

REVIEWS

POUR UNE SOCIOLOGIE DE L'INTERPRÉTATION MUSICALE—Le Cas du “Concerto pour trompette” de Haydn [Toward a Sociology of Musical Interpretation—The Case of the Haydn Trumpet Concerto] by Alfred Willener. Editions Payot, Lausanne: 1990. 199 pages. ISBN 2-601-03070-4.

Remember the first time you tackled the Haydn Trumpet Concerto? One of Haydn's finest works, arguably his best concerto, has become a symphonic war-horse, a competition piece, and a rite of passage for the aspiring trumpeter. I remember one afternoon many years ago at Interlochen, when several of us high-schoolers had just played the first movement as part of some musical shoot-out. The very earnest discussion centered mostly on who had reached the high E^b in the recapitulation and who had failed. There were a few comments about some hapless fellow who played “too staccato,” as if this were an indication of poor moral character. Why we were trying to defeat one another along an obstacle course laid out at the close of the 18th century was not open to question. We accepted the sacred quality of the work without comment, as if it were not a collection of old marks on paper capable of guiding a group of living, breathing musicians through some pleasing, expressive sounds, but a revealed truth that would somehow make us artists if we only lived up to its standards.

My friends and I could see no difference between the Concerto itself and the encrusted layers of interpretive tradition that ruled our experience of it. We may have had some idea of its place in the history of European music, but the way it was to be played was dictated by the admonishments of our teachers, the sacred indications of articulation, dynamics, and tempo introduced by 20th-century editors, and the example set by famous recordings from our own time. We were under considerable pressure to produce an interpretation the outlines of which were so thoroughly agreed upon and understood that they were hardly noticed.

In the competitive, professionalized, and bureaucratic world of 20th-century music making, there are strong pressures on everyone to accept recognized standards of performance regarding both the mechanics of execution and the fine points of interpretation. To ignore these is to risk failure in an arena where failure is the norm. From the perspective of good music-making this state of affairs is not necessarily bad. Free-lance orchestras would be impossible without a high degree of unspoken agreement regarding interpretation. Rehearsal time is a rare and expensive commodity in most walks of musical life, and the profession requires us to play together convincingly from the very first note. To survive, we must stay within certain boundaries learned from teachers, recordings, and on-the-job mishaps. Questioning these conventions or speculating on their origin is a luxury few of us can afford.

Today the game has been further complicated by a variety of different rulebooks for different situations. A trumpet player's date book may show a “historically correct” performance on period brass instruments, followed by a *Messiah* sing-in on modern

instruments, followed by a jazzy Broadway show. Before the modern era you could be fairly sure that musicians who lived in the same town spoke the same dialect, ate the same food, heard the same music, and played about the same without having to reflect on what they were doing. Even into this century old and new music tended to be performed according to the same conventions of interpretation. Today's marketplace has created a new species of chameleon known as the "free-lancer" who blends into its surroundings in order to survive and many sub-species of "specialists" who can function only within one of the many ecological niches of the musical ecosystem.

Why do we interpret the music we play the way we do? The answer that we would be fired if we played differently is insufficient, because the standards to which we are subjected are not arbitrary and came from somewhere. Also, we do find room to express who we are as people in our work, to contact emotions and reach for the undefinable. If we could not do this we would all become lawyers, and lawyers would sell their violins. Apparently, the answer lies in some combination of individuality and culture, of personality and tradition. All the ingredients are elusive, but the culture/tradition side is probably easier to study. In folk music around the world you can often see the roots of interpretation in the melody of language, the rhythm of dance, and the emotion of religion. Our roots are as much in the artifice of institutions—conservatories, orchestras, record companies, and universities—as they are in the ancient traditions of our culture.

In *Toward a Sociology of Musical Interpretation: The Case of the Haydn Trumpet Concerto*, Alfred Willener methodically examines the interaction between trumpet players and their environment to understand how musical interpretation is influenced by society. Willener is a fine amateur trumpet player who was for many years a professor of sociology at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. He is uniquely qualified to ask the right questions in undertaking a book of this sort. We may make the usual grumbles about the discipline of sociology itself—that the answers are either obvious or inscrutable. But we cannot deny the importance of the questions, especially in these times when musicians are subjected to so many different influences and so many schools of interpretation contend. If some of Willener's statements seem obvious, it still may be true that we have never thought of them before or recognized their significance. Although some of his questions are unanswerable, we find ourselves conducting our careers as if there are at least moral equivalents to answers, and we benefit from recognizing them as such.

