

**Walter Frisch. *Music in the Nineteenth Century*.
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Teaching music of the nineteenth century to music majors brings its own special challenges. Because so much of the music that students have heard and performed dates from this century—and also because it was immediately followed by a style period that is still challenging for many listeners—some students think of the nineteenth century as a kind of comfort zone, a time they already know and understand. As a result, they may be less open to new ideas and perspectives on this period than they might be on others that are more of a blank slate to them. These challenges make the ideas that inspire the series *Western Music in Context* all the more welcome. As series editor Walter Frisch says in the preface to the series as a whole, “Music is a product of its time and place, of the people and institutions that bring it into being” (xiii). Referring to the nineteenth century in particular, he adds, in the author’s preface to this volume, that

an appreciation of this rich legacy requires more than frequent exposure. It demands an exploration of the historical, social, and cultural contexts in which

the music was created and heard. Many music histories, written primarily as a narrative of great composers and works, fail to achieve this goal (xv).

Until this book appeared, I was never sufficiently happy with any text to use it as the basis for my semester course on the nineteenth century; instead, I designed the course and materials on my own. When this text was released, I adopted it immediately, and I am now using it for the second time.

The book's greatest strength is its attention to multiple contexts. While emphasizing the central composers and works that are commonly included in any survey of the period, it also acknowledges music from outside the canon, such as music published for amateur performers and virtuosic music that is now mostly forgotten. Frisch gives ample attention to the intellectual backdrops against which music was composed and performed. For example, in Chapter 2 he goes quite deeply into the Romantic movement, with numerous quotations from Romantic intellectuals across Europe (e.g., Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, Victor Hugo, Friedrich Schlegel, Giuseppe Mazzini, and William Wordsworth) and explanations of aspects of the movement such as romantic irony and the conflict between fantasy and reality. I find this chapter extremely strong; my only small criticism is that Frisch writes about the attraction of Romantics to Christianity without the qualification that many of them interpreted that religion very loosely.

Frisch also pays ample attention to how historical and political circumstances were connected to the arts. Some examples: he sets the scene of Austrian life in the *Biedermeierzeit* by considering the effects of Metternich's government, and ties his characterization of Johannes Brahms's and Anton Bruckner's differing approaches to the symphony to a discussion of the different religious and class identities of each composer's most appreciative audience. The business aspect of music is also acknowledged through commentary on the roles of such figures as publishers and opera impresarios.

This combination of material provides a network of connections that makes it possible to paint a complex and multilayered view of the nineteenth century. The Mendelssohn family is a fine example. The text discusses both Felix and Fanny and goes into the reasons, based both in class and gender, that they had similar musical training as children but then moved on to different types of musical lives as adults. This opens the door to many important discussions that bear on music: the changing attitudes of Jews in the nineteenth century that can be attributed in part to Moses Mendelssohn, the range of situations faced by Jewish musicians at different times and places (an opportunity to compare Mendelssohn and Gustav Mahler), nineteenth-century attitudes toward women in artistic professions, and more. When I tell my students that Mendelssohn's aunt Dorothea married Friedrich Schlegel, they know who Schlegel was because

of Frisch's earlier chapter on the Romantic imagination and can put that information into a broader picture. I used to try to create this type of picture on my own; now I have a text that supports me.

While the book's thirteen chapters are not separated into groups, Frisch implicitly divides the century in two halves. Chapter 1 opens with "Nineteenth-Century Music and Its Contexts." Chapter 2, titled "The Romantic Imagination," provides the intellectual context for the first half of the century, setting up the background to support the next four chapters. Chapter 7, "Beyond Romanticism," does the same for the second half of the century, supporting chapters 8–10 and 12. Chapter 11, "Musical Life and Identity in the United States," and Chapter 13, "The Sound of Nineteenth-Century Music," address broader topics that span the whole century.

Within the first half of the book and the century the material is subdivided in an interesting and original way. Chapter 3, on "Music and the Age of Metternich," focuses on various types of music in Vienna, contrasting musical worlds: Ludwig van Beethoven's late style, different sides of Franz Schubert's creative life, and the virtuoso realm. Frisch then moves to opera and approaches it in four countries (Italy, France, Germany, and Russia) with attention both to stylistic qualities and to business circumstances. This organization by topic differs from that adopted by John Rice in the previous volume in the series, in which all chapters are place-based.¹ Chapters 5 and 6 are artfully titled "Making Music Matter" and "Making Music Speak." The first addresses various types of music criticism and performance, while the second emphasizes the link of music to the word in program music and the character piece.

