Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-Century Music (review)

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spective recognition of the global impact of the Great War for the entire century' (p. 428). In his final sentence Watkins states that '[i]n the process of fashioning a ''ritual that never was'' for an edifice [the old Coventry Cathedral] that stood only as a ghostly, skeletal reminder, the meaning as well as the meaninglessness of the Great War had found a new and resonant echo' (p. 429). By this close, Watkins has offered soundings of a vast range and diversity, and has adventurously pursued the elusive realms of meaning. His book is sure to be echoed in this new century's studies of the Great War's impact on the musical culture of the Allied nations.

Stephen Downes

Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-Century Music. By David Metzer. pp. viii + 230. New Perspectives in Music History and Criticism. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, £47.50. ISBN 0-521-82509-1.)

This remarkable book covers a lot of ground: where Glenn Watkins's massive *Pyramids at the Louvre: Music, Culture, and Collage from Stravinsky to the Postmodernists* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), which David Metzer names as a reference point, deals only with concert music, *Quotation and Cultural Meaning* not only takes us from Ives to Stockhausen but also from Duke Ellington to the underground scene of sampling artists, not to mention T. S. Eliot, Francis Bacon, the comedienne Sandra Bernhard, and video artist Douglas Gordon—and all this in scarcely more than 200 pages. But the difference between Watkins's approach and Metzer's is that while the former attempted something like a comprehensive history of musical borrowing in the twentieth century, the latter presents individual case studies.

More significant, however, are the differences in outlook: what in Watkins is generally depicted as an area of mutually beneficial cultural interchange, Metzer describes as a series of battlefields where cultural anxieties are acted out, claims of historical legacies made and contested, symbols of authority erected and overthrown. For, as Metzer puts it, quotation is a 'cultural agent' (p. 3); in other words, quoting means positioning oneself, confirming the authority of the quotation and hence one's own historical lineage from it, or undermining it, there being no such thing as a semantically and ideologically neutral quotation. Thus quotation touches on cultural identity, affirming it, problematizing it, or rejecting it. This is what makes the book so important in the present climate with its heightened concern for identity politics.

Consequently, Metzer's interpretations revolve around the use of quotation as a symbolic gesture. To name but a few examples, he demonstrates how Ives's quotations of song tunes function as nostalgic evocations of the ideal of small-town America that the composer associated with his childhood and that he saw as under threat from encroaching modernity, or how Ellington's use of a spiritual in *Black and Tan Fantasy* reacts to the discourse on race among the intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance. While he further regards George Rochberg in his Third Symphony as seeking salvation from the alienation of modernism in the past, he sees Stockhausen in *Hymnen* conversely annihilating the past in the name of a future utopia. Further on, he describes how sampling artists try to resist the power of the mass media by answering back (to be silenced by infringement-of-copyright cases).

The wealth of contextual materials and expertise that Metzer brings to all these discussions is exemplary, and his sharp and original insights make his analyses persuasive and compelling. Yet, the inclusiveness of the book, which is undoubtedly one of its strengths, may in a different way be also one of its weaknesses. The rationale for a series of case studies is presumably that they inform one another. One wonders whether this is actually the case in *Quotation and Cultural Meaning*. The inclusion of concert music as well as jazz and popular music creates a difficulty since during much of the twentieth century the former was premissed on the ideology of originality and stylistic integrity, which never attained the same status for the latter. Accordingly, in concert music quotation acted as a challenge to the prevailing ideology, whereas in jazz and popular music it is far less exceptional. To be sure, Metzer discusses more specific quotations in jazz than, say, a head arrangement of a standard; nor does he claim that his case studies are comparable. But what, then, is their juxtaposition supposed to reveal?

It seems symptomatic therefore that the general parts of the book—the introduction, an interlude, and the conclusion—make for less inspiring reading than the individual case studies. The reason may lie not so much in the inevitable repetitiveness that characterizes such chapters but, rather, in the fact that there appears to be little common ground between the different analyses; nor is there a sense that anything resembling a complete picture emerges.

