

JULIAN HORTON (ED.), *THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO THE SYMPHONY* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). xiv+452pp. ISBN: 978-0-521884-98-3 (hardback, £60), 978-0-521711-95-1 (paperback, £21).

Cambridge Music Companions number some thirty on composers, ten on instruments and nineteen, including the volume under review, on 'topics'. This Companion to the Symphony, the instrumental genre that bulks largest in modern concert life, is one of the longest. It falls into three large sections: Part I, a historical overview; Part II, 'studies in symphonic analysis'; and Part III, 'Performance, reception and genre', although 'genre' is under scrutiny throughout. The editor contributes two substantial chapters in Part II and an introduction ('understanding the symphony') that exposes the 'formidable historical, philosophical and analytical challenges that the symphony poses' (1). In assembling this volume, he is to be congratulated on overcoming some pretty formidable challenges himself.

The result is perhaps less than companionable to the average concert-goer who likes a bit of background information. Such people (and they do exist) might prefer a repertoire guide, with facts and listening guidelines. The best-known composers have inspired such studies, and a wider repertoire is covered in works such as those edited by D. Kern Holoman and the late A. Peter Brown (details are given in the Companion's impressive bibliography of over twenty pages). The index turns up entries for 20–25% of Mozart's and Haydn's symphonies. Composers with smaller outputs (even one as influential as Sibelius) are not guaranteed a mention for every work. Mahler, another pivotal figure, has all ten symphonies listed under his name in the index; for some reason the still more crucial Beethoven has his index entries distributed, with 'Fifth' and 'Ninth' under F and N, 'Eroica' and 'Pastoral' under E and P, the others being listed as 'Symphony No. 1' (etc.) under Beethoven.

The primary aim of this Companion seems to be not only to inform but to provide food for thought. If the chapters that cover large repertoires work least well, this isn't necessarily the authors' fault. A flood of names, some obscure, may mask, rather than illuminate, the detection of broader trends, as well as inviting the question: if X is in, why not Y? Of the three allusions to Franz Berwald, only one mentions a feature of his music, and that (261) is only an unusual modulation ('in the *Symphonie sérieuse*, the slow movement ... tonicises the lowered leading note'). One might conclude that this strikingly individual composer was more conservative than is actually the case; see Daniel M. Grimley's article in *The New Grove*, with examples from the splendid *Symphonie singulière*. Surely Rautavaara and Roussel merit more than a passing mention; Magnard is ignored. Elgar's Third Symphony, which he didn't write or conduct, has double the index references of his Second, which he did. But some such lacunae, or imbalances, are unavoidable in a project of this type. The whole must be acknowledged

as a thorough overview of the symphony and its contexts, with a number of deeper probes into this extraordinary product of (essentially) European civilization.

Symphonic output in the twentieth century was so diverse partly because there was none of the central control exerted on the nineteenth century by Beethoven. Any attempt to summarize inevitably leads to frustration. Alan Street, in 'The symphony, the modern orchestra and the performing canon', drops so many names that what seems most obvious is the absence of canon, at least since Sibelius fell silent. Street brings in recent developments, such as El Sistema and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra (411), and notes in passing interesting phenomena like performances of Elgar and Britten in Buenos Aires (404). Easier on the digestion are separate essays on the modern symphony in two of its principal homelands. Pauline Fairclough documents how a totalitarian (Soviet) regime exploited a cult of Beethoven around the centenary of his death. There is fascinating information on what critical distortions were required to make certain works acceptable. Berlioz's *Symphonie funèbre et triomphale* was 'frequently performed in the Soviet 1920s' (367) because the regime recognized the composer's 'revolutionary sympathies' and 'ideologically respectable biography'. Fairclough doesn't challenge this verdict; in reality, Berlioz's symphony commemorated the dead of 1830 to bolster the Orléans monarchy that had hijacked the July revolution, and his revolutionary sympathies were extinguished well before the next such event, in 1848. Presumably the Soviets couldn't admit this as they headed towards a harsher dictatorship than that of Napoleon III.

