

**Esther M. Morgan-Ellis, ed. *Resonances: Engaging Music in Its Cultural Context*. Dahlonega, GA: University of North Georgia Press, 2020. xi + 552 pp. Open access. \$29.99. ISBN: 978-1-940771-31-1 (paper)**

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Finding the most appropriate textbook for a music appreciation course requires patience and thoughtful consideration. For decades, a handful of editions have dominated the market. With slightly varying focuses, these books traditionally present canonic Western art music composers and compositions chronologically, situated within defined historical eras, and are accompanied by listening guides and study questions. In recent years, standard content has expanded to include a few noted women, persons of color, and sometimes connections to non-Western musics. These enhancements are important, but they often manifest as isolated add-ons—tokens as it were. Thus, in a never-ending quest for some perfect combination, new textbooks regularly appear from both established and less-recognized publishing companies. Yet very few achieve large-scale distribution. Every so often, however, a scholar introduces a product with the potential to break into the circle of favored texts.

*Resonances: Engaging Music in Its Cultural Context*, edited by Esther M. Morgan-Ellis, may do just that. The volume has generated quite a bit of buzz since its announced release in early 2020. The textbook was written by Morgan-Ellis and nine of her University of North Georgia music colleagues, whose areas of specialty range from applied performance to composition to music education. All the contributing authors teach music appreciation, providing a well-rounded, practical, and thoughtful presentation, and Morgan-Ellis's editorial guidance assures a consistent authorial voice throughout. A featured story on the University of North Georgia website notes that the book has already been adopted by at least thirty U.S. universities.

While some standard features of *Resonances*, such as listening guides, bolded vocabulary words, and recommended audio links, are commonly found in other music appreciation texts, there are several factors that markedly set this

new textbook apart. The first is the edition's status as an open access textbook. Students and instructors can download the full volume in .pdf format at no cost. For those students who prefer hardcopy, a paperback version is available for a reasonable \$29.99. In our current era, when large portions of the student population are struggling financially, a well-written, high-quality, easily accessible music appreciation text is quite appealing. The edition does not include as many digital and multimedia bells and whistles as some of its competitors, but the tradeoff is well worth it, especially as some established publishers have adopted the practice of issuing expensive new editions more frequently than necessary, while making supplemental digital components available only with newly purchased copies of the latest version of their standard texts.

Also notable is this book's topical, rather than chronological, approach. After a standard introduction that includes an overview of musical elements, subsequent units center on musical storytelling, music in public venues, at court, and at home, nationalistic and political music, and a catchall of "functional" music, which examines religious and other spiritual music, as well as marches and dances. A final unit guides students through historical attempts to evaluate musical value, by examining five selected Pulitzer-Prize-winning compositions that span some seventy-five years. This section would work well at semester end, highlighting changes in style over time, reinforcing concepts introduced earlier in the text, and instilling a recognition that determining musical longevity is a complicated, and often biased, process. While I quite enjoyed this unit and would include it in my own courses, the section could easily be eliminated if necessary, due to time constraints. There is much more musical and historical content found in this textbook than can be covered in a single semester-long course. The editor's introduction makes it clear that instructors should pick and choose among chapter sections, or even complete chapters or units, to best fit their own interests and those of their students.

*Resonances* is not the first music appreciation textbook to offer a topical organization, but the edition's combination of musical selections from different time periods, places, and musical styles feels fresh and enticing. Folk and popular music, jazz, film music, musical theater, and music of non-Western cultures are interspersed within chapters that also feature Western art music. For example, the music of John Williams and King Oliver stands alongside that of Wagner, Stravinsky, and Holst, and Beyoncé's songs are represented in the same chapter as Schubert, Bobbie Gentry, and traditional *kumbengo* recitations. The book consistently references other selections within and across chapters, creating connections. And although musical examples are quite varied, the role of Western art music is in no way diminished, for it forms the core of the text. There is still much more discussion of "composed" music than of other genres,

but the way in which other styles are juxtaposed against more traditional fare serves to decenter a feeling of canonization.

