharing his intimate musical secrets. Other musicians and townsfolk less eccentric, or perhaps just less egotistical than M $\ddot{u}$ thel also knew how boisterous the baroque city could be. Those moderns who yearn for the imagined calm of urban life in the Age of Bach, will be sonorously disabused of this notion by Kevorkian's often entertaining and always thought-provoking study.

Even the snowstorms wished for by M $\ddot{u}$ thel couldn't mute the trumpet-playing tower guards (*T $\ddot{u}$ rmer*). From the balconies of church towers, these municipal musicians provided unobstructed aerial accompaniment for processions, announced the approach of a monarch's carriage, cheered the arrival of holidays, and provided the essential quotidian service of, in Kevorkian's apt phrase, “marking collective time” (63). The Erfurt tower guards also blew a simpler horn than a trumpet every quarter of an hour, and these smaller brass instruments were used in the other cities too. A Munich tower guard instruction from 1650 described this operative's main duty as “herald[ing] the day with trumpeting” (*den Tag anblasen*) (52). In Leipzig, and elsewhere, that day apparently started with a Lutheran chorale at either 2 or 3 a.m., though for some the tune merely bifurcated the night. Either way, the music provided a kind of city-wide alarm clock jingle heard by all residents. Sunset and the mid-morning height of the business day in mercantile Leipzig were also heralded. These hymns heard from on high not only divided the day into its constituent parts but reminded all that they lived in a theocracy, even as encroaching modernity and the joys of consumption—including music—inexorably eroded church control.

Kevorkian is keenly attentive to the demands of musical work and is adept at placing us in these musicians' buckled shoes. The snow yearned for by some clavichordists would require the *T $\ddot{u}$ rmer*

to blow from church towers high above the city in biting cold weather, making it painfully difficult for the him to “shape his lips” (63). Whatever the climatic conditions, tower guards may have played “relatively simple tunes,” but, writes Kevorkian, “the stakes were high” (63). All in town could—indeed, should—hear these chorales that were known by heart by almost everyone.

In Leipzig, some of the closest ears belonged to the city music director, Johann Sebastian Bach, and his wife, the talented professional singer, Anna Magdalena. Their apartment was next to the tower of St. Thomas Church. Anna Magdalena’s father and her three brothers were all trumpeters. Her husband also counted tower guards on his side of the family tree. In one of many memorable scenes, Kevorkian’s first page conjures Anna Magdalena listening discerningly to the nearby trumpeter delivering his evening chorale. Augsburg employed one Catholic and one Lutheran tower guard, each playing for the weddings and other occasions of those of their own confession. Only when two trumpets were called for did they join in a harmonious duet.

The lives of these many, indefatigable laborers are evoked not just with archival rigor but with human feeling. The Augsburg trumpeters petitioned the city council to allow them to have their wives join them in their tower rooms, thus allowing the men to fulfill, as the 1549 document cited by Kevorkian puts it, their “marital duty” (60). The council granted the request, but just once a month. By 1749 their successors were permitted to descend from their posts and go home between 7 and 9 p.m. each day. Slow was the progress of musical labor rights.

Down on the streets, watchmen called out the half-hour through the night by singing out the time, blowing a horn, or sounding a noisemaker. Complaints were inevitable, and protocols enjoined these mobile timekeepers and proto-policemen to make their voices as pleasing as possible. During the day, shoppers jangled coins and haggled with vendors, hawkers shouted and sang; the cacophony reached a crescendo during trade fairs. Some of these tunes, like those of a certain scissor sharpener, made their way into picturesque compositions like one by Sebastian Knüpfer, a predecessor of Bach as director of music in Leipzig.

As these cities got richer after the devastations of the Thirty Years’ War, more and more forms of leisure spread into the night; with the increase of musical entertainments in coffee houses and taverns, the sounds of people and song not only filled these interiors but spilled out onto the street. In other civic and domestic spaces, we encounter celebrations intimate and outsized: weddings (a major source of income for municipal musicians) and the ensuing afternoon feasts; town council investitures; grand commemorations lofted to the autocrats of the age. The middle of the eighteenth century also saw the rise of what would become the public concert, most prominently in Leipzig, and Kevorkian suggests that, as musical sound was increasingly transformed into an art to be revered, its “proper” place became the concert hall. Music faded from squares and towers.

Even during the heyday—and night—of baroque civic music, concerted works in church and elsewhere, including organ music and the more elaborate ensemble pieces presented by city musicians from the balcony of townhalls, were forbidden during the official periods of mourning that followed the death of monarchs. Bells, too, could project public joy or dolor. Silence enforced awed reverence for the departed but also cleared sonic space so that celebratory music for the new ruler could resound all the more triumphantly when it came at last. Yet, if music could be both an expression of, and salve for, sadness, then denying ears and souls this balm strikes one now—and perhaps more than a few then—as cruel.

Music performed from the church tower was usually relatively simple stuff. Far more involved were some of those works heard down below, especially come Sunday morning. As Kevorkian demonstrates, J. S. Bach cannily deployed Leipzig’s Town Musicians (*Stadtpfeifer*) not just for musical reasons but also in support of his political and personal maneuverings. She draws our attention to a series of concerted vocal works (“concerted” meaning a choir and/or soloists heard along with independent instrumental parts) from 1730, a fraught period for the director of music. Bach was then at odds with some members of the city council, and his job hung in the balance. Purposefully deploying the full might of the civic musicians in complex music from his pen gave sounding force to his artistic skill and professional prerogatives. After performing a demanding brass part in Bach’s cantata, *Preise dein Glücke, gesegnetes Sachsen* (BWV 215), the Leipzig trumpeter Gottfried Reiche succumbed to the

smoke from festive torches lighting the nocturnal celebration put on in the town square for the new Saxon elector, Frederick Augustus III on 6 October 1734. Sound could not only uplift and energize but also, as now, harm.

Kevorkian tells us that the decline of urban music began with the ravages of the Seven Years' War in the middle of the eighteenth century and continued apace under the forced economies of the Napoleonic Era. Industrialization and mechanization finished off the tower guards. An attempt to collect the last of their tunes was made in the early twentieth century, but the project was abandoned with the outbreak of World War I. Kevorkian notes that in a few German towns of the present reenactors serve up a tiny, tepid taste of the baroque urban symphony—just not at 3 a.m.