

Richard Taruskin and Christopher H. Gibbs. *The Oxford History of Western Music, College Edition.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 1,212 pp. \$85.00. ISBN 9780195097627

Oxford Anthology of Western Music. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Volume One, The Earliest Notations to the Early Eighteenth Century.

David J. Rothenberg and Robert R. Holzer, eds. 534 pp. \$42.50.

ISBN 9780199768257 (paper)

Volume Two, The Mid-Eighteenth Century to the Late Nineteenth Century.

Klára Móricz and David E. Schneider, eds. 802 pp. \$42.50.

ISBN 9780199768264 (paper)

Volume Three, The Twentieth Century. Klára Móricz and David E.

Schneider, eds. 604 pp. \$42.50.

ISBN 9780199768271 (paper)

Oxford Recorded Anthology of Western Music. Audio tracks in MP3 format; compilations copyright 2012 Sony Music Entertainment.

Vol. 1, 2 CDs, 164 tracks, 10 hours and 16 minutes. \$71.95.

ISBN 9780199768288

Vol. 2, 3 CDs, 112 tracks, 12 hours and 52 minutes. \$71.95.

ISBN 9780199768295

Vol. 3, 2 CDs, 93 tracks, 8 hours and 39 minutes. \$71.95.

ISBN 9780199768301

Concise edition: key selections on 3 CDs. \$90.00.

ISBN 9780199768318

ROBIN ELLIOTT

This lavishly produced (hardcover, wide margins, copious color illustrations), authoritative (the Taruskin/Oxford imprimatur), and comprehensive (1,123 pages of text) tome stakes a claim for domination of the

Journal of Music History Pedagogy, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 195–201. ISSN 2155-1099X (online)

© 2013, *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, licensed under CC BY 3.0

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

textbook market for the undergraduate music history survey course sequence. For decades the Grout/Palisca/Burkholder textbook enjoyed an almost unrivalled position in that market.¹ In recent years, serious challenges to the hegemony of the Grout (et al.) textbook were mounted by Seaton, Bonds, and Wright/Simms, among others.² Taruskin/Gibbs now looks set to become the textbook of choice for instructors wishing to offer their students a serious, in-depth introduction to the history of Western music. Competitively priced, and with abundant supporting materials in print, sound, and online formats, it sets a new standard of excellence. I just hope that there are enough music history survey courses left standing at this late date to justify the expense and effort that went into the creation of this textbook and related materials. As I will explain at the end of the review, I have my doubts on that score.

Richard Taruskin's contribution to this book consisted of allowing Christopher H. Gibbs to make a one-volume reduction of his magisterial *Oxford History of Western Music*. It must have been no easy feat to shrink five volumes and 4,000-plus pages of material to one quarter of its size. We learn in the Acknowledgments (p. xxxi) that this College Edition was six years in the making, a testament to the difficulty of Gibbs's task. The opinion of over sixty music history professors was sought during the development phase of the project, which no doubt prolonged its gestation period. The work was overseen by an eleven-member editorial advisory board (including the four editors of the anthology volumes), a further tribute to the project's sterling academic credentials. Due credit must be given to Rebecca Maloy, who created the timelines, musical examples, maps, chapter summaries, and links to the three-volume anthology of scores with related recordings, all of which make the book user-friendly for the undergraduate students who will be its principal readers. Beautifully designed and produced to the highest standards, the book is a treat to look at, although wearying to hold for any length of time because of its substantial weight.

Ancillary resources for the textbook include a website, with a password-protected section for instructors, and three hefty volumes of music scores with matching volumes of recordings. As an added bonus, students are given free access to Oxford Music Online for eighteen months with their textbook purchase. The CD recordings are in MP3 format; be forewarned that most CD

1. J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 8th ed. (New York: Norton, 2010). The first edition, by Grout alone, was published in 1960.