I would like never again to see or hear the silly expression 'land without music', with which Alain Frogley frames his (otherwise) fine essay on British symphonies. Frogley marks the polarity between London's royal conservatoires: the College governed by the Brahmsians Parry and Stanford, the Academy (whose pupils included Bax and Holbrooke) more eclectic in outlook. Among defining points was Elgar's First Symphony, and Frogley rightly notes that its orchestral sound-world is indebted to Wagner as much as Brahms, and to other sources ('lighter French composers': 381). Again, the sheer quantity of material requires movement through the later twentieth century so rapid that we read, for instance, that 'even ... more modernist, primarily atonal composers, such as Alexander Goehr and Jonathan Harvey, were still contributing' (391), without anything being said to characterize their work or help the reader who may wish to learn more.

The statement that Birtwistle has never turned to the symphony (390) reopens a question broached in various places: how to separate 'the symphony' from 'the symphonic'. Surely Birtwistle's orchestral works have symphonic qualities; and 'the symphonic' is not even necessarily orchestral. There are 'symphonic' concertos and chamber works, and 'veiled symphonies', as Schumann called Brahms's early piano

sonatas. John Williamson's account of 'The symphony as programme music' necessarily draws in symphonic poems, though not their predecessors, which are programmatic overtures. A page is devoted to Joachim Raff's symphony on Bürger's ballad *Lenore* (352) without mentioning other demonic rides: Duparc's symphonic poem on *Lenore*, or the splendid *Chausseur maudit* of César Franck. Not that there is too great a concentration on German music; several French, Russian and British composers make an appearance, with due acknowledgement of the seminal work of Berlioz and Liszt.

The quantity and variety of the modern symphony also affects David Fanning's Part I survey of 'The symphony since Mahler', which is particularly authoritative on Russian developments. I feel moved to question one of his points: he rightly claims that the aesthetic distance between Sibelius and Mahler 'defines a polarity that remains useful', but adds that it 'helps to explain why some major composers ... made little or no contribution to the symphony' (99). He lists four of them. With Schoenberg and Janáček, 'little' lets him off the hook because of their titles 'Kammersinfonie' and 'Sinfonietta' (Janáček's 'Danube' symphony is a posthumously 'realized' fragment). Though not little, Bartók's symphonic masterpiece is 'Concerto for Orchestra' (another symphonic genre that is not discussed). But with Debussy, the subtitle 'Three Symphonic Sketches' did not delude a perceptive critic, the late David Drew, from calling *La mer* 'arguably the greatest and most original French symphony'—a verdict difficult to dispute, Berlioz notwithstanding.

Authors in the remainder of Part III deal admirably with topics that are better suited to the available space. Mark Evan Bonds heads his chapter 'Beethoven's shadow', reviewing multiple responses to different Beethoven symphonies. Richard Will details the forces used in the classical orchestra which was the symphony's cradle and upbringing. This brings me back to the surveys in Part I. John Irving's judicious overview of the Viennese symphony in its heyday mentions that Haydn's later symphonies were 'written for London's, not Vienna's concert life' (16); he might have written 'Paris's and London's', unless 'later' applies only to the last twelve of over a hundred. He is very good on patterns of *listening* (his italics, 17) and contexts, including liturgical, in which symphonies might appear; and he makes a strong case for the neglected symphonies of Vaňhal. Mary Sue Morrow gives us the benefit of extensive research in her chapter on 'other classical repertoires', defining her methodology as 'socialist' in that 'it identifies no "major figures"', viewing 'symphonic composition as a collective enterprise in which thousands of composers participated' (29). This prepares us for the opening of Part II, Michael Spitzer's analyses of (sections of) 'Six great early symphonists'—Sammartini, Stamitz, Boccherini, Kraus and two sons of J. S. Bach—which is something of a *tour de force*.

Back in Part I, David Brodbeck writes on ‘The symphony after Beethoven after Dahlhaus’, whose Germanic perspective recalls Horton’s introduction, which introduced Wagner and Adorno on p. 1. Brodbeck challenges Dahlhaus’s assertion of post-Beethoven decline, a dead period until the emergence of Brahms. He doesn’t say this, but the text that opens his discourse (61) shows Dahlhaus at his most tendentious; he gives as models Beethoven’s ‘Third and Seventh symphonies, in the case of Berlioz; the Sixth, in the case of Mendelssohn; and the Ninth, in the case of Bruckner’. Bruckner never wrote a choral finale, whereas Mendelssohn wrote the *Lobgesang* and Berlioz a choral symphony *Roméo et Juliette*, having reprised earlier movements in his *Harold en Italie* finale on the pattern of the Ninth. Mendelssohn and Berlioz (and, unknown to them, Schubert) were both inspired to write fastish slow movements by the Seventh, and the Sixth (‘Pastoral’) is a clear model for the five-movement *Symphonie fantastique*. Brodbeck’s critique is fully justified, and his excellent discussion takes in Dvořák and Goldmark, and ranges as far as Schoenberg.