Frisch subdivides the second half of the century somewhat more traditionally, according to genre and/or composer, with one chapter focusing on Richard Wagner, another on Giuseppe Verdi and operetta (an interesting pairing—he links them because both had great popular appeal), and another on symphonic developments in various parts of Europe. The last chronological chapter takes on the style changes at the *fin de siècle*, with particular attention to Richard Strauss, Mahler, *verismo*, and Claude Debussy.

Anyone who teaches this course has doubtless struggled with the question of what repertoire to include. The second strength of this text is its flexibility in this respect. Frisch provides information about important musical developments and their links to broader contexts, along with references to relevant musical works, accompanied by brief notated music examples. For an instructor who chooses to use those particular works for focused study, the companion anthology provides scores and analytical commentary. Someone who prefers to emphasize different works can use this text equally well. For example, I have long chosen to teach *Harold en Italie* rather than the *Symphonie fantastique* as an

1. John Rice, *Music in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Norton, 2013).

example of Hector Berlioz's program music, in part because my students have already worked with the latter in their earlier, full-year survey. This works quite well in tandem with the textbook. We can read its discussion of the *Symphonie fantastique*, recall what we already know about that piece, and then consider the other work comparatively.

One refreshing quality of the series is its awareness of places and circumstances outside Europe—for example, John Rice's comment in the volume on the eighteenth century that "the coffee that stimulated intellectuals and artists, and the sugar that made the coffee palatable, were both products of slave labor."² Since the focus of Frisch's text remains European, the chapter on music in the United States is necessarily limited in scope. It makes interesting comparisons among three parts of what will eventually be the United States: Boston, Spanish colonial America, and New Orleans. For each place it emphasizes one individual and sometimes the institutions associated with him: Lowell Mason and the Handel and Haydn Society, Father Narciso Durán and the Spanish missions, and Louis Moreau Gottschalk. In each case Frisch points out links to European traditions and finds a common impulse to use music for educational and socially beneficial purposes. He goes on to consider briefly the songs of Stephen Foster and the growing interest in opera and classical music in the United States.

One issue that always looms over any text is the question of whether and how much it reinforces the canon of repertoire that we teach and study. Some readers would surely prefer to see more attention to the periphery of Europe and perhaps to the popular traditions that coexisted with the classical. Frisch opens the doors to those discussions through some attention to Russian and Czech nationalism on the one hand and operetta on the other, but does not explore other regions (Scandinavia, for example) and other popular genres. This is worth mentioning—but of course any text on this century will have to leave out much important music.

The pieces Frisch chooses to explore in depth strike a good balance. In the anthology we find a few works that make an appearance in most collections, such as the Habanera from *Carmen*, the first two songs of *Dichterliebe*, and Musetta's Waltz from *La Bohème*. Several are drawn from canonical works but present different movements or sections than those in other anthologies: for example, the second movement of the *Symphonie fantastique* and Isolde's Act I narrative to Brangäne. Similarly, Frisch discusses the Passacaglia from Brahms's Fourth Symphony in the text, but then chooses the first movement of the First Symphony for the anthology. Finally, there are works that may surprise, including Hugo Wolf's Mörike song "In der Frühe," "He, watching over Israel" from *Elijah*, and Gottschalk's piano piece *La gallina*. For each piece in the anthology Frisch provides incisive commentary consisting of a brief

2. Rice, *Music in the Eighteenth Century*, 5.

historical contextualization followed by an analytical description. At times he provides his own explanatory interpretation for the particular musical choices; for example, on the chorus from *Elijah*, he concludes that

Mendelssohn's chorus thus traces a broad arc, starting from and returning to a mood of comfort, passing in between through turbulence and instability. The musical structure is perfectly calibrated to the emotional and spiritual design (p. 96).

To conclude, I find this text uniquely satisfying. Some instructors will prefer to use other textbooks that hold to the lives-and-works tradition. On some topics, such books offer more detailed information. What I find so compelling about this book is the degree to which it shows the interweaving of many historical strands, just as one would hope and expect in a series called "Western Music in Context." This quality makes it possible to broaden our students' perspective by presenting a complex and nuanced view of how the classical music tradition interacted with other aspects of life in the nineteenth century.