2. Douglass Seaton, *Ideas and Styles in the Western Musical Tradition* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1991; 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Mark Evan Bonds, *A History of Music in Western Culture* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003; 3rd ed. 2010); Craig Wright and Bryan Simms, *Music in Western Civilization* (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Schirmer, 2006; 3rd ed. Boston: Schirmer Cengage Learning, 2010).

players are not MP3 compatible. If you try, as I did, to play these CDs on traditional CD players the resulting noise is extremely unpleasant!

Given the vast, indeed almost limitless, amount of material that could be included in a textbook of this scope, what choices have been made and why? The prefatory matter in the book states that the focus is on “a lasting canon of musical excellence” (p. xx), and indeed, what are music history textbooks for if not to reinforce and validate the canon? But it also claims that the book “foregrounds the people” and “emphasizes the connections among works” while at the same time aiming to “cultivate ways of historical and critical thinking” (p. xx)—tall orders, to be sure. As Melanie Lowe has noted, the Burkholder textbook in its narrative account foregrounds the people, while Bonds concentrates on the music.³ Taruskin/Gibbs aims to include it all—the people, the musical works, and the context—and to describe it all in more detail than ever before. In referring to the Bonds textbook recently, Taruskin criticized the fact that “following in the latest trends in textbook publication, [it] has very little continuous text but consists in the main of bite-sized verbal clumps.”⁴ No bite-sized clumps here. There is not a single sidebar in the entire book; every chapter unfolds as an unbroken narrative from start to finish. Indeed, the entire book is one continuous narrative, which opens and closes identically. The first sentence is “Our story begins, as it must, in the middle of things” (p. 1), and the last sentence is “Our story ends, as it must, in the middle of things” (p. 1,121). *Ma fin est mon commencement*, as Machaut stated. Taruskin/Gibbs state that this Machaut rondeau is notable for its “intellectual cleverness and intricacy of detail” (p. 109); the very same could be said of their textbook.

Just as with the *Oxford History of Western Music*, which devoted significantly more space to the music of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so too in this College Edition “the last two hundred years of music history are given enhanced coverage . . . the works that are most salient to today’s students” (p. xxi). Just 463 pages are needed to cover the story from antiquity up to Mozart, whereas 660 pages are devoted to the music of the past 220 years. One could argue that this is simply acquiescing to one of the most striking developments in musicological practice of the past twenty-five years: the wholesale abandonment of research into the music of earlier eras. Of the book’s thirty-six chapters, only six are devoted to Medieval and Renaissance music. Indeed, the very term Renaissance is abandoned. An interesting essay on “Periodization” at the end of Chapter Three concludes that “the term

3. Melanie Lowe, “Teaching Music History Today: Making Tangible Connections to Here and Now,” *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 1, no. 1 (2010): 45, n. 1; <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/17/24>.

4. Richard Taruskin, “Non-Nationalists and Other Nationalists,” *19th-Century Music* 35, no. 2 (2011): 134.

[Renaissance] serves little purpose for music history except to keep music in an artificial lockstep with the other arts” (p. 127).

Gibbs sums up the approach of this book as follows: “The trick is to shift the question from ‘What does it mean?’ to ‘What has it meant?’” (p. xxx). The inherent quality and value of the music itself, though still obviously important, is now less emphasized, while issues pertaining to reception history are given more weight. In short, a shift has taken place from a work-centered approach to a listener-centered one. There are discussions, sometimes quite detailed ones, of actual pieces of music in the book, but the main thrust of the work-centered component has now shifted over to the anthologies. The three-volume anthology, with nearly 2,000 pages of scores and detailed analytical and contextual introductions to each work, places the music itself front and center. Clear annotations in the margins of the textbook refer the reader to the relevant anthology scores and recordings, allowing for integrated use of these materials. There is ample information here to keep students occupied for a music history survey sequence of four courses spread out over two years. And good luck to those students who are expected to digest these materials in any less time than that.

