

James R. Briscoe, ed. *Vitalizing Music History Teaching*. Monographs and Bibliographies in American Music, 20. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2010. 202 pages. \$36.00. ISBN 978-1-57647-162-3.

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Recent years have seen a surge of interest in music history pedagogy under the sponsorship of the American Musicological Society—its Pedagogy Study Group, its annual Teaching Music History Day, and now this *Journal*. The collection under review, *Vitalizing Music History Teaching*, is published under the auspices of the College Music Society and derives from a multi-year series of workshops and sessions sponsored through the CMS by the volume editor, James Briscoe, and others. It seeks to combine the efforts of the two societies, enrolling a number of prominent scholars concerned with both research and pedagogical method to engage with philosophical as well as pragmatic questions on the teaching of music history into the twenty-first century. The variety of approaches provided in the three large sections of the collection—“Teaching Principles,” “Teaching Strategies,” and “Teaching Content”—inherently opens the collection to a critique of incoherence, and those seeking systematic pedagogical methodology will not find it in these pages. To be sure, the authors have not sought to provide a systematic approach, and their essays are explicitly framed as offering suggestions/reflections, rather than conclusive prescriptions. Inasmuch as a text can be read selectively for inspiration and discussion, *Vitalizing Music History Teaching* is without question the best available textbook for a graduate-level music-history pedagogy course (especially since a similar and excellent predecessor, Mary Natvig’s *Teaching Music History*, is regrettably only available in hardback at a prohibitive price).¹

The book is most easily purchased directly from the College Music Society at <http://www.music.org/cgi-bin/showpage.pl?tmpl=/profactiv/pubs/mbam/mbam20&h=29>.

1. Mary Natvig, ed., *Teaching Music History* (Aldershot, Hants and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000).

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An excellent feature of the book is the companion web site that provides audiovisual examples for the essays (all of which flag the central URL, <http://www.music.org/vmht/>), giving the authors the opportunity to exemplify pragmatic pedagogical suggestions. In the opening essay “How Can You Teach What You Don’t Know? . . . and Other Tales from Music History Pedagogy,” Michael Beckerman uses online visual examples to great and creative effect, and his engaging prose builds on his central contention that the teaching of music history is best approached through “a series of open-ended questions rather than half-hearted or unconvincing answers,” suggesting that “students at just about any level are most excited when they are invited into the enterprise and make contributions to understanding.” (p. 18) This notion of a learning partnership is perhaps the most dynamic—vitalizing—contribution of the collection, and the editor was wise to put it at the start. Per Broman (“The Good, the True, and the Professional: Teaching Music History in an Age of Excess”) builds on Beckerman’s suggestion, focusing on ways to stimulate critical thinking in the process of building engagement; his essay is more circumscribed, with a focus on a single case study.

The inclusion of considerations on ethnomusicology was an essential decision, not only because it’s unconscionable to ignore vernacular and non-Euro-American traditions given their centrality to twenty-first-century musical culture, but also because institutions are increasingly demanding such attention to cultural diversity in the music-and-culture curriculum. Gavin Douglas’s contribution (“Some Thoughts on Teaching Music History from an Ethnomusicological Perspective”), however, is a bit disappointing to this reviewer, focusing as it does on the unfortunate paucity of references to ethnomusicological concerns in the main music history textbooks (so what’s the solution?) and on discussion of some well-worn ethnomusicological studies of the Western art tradition (such as Kingsbury, Nettl, and Small). These are important resources, and those unfamiliar with Small’s notion of “musicking” will gain useful insight from Douglas’s summaries, but this is not exactly new ground. Nevertheless, the specific pedagogical suggestions that Douglas raises (giving students the assignment to discuss a music-related event without reference to musical specifics, or creating course trajectories that are function- or context-related rather than straight-chronological) are solid and, if adopted, would usefully complicate the canonic narrative that is pervasive especially in conservatory-modeled music programs.

James Parakilas (“Texts, Contexts, and Non-Texts in Music History Pedagogy”) provides a useful challenge especially directed to those teaching music history to students who identify primarily as performers, suggesting ways in which various “non-textual” features of history (or “texts” that may be more open or contingent than might initially appear) can help deepen engagement for those who are trained to think of musical scores as fixed and all-telling resources. Douglass Seaton’s essay (“Teaching Music History: Principles,