The toughest part of the book for those who are not, or are not on the way to becoming, musicologists, is Part II. It starts comfortably with Spitzer’s sprightly account of early symphonic movements; then Simon P. Keefe draws some adventurous, even disturbing, harmonic effects from Haydn and Mozart. Mark Anson-Cartwright then reviews ‘structural principles and narrative strategies’ in Beethoven, covering many points, some familiar (such as the famous *Eroica* C#), some less so, but, unlike the other chapters in this Part, without music examples. More problematic is Steven Vande Moortele’s concept of ‘two-dimensional’ symphonic forms, concentrating on Schoenberg’s *Kammersinfonie* Op. 9. ‘Two-dimensional’ means continuous music governed by a form that is interrupted but resumes; Schoenberg plants a scherzo and trio, and a slow movement, within an overarching sonata form. This was not without precedent. A better example than the symphonic poem *Pelleas und Melisande* is Schoenberg’s String Quartet Op. 7, not named although Vande Moortele acknowledges (275) the possibility of a symphonic quartet. And he does invoke a much earlier non-symphonic precedent, Liszt’s piano sonata (270). But this chapter pays excessive homage to *Formenlehre*. The author twice calls ‘deeply problematic’ issues concerning where sections begin and end, which are unlikely to affect the listener or performer; even the analyst, surely, should admit more than the possibility, but the likelihood, of ambiguity.

The core of the book is provided by three searching essays. Two are by the editor on the nineteenth century (extending to Mahler’s Ninth; this is ‘the long nineteenth century’), one on recycling themes between movements, the other on tonality. The average listener is more likely to be aware of the former, and Horton notes its somewhat ambiguous ‘justification’ in certain works of Beethoven, before moving on to Berlioz’s ‘idée fixe’. The latter, an extended melody of vocal origin, is atypical of cyclic

ideas, most of which are characteristically instrumental motives—not necessarily less obvious to the ear, but closer to Wagnerian leitmotif. Mahler used such motives (one could add the Fifth Symphony to those discussed, Nos. 1, 2 and 9), alongside elements that bring him closer to Berlioz: a sparer orchestral sound than Brahms or Strauss, and a profusion of melody, some derived from actual songs. I cannot hope to do justice to these two splendid chapters, which include many music examples and an eight-page table of ‘cyclical tonal schemes’. In chronological order by date of birth, this ends with Glazunov, born the same year as Sibelius and Nielsen who, for reasons that I infer are as much aesthetic as chronological, are allocated to the twentieth century and not included.

This point demonstrates, again, the intractability of the material that confronted Julian Horton as editor. Sibelius and Nielsen are the subject of books by Daniel M. Grimley, whose chapter ‘*Symphony/antiphony: formal strategies in the twentieth-century symphony*’ concludes Part II, and is itself a virtuoso performance. The title comes from the work of another Scandinavian, Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, whose work I confess is entirely unknown to me. Grimley’s introductory section explains why, and how, among the extraordinary riches of the period, he has selected his examples, which besides the Dane are taken from Sibelius (No. 4), Stravinsky (*Symphony of Psalms*, rather than his instrumental symphonies), Berio (*Sinfonia*) and Carter (*Symphony of Three Orchestras*).

The possible flaws of this Companion, as with many actual symphonies, are inseparable from its richness of content and many other virtues. It is a fine contribution to the historical, contextual and analytical study of this formidably interesting genre. The editor is presumably responsible for many useful cross-references inserted into several of the chapters. For all that I have offered a few queries and criticisms, therefore, I conclude by congratulating him again on a volume to which the earnest student and scholar will, or should, return regularly and often.

Julian Rushton
University of Leeds