Four composers are rated as important enough to be the subject of an entire chapter: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert. Bach and Handel share two chapters, one on their instrumental music and one on their vocal music. Wagner and Verdi share a single chapter. Other composers given substantial treatment here include Mahler, Strauss, and Schoenberg. This predominant focus on Austro-German composers is to be expected. However, given Taruskin’s exhaustive writings on Russian composers, it is surprising to see them being given comparatively short shrift. Stravinsky receives adequate treatment (but not more than that) in two chapters, one on modernism in France (Chapter 28) and one on neo-classicism (Chapter 30). But Rimsky-Korsakov, his teacher, gets barely a mention. Taruskin wrote recently that “as Russians are often shocked to learn, Rimsky-Korsakov is not taken very seriously by musicians and music scholars in the West.”⁵ This book does nothing to correct that attitude. The English do not fare well, either. Britten is given six pages, but Elgar rates just a single paragraph, half of which is about Hans Richter’s efforts to promote his music. And don’t get me started on Canada. Canadian instructors who adopt the textbook should be forewarned that their students will get the very clear message that it is their country, not England, that is “Das Land ohne Musik.” Only two Canadians, Henry Brant and Colin McPhee, are mentioned in the book, and both men spent most of their career in the United States. (Incidentally, one Canadian is pictured but

5. Richard Taruskin, “Catching Up with Rimsky-Korsakov,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 33, no. 2 (2011): 170.

not identified: the percussionist on the far right of a photo of the Steve Reich Ensemble on p. 1,075 is Russell Hartenberger, a former Dean of the Faculty of Music at the University of Toronto.)

To get the nitpicking over with, the musical example on p. 768 is missing its key signature after the first system; “were” on the last line of p. 40 should be “where”; and “in motet” at the bottom of p. 146 should read “in a motet.” The book has clearly been meticulously copy-edited and proof-read, as these were the only three errors that I found.

The authors do give a rationale for the small amount of space devoted to composers (such as Rimsky-Korsakov and Elgar) who are popular with audiences but not with music historians, in a short essay titled “Innovation and Popularity—‘Canon’ versus ‘Repertory,’” that is tucked into Chapter 26 (pp. 778–80). The essay ends on a confusing note, though. Having explained that composers whose music “supposedly makes stylistic progress” (p. 779) are the only ones to be granted canonic status, the essay ends by complaining “but that is a poor criterion of selection; it plays into the historicist purposes that more recent historiography, including this book, has sought to challenge” (p. 780). A fairly extensive discussion of Puccini follows (pp. 780–84). While devoting this much space to Puccini could be thought of as challenging the paradigm of stylistic progress, numerous examples could be cited to show how the textbook buys into that very same paradigm. This is the contemporary musicologist’s dilemma: our narratives of music history are based on the canon, but once we tinker with that narrative by including “repertory” pieces as though they were “canonic,” the inherent logical consistency of our enterprise is compromised.

The only major issue I have with the Taruskin/Gibbs textbook is that it at times fails to distinguish between interpretations and facts. Though not a pervasive problem, this is a persistent one that occurs from time to time throughout the narrative. At the bottom of p. 118, for instance, *Non avrà ma’ pieta* is called “one of Landini’s most popular ballate,” as though this were a commonly known fact. Really? Popular with whom? Popular in his day, or now? How is this popularity measured? What evidence is there to support this assertion?

To consider the interpretation-versus-fact issue more closely, the case of Dufay’s *Nuper rosarum flores* is instructive. The work is given an extended discussion in both the textbook (pp. 121–24) and the first volume of the anthology (pp. 100–1). I have used *Nuper rosarum flores* in my music history pedagogy course to examine the processes by which we write music history, and the relationship between the musical work itself and commentaries upon it, i.e. between fact and interpretation. In an article in 1973, Charles Warren stated that the isorhythmic proportions of Dufay’s motet, which was created for the consecration of the Cathedral of S. Maria del Fiore in Florence in 1436