A large number of twentieth- and twenty-first century art music and jazz compositions are provided for listening and study throughout the volume. These range from symphonic to choral to experimental genres. Female composers receive notable representation, and a special focus is placed on music of the United States. Well-known composers are present, from Beach to Bartók and Cage to Shostakovich, and some newer names such as Caroline Shaw and Catherine Likhuta propel content and analysis into contemporary times. Twentieth-century composers of color, such as Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Duke Ellington, and Florence Price, find their place within appropriate topical sections. The nineteenth century is also well represented, though less diversely than the twentieth century, with almost two dozen compositions discussed from the time of Beethoven to that of Dvořák.

Earlier music, however, is much less visible and certainly less diverse. Musical examples from the Classical era are limited to the big three: Haydn (with one composition featured), Mozart (five compositions mentioned in a different chapter), and Beethoven (six compositions referenced across three other chapters). While such deliberate separation de-emphasizes the importance these composers are typically afforded as a group, it is a bit disappointing that no others, especially from marginalized communities, are included from this time. Equally distressing for those of us who value early music is the lack of pre-1700 material. While the high Baroque is fairly well represented, Renaissance music is limited to featured examples by Dowland and Palestrina (and for those who would place Dowland on the cusp of the Baroque era, Palestrina stands alone). An overview of Gregorian chant, the Comtessa de Dia's one surviving troubairitz song, and Hildegard von Bingen provide the only illustrations of medieval music.

Traditional and composed music from non-Western cultures is not really featured any more predominantly than in many of the popular music appreciation text revisions of recent years, but once again the topical organization of this edition makes it feel as if there is greater diversity. Perhaps this perception results from the treatment of these musical examples as an integral part of chapters, interspersed alongside art music selections, as opposed to being sectioned off as supplemental material. Admirably, the range of featured non-Western music is expansive, with inclusions from Israel, South Africa, the Caribbean, China, Indonesia, India, the Ukraine, and selected Northern African nations. It is somewhat puzzling then, in a book that consciously highlights music of the U.S., that there are no musical examples from any North American indigenous peoples. Certainly there are many fine, accessible pieces that would fit well into the chapters on

storytelling, music for spiritual expression, dance, or nationalistic/protest music. Likewise, there is a lacuna of musical examples from Mexico, Central and South America. But to be fair, choosing content is always difficult, and there is never a way to include everything, especially in a book that already runs more than 500 pages. Further, there is nothing to prevent instructors from providing their own supplemental inclusions, based on personal preference.

Future editions of the textbook might reconsider the anglicization of composition titles and the presentation of translated texts without side-by-side presentation of the original language. The choice to use primarily English titles seems a bit perplexing in a book that seeks to contextualize music culturally. It also gives the sense that the volume addresses an audience much younger and less sophisticated than that for which it is marketed. While some titles, such as *The Rite of Spring*, *The Four Seasons*, and *The Magic Flute*, have indeed become standard in their English forms over time, there is no reason why college students—even those in the general population who are not actively studying music—cannot recognize and use titles such as *Symphonie Fantastique*, *L'Orfeo* or “Wachet auf,” for language helps to situate compositions in their original place, time, and function. This, of course, is a relatively small matter, and should not detract from the many good features of *Resonances*.

The textbook concludes with three appendices: instruments of the Western orchestra, which some instructors may want to expand to include Sachs-Hornbostel classifications, thereby widening vocabulary for non-Western and early music selections; a list of the book's featured musical examples organized either by historical era, style, or wider geography; and a useful glossary to which students should be directed by their instructors from the very start. Supplemental instructor materials, available upon request, include a set of learning objectives for each chapter, a multiple-choice test bank, and PowerPoint slides in .ppt and .pdf formats for in-classroom or online use.

*Resonances* is obviously a labor of love, developed over time by a team invested in student learning. As the musicological community struggles to balance tradition with more inclusive representation in the public sphere, this textbook offers a welcome compromise. More importantly, *Resonances* promises to whet the musical appetites of the many students who will grace our classrooms for semesters to come.