One problem in this context is Metzer's apparent distrust of theory. For a discussion of the cultural meaning of quotation, one needs to ask how quotation acquires such meaning: in other words, what is required is a semantics of quotation—however provisional and incomplete. Such a semantics would also help to compare different instances of quotation, different ways in which meaning is constituted through the dialogic interplay of referential contexts. Although he does cite theoretical approaches to quotation, Metzer seems wary of allowing them to inform his own approach, with the exception of J. Peter Burkholder's work, which he mostly references instead of elaborating on it. In particular, the 'Interlude: Chronological Scenes' (pp. 69–73) seems primarily to serve the purpose of getting theory 'out of the way'.

As a consequence, Metzer's hermeneutics—if it can be called this—consists mostly of amassing contextual material in the hope that it may elucidate the quotational practice concerned. In Metzer's account, then, questions of authorship and originality, and of self and other, do not really arise. Despite appearances to the contrary, his is a safe world where distinctions between what is the original and what a quotation, what is referential and what non-referential music, or of who quotes from whom, can be undertaken with some certainty.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Metzer summarily dismisses post-structuralist theories of intertextuality that challenge such certainties (see pp. 165 ff. in particular). Nevertheless, this dismissal appears somewhat hasty, if not ill-informed. First, Metzer seems to assume that regarding every text as an intertext, as proposed by what might be called 'strong' theories of intertextuality, such as Roland Barthes's, makes differentiations between intertextual practices impossible. Yet this is erroneous: after all, Michel Foucault responded to Barthes's claim of the 'death of the author' with the question 'what is an author?', and subsequent developments of intertextual theories have led to a sophistication that one ignores at one's peril, well-founded scepticism notwithstanding.

But more important, what Metzer seems to miss is that the condition that Barthes in particular describes is what drove so many very different artists to quotation in the first place. What they had discovered is that authorship in an absolute sense, that is, as creation *ex nihilo*, is no longer tenable because referentiality is inescapable—which is precisely what Barthes had pointed out. Given that in the Western tradition art is seen as an expression of the self, this means nothing less than a loss of subjectivity as described by theorists of postmodernism (for whom Metzer does not have much time either)—hence Stockhausen's aggression against quoted material (a violent attempt to reclaim subjectivity), or the anxiety Metzer uncovers in the work of Berio and Rochberg, among others.

One way of reasserting subjectivity is to face referentiality head-on, that is, through quotation. But this means that quotation is only the outward sign of the impossibility of unmediated expression, which in turn implies that a categorical distinction between quoted material and direct discourse, which Metzer seems determined to uphold, is problematic. The self–other distinction between 'your music' and 'my music', which such an approach presupposes, ignores the fact that composers quote other music in order to make it their own, that they seek to express their subjectivity through it; one reason, as I have said, is the recognition that their 'own' music is contingent on outside influences—that is, that it is already to a certain extent 'other'.

When, as Metzer suggests, Sandra Bernhard's exclamation 'without you I'm nothing' can be seen to refer to the media celebrities she usurps and parodies (p. 208), what is at issue is precisely such a paradoxical attempt to reclaim subjectivity through mimicry and quotation. If so, then Metzer's aversion to post-structuralist theorizing prevents him from drawing connections between his case studies. What I mean is that Bernhard's case is not so different from that of the sampling artists who try to resist the mass media by usurping its products, or that of the post-war avant-garde composers who turned to history precisely in order to exorcize their sense of historical contingency. All are faced with what they perceive as a threat to their subjectivity by the anonymous workings of Baudrillardian simulacra that they seek to counter by partaking of the production of simulacra themselves, thus exercising a degree of control. In a world of simulacra the only authenticity that seems available is that of a simulacrum that does not pretend to be real.

This is not to say that Metzer negates these connections, and they may well be implicit in his choice of examples and in the interpretations he reaches, but he does not actually state them, and in order to draw them out, I, at least, had to enlist the help of the theories that he dismisses. Without a Barthesian notion of intertextuality and Baudrillard's related concepts of simulacrum and simulation, there would not be the threat to subjectivity that, as one can infer from

the subtext of Metzer's discussions, seems to drive these artists.