(fact), mirror the architectural proportions of the cathedral (interpretation).⁶ Warren's interpretation duly made its way into music history textbooks as fact, and it was the story about Dufay's motet that was related to me when I was an undergraduate music student. In 1994, however, Craig Wright argued that Warren's analysis of the architectural proportions of the cathedral was deeply flawed, thus rendering his interpretation invalid. Wright proposed an alternative interpretation: the motet relates to the proportions of King Solomon's temple, as given in the Bible (1 Kings 6:1–20).⁷ Textbooks, including Taruskin/Gibbs, have changed their tune accordingly, stating that the proportions of Dufay's motet relate to King Solomon's temple, and not the Cathedral of Florence—as though this were a fact. In 2001, however, the architectural historian Marvin Trachtenberg wrote a convincing essay to demonstrate that Dufay's motet may be referencing *both* Solomon's temple *and* the Florence Cathedral.⁸ In the Oxford anthology, Rothenberg and Holzer's discussion of the Dufay motet mentions its relationship to both Solomon's temple and the Florence Cathedral, but without citing any secondary literature, they give the impression that these are facts, rather than interpretations, about Dufay's music. A student reading both the textbook and the anthology discussions of the Dufay motet may be confused: do the proportions of the music relate to the biblical temple, the Florence Cathedral, or both? The student will also likely miss the larger issue, which is that we don't know any of this for a fact. Interpretations of music and its "meaning" are provisional—at best we can offer an educated guess, a convincing argument, a solid theory, but nothing more than that. Dufay's music has not changed since 1436, but our guesses as to what he had in mind when he wrote it have. Students like facts and struggle with interpretations, but we need to do more than give them interpretations posing as facts. It is that struggle which will bring them to the very heart of our discipline, and show them why it remains an exciting, ever changing, rewarding adventure.

I have an enormous respect for what this book represents and what it accomplishes. The textbook and its ancillary materials offer as comprehensive and balanced an account of the mainstream of Western music history as we are likely to get. And yet when reading it, I found myself vaguely troubled by the whole enterprise, without quite knowing exactly why. I sensed it had

6. Charles W. Warren, "Brunelleschi's Dome and Dufay's Motet," *The Musical Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (1973): 92–105.

7. Craig Wright, "Dufay's *Nuper rosarum flores*, King Solomon's Temple, and the Veneration of the Virgin," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 47, no. 3 (1994): 394–441.

8. Marvin Trachtenberg, "Architecture and Music Reunited: A New Reading of Dufay's *Nuper rosarum flores* and the Cathedral of Florence," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2001): 740–75.

something to do with the fact that such a comprehensive account of the history of Western music should appear at a time when we are busily dismantling the entire edifice—both musical and academic—upon which this account rests. It is both troubling and yet somehow mildly reassuring that I found the precise reason for my unsettled mood within the pages of the book itself. In a section titled “Aesthetics of Pastiche,” which is about postmodernism in general, and Rochberg’s String Quartet No. 3 in particular, the authors reference Umberto Eco’s novel *The Name of the Rose*. They write, “The Italian writer and intellectual described the dilemma of ‘belatedness,’ a sense of coming after everything that mattered” (p. 1,098). The source of my mild unease was not my own belatedness (real though that is), but rather the textbook’s. This superb account traces the progress of Western music from a Stone Age bone flute (pp. 1 and 3) to the operas of John Adams and Kaija Saariaho (pp. 1,117–21). But I cannot find solace in the fact that the story ends with a discussion of the late-twentieth century rebirth of interest in opera; not when we have already read that “opera in essence ceased as a major living genre” (p. 949) when its role and function were subsumed by cinema. No, these cultural artifacts—the operas of Adams and Saariaho, and indeed the textbook itself—will one day be read as the last gasps of music and musicology as we once knew it. Like the Easter Island statues, the Taruskin/Gibbs book will perhaps remain a puzzling artifact of a long-dead culture. No wonder I was disheartened as I came to the end of the book. “The implication is indeed depressing” (p. 1,098).