Problems, and Proposals”) is more diffuse—it reads almost as a compendium of “helpful hints for the beginning music history teacher”—and thus touches on issues similar to those raised by other authors. Because of this, a reader working through the essays in order might be less engaged by its suggestions. But if it were considered alongside the other essays and used as a resource in a pedagogy classroom, its differences of emphasis could stimulate fruitful debate. The same could be said for Sandra Stauffer’s contribution (“Process, Passion, People: Pedagogical Notes for Musician-Scholar-Educators”), which provides a perspective from pedagogical theory and research that reinforces the arguments about engagement brought forth by Beckerman and Broman. Perhaps least satisfying in this opening section is the very brief set of remarks by Wade Weast, Dean of the School of Music at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts (“Music History Teaching in the Twenty-First Century: An Administrator’s Perspective”). While it certainly is important to include the voice of an administrator—support from “above” is essential for any significant reform of pedagogy—this reviewer wishes that the statements provided by Weast had not been quite as general, sympathetic though they are, and had been more clearly directed at the role of music history (complex and multifaceted though it may be) in the mission of departments or schools of music, colleges of arts or humanities, and universities.

The second section, “Teaching Strategies,” focuses on more specific case studies—these will be more or less useful to the reader/teacher depending on the student population that one is likely to encounter and the kinds of courses for which one is responsible. Matthew Balensuela’s hands-on analytical project concerning eighteenth-century theoretical sources (“Music History/History of Theory: Dynamic Tensions between Theory and Composition in the Classical Era”) is an excellent model of how students can engage directly with historical texts while understanding the continuity between their theory and music history courses—a continuity that is all too often lost through curricular logistics. Balensuela’s approach suggests a deep engagement with a more limited set of examples rather than a “coverage-focused” attempt to discuss as much material as possible, and the following essay by James Briscoe (“Avoiding the Slough of Despond, or, Teaching by Touchstone”) reinforces this idea with a systematic discussion of teaching music history through “touchstone” examples as well as a case study on how such an approach might be put into place. In questioning the purposes and assumptions of “survey” teaching, Susan Cook (“Teaching Others, Others Teaching, or Music History Like it Mattered”) again returns to issues of ethnography and historiography, and for this reviewer at least the challenges she poses to “make room . . . for other voices and the voices of the Other” in order to “help us answer those central questions: so what and who cares?” (pp. 134–35), and her suggestion to articulate a clear “mission statement” for one’s pedagogical approach, are more powerful and better articulated than in any other essay of the collection. In

contrast with the “meta-intensity” of principle and methodological questioning in Briscoe and Cook’s essays, Barbara Hanning’s contribution (“Teaching Music History through Art”) on the potential for the pedagogical intersections of music and visual art examples (especially with reference to stylistic-historical categories such as “Classical,” “Romantic,” etc.) is both more directly pragmatic—with very clear case studies and examples of possible parallels to draw—and perhaps also less soul-searching, for better or for worse. (This reviewer could almost imagine Cook asking Hanning, “why do you want to draw those comparisons?” But again, the lack of unifying “message” is not a flaw if one understands the collection as a resource for discussion.)

The three case studies in the final section of the book, “Teaching Content,” are each very valuable, and their titles are self-explanatory: Robin Elliott proposes guidelines for “Teaching Canadian Music in Undergraduate Music History Courses,” Jessie Fillerup suggests ways to engage students with the fullness of experimental tradition in “Cage & the Chaotic Classroom: Pedagogy for the Avant-Garde,” and Jeanne Halley questions the absence of discussions of bodily movement in the pedagogy of a crucially movement-defined tradition in “A Mysterious Lacuna: Reconsidering the Exclusion of French Baroque Music and Dance from the Curricula.” This last section of the collection is arguably the least “filling”: the three case studies almost beg to be supplemented by others, since they only begin to answer the earlier call by Cook to ensure that “other voices” be heard in the teaching of music and culture. But perhaps this is as it should be, since it emphasizes the necessary permanent incompleteness of the project—by their very scarcity these examples might encourage the reader (and here again one might think of the graduate pedagogy seminar) to develop additional “case studies” that each might require particular pedagogical methodologies and answer the multiple “so what” questions that this book raises so effectively.

All along, this review has been imagining a graduate course for which this collection could function admirably as a textbook—and not only for musicology students, since individuals with doctorates in other areas of music will often be put in a position to teach music history, especially in a small institution where one is asked to wear many hats. Indeed, the CMS has provided a remarkable resource in publishing this volume, just at a time when the AMS is strengthening its commitment to issues of pedagogy at an institutional level. But these initiatives will only bear fruit if PhD programs in musicology establish a parallel commitment to systematic coursework in pedagogies of music history—such coursework must be taken as seriously as any research seminar. Only when pedagogies of music history are as central to young scholars’ self-identity as their research will the essential common goals of this collection and this *Journal* be realized.