It may seem slightly unfair to criticize Metzer's book for what it does not do, rather than praising it for what it does, but I feel that an opportunity has been missed. There are also a few relatively minor problems among the individual analyses, some of which may be connected to the broader issues sketched above. For example, when, writing about the third movement of Ives's Fourth Violin Sonata, Metzer states that 'the absence of tonal closure in these passages, and in the movement as a whole, enhances the suggestion that the generation gap has not been sealed' (p. 42), he comes dangerously close to a hermeneutic free-for-all. The conventional idea that dissonance and tonal ambiguity suggest conflict, whereas consonance and tonal closure stand for resolution, seems not wholly adequate for such a composer as Ives—or at least this would first have to be shown. One wonders whether enough thought has been given to the semantics of decontextualization as well as to the dialectic between heterogeneity and stylistic integrity.

While this appears as a momentary lapse in otherwise sophisticated and thoughtful analyses, Metzer's repetition of the current orthodoxy concerning the post-war avant-garde is more problematic. Thus, in an unfortunate metaphor he states that post-war serialism attempted to 'create music that could exist without the blood of tradition' (p. 111), an attempt described elsewhere as a 'delusion' (loc. cit.) or 'arrogance' (p. 158). Such views blatantly disregard the historical context: to continue with the cultural business 'as usual' after the complete perversion and annihilation of culture would have been an utter betrayal of the very values this culture was supposed to embody. But Metzer goes further in describing quotation as some kind of exit strategy out of the dead end of serialism, a construction that is too neat to avoid normative and teleological accounts of history, as in the following passage: 'Such confidence [of being able to exploit the past] is perhaps exceeded only by the audacity of the integral serialists in trying to annul the past. Many of those same composers, of course, later turned to collage composition, and their chronological arrogance once again led them into a trap. If integral serialism traveled too far away from the past, collage idioms got too close to it' (loc. cit.). Here historical description has been replaced by ideological judgement with the supposedly 'golden' mean as absolute standard, a normativism that also seems to shape Metzer's interpretations of Stockhausen, Rochberg, and Berio (the first trying to crush the past, the second being subdued by it, and the third getting it just about right).

It may not even be so clear that quotation ever was an attempt to reconnect with history as it seems to have been on the surface: after all, quotations are history reified, commodified, cut off from their original context as well as from their new surroundings—something I suspect that composers, notably Berio, were well aware of (interestingly, Metzer never uses the word 'history', preferring to speak simply of the 'past', but this does not solve the problem). Again, the idea of a simulacrum seems more apt to describe the sense of *post-histoire* that many collage compositions of the 1960s and 1970s evoke.

All in all, then, this book will hardly be the last word on a fascinating topic (nor, to do him justice, does Metzer suggest as much). Nevertheless, for the acuteness of its analyses alone it is a must for everyone interested in the field.

Björn Heile

Britten on Music. Ed. by Paul Kildea. pp. xiii + 448. (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2003, £30. ISBN 0-19-816714-8.)

Britten, Voice and Piano: Lectures on the Vocal Music of Benjamin Britten. By Graham Johnson. pp. ix + 270; 2 CDs. Guildhall School of Music & Drama, Research Studies, 2. (Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and Ashgate, London and Aldershot, 2003, £29.95. ISBN 0-7546-3872-3.)

Benjamin Britten was hardly unique as a composer who loved setting words but loathed speaking or writing them. As he made clear in 1962 when receiving an honorary degree at Hull University, 'I admit that I hate speaking in public. It is not really a matter of natural shyness, but because I do not think easily in words, because words are not my medium. . . . I also have a very real dread of becoming one of those artists who *talk*. . . . The artist's job is to *do*, not to talk about what he does' (p. 214). The point was reinforced in 1963—'I hate talking about my own music, or my own musical inclination, & avoid it whenever I can' (p. 239)—and again, more poignantly, in 1970, at the time of crisis after the Maltings fire when, under extreme stress, he was trying to keep everything in balance. 'After all, one's main job *is* to write music, and one also mustn't sort of get ill by betraying one's real self' (p. 342). The poignancy is intensified in that the composer seems to be recalling Auden's high-