Willener begins his story at the close of the 18th century. The original score of the Concerto is almost without indications of dynamics and phrasing. Haydn and his musicians at the court of Esterházy formed a self-contained musical organism which functioned in isolation, and he probably had to give them very little specific instruction regarding interpretation. The original instrument was a keyed trumpet in low E^b that was essentially a natural trumpet with three openings near the bell allowing the pitch to be raised to fill in the gaps in the harmonic series. Opening the keys created unavoidable uncertainties in intonation and tone, but still the instrument had considerable "shock value" because it could leave behind the stylized and militaristic role to which the

trumpet had been relegated. Willener makes an important point—that in creating an interpretation the performer must bear in mind what the work meant to the composer and the composer's world. In the case of the Concerto, the meaning can be found in the trumpet's rising above a formerly pedestrian role. The opening theme—an ascending scale in the low register—was shocking in 1796 because it revealed expressive possibilities on the instrument that had previously been unattainable. Willener sees another clue in the opening passage of the solo part, usually omitted from modern editions, which consists only of notes from the natural harmonic series. This “teaser” made the first statement of the melody seem all the more extraordinary. Willener sees Haydn projecting his own life into the Concerto, transforming the role of an instrument with a rising melodic statement much as Haydn himself transformed his life and rose above humble origins by becoming a court composer.

You do not have to accept Willener's specific arguments to recognize that the tensions surrounding a work when it is created somehow leave traces on the work itself from which the performer can benefit in uncovering. This is a quite different idea from historical accuracy in performance, and it has a certain moralistic and romantic luster that some of us may find repellent. With his sociologist's perspective, Willener is able to keep his analysis in the realm of the plausible.

The modern era of the Concerto begins with its publication by Goeyens in Brussels in 1929 and its popularization through recordings and performances before the Second World War. Willener points out the absurdity of the admonition, “Just play the piece the way it was written!,” by comparing a number of different modern editions in a specific passage and showing how editors allow their prejudices to intrude. He makes a similar comparative test with recordings. Probably no man alive has listened to more recordings of the Haydn Trumpet Concerto than Alfred Willener. The most salient differences he describes as variations in “punctuation”—articulations that define the shape of musical phrases. His most telling analysis describes how a performer's career stance in relation to the world of music influences his or her interpretation of the work. Professors of trumpet will tend to exaggerate those technical aspects of the work in their playing that they have taught to their students. First-desk players in orchestras, when given the opportunity to step in front, will play with particularly good rapport with the orchestra and will show a good understanding of the solo part's relation to the orchestral part. “Purists” will attempt the work on a keyed instrument patterned after the one built and played by Weidinger for the first performance. As for the touring concert artist, Willener writes, “He knows how to prolong the accents, to make silences, to go to the admissible limits of rubato, to make gestures beyond what are necessary to play the instrument to show his devotion and his emotion. He knows how to deliver just the right dosage of effects, maintain suspense, and to get the most out of the personal attributes of his playing while integrating them into a balanced combination (technical prowess, respect for the work, his personal contribution to it).”

We may be tempted to dismiss analysis of this sort as mere “common sense.” Indeed the information on which it is based is readily apparent to any working musician. But

how many of us have taken the time to ponder the implications of what we see, along the lines of Willener's argument or any other? Willener uses a specific logical framework derived from the work of the sociologist Theodoro Adorno to describe music, musicians, and the social world of music as a complete organism in which every aspect influences every other in ways that can at least be catalogued and described, if not measured and understood. Although we are left with an impossible algebraic mess of a thousand unquantifiable variables, a vision of what is really happening can suddenly jump to the foreground, a vision that could not have existed without the analysis.

To point out the factors that influence performances of the Concerto, Willener takes us on a tour of the world of present-day trumpet playing. His account tends toward the anecdotal and sarcastic and is frequently very amusing, although its foundation is highly systematic. After describing the different types of performers, he discusses recordings, conductors, academicians, listeners, teachers and clinicians, instruments, and some of the great players, all with a perspective that is very personal and thought-provoking.

Willener concludes that there is something special about the Concerto that keeps it from being "used up," even in its modern role as a rite of passage, competition piece, and orchestral "standard" (as Wynton Marsalis described it). The repertoire for solo trumpet is thin compared to what is available for other instruments, but the work has survived inevitable overuse. Its novelty, confidence, profundity, and humor are qualities that Willener relates directly to its composer and the circumstances surrounding its creation. As for why the work is interpreted the way it is in our time, there is obviously no simple explanation. The sociological and cultural influences described by Willener are very significant even if they cannot explain an essentially subjective experience (playing or listening to the Concerto) once and for all. His type of analysis is encountered often enough in literary criticism and in music criticism as it relates to composers, but it could be used more often to understand and illuminate music performance. Since the greater part of our musical experience is now devoted to new and different interpretations of old music rather than new and different music, it would do us good to pay attention.

Willener is looking for a "truthful" performance, as opposed to one that is merely historically or technically accurate. We have all had such an experience, hopefully in our playing as well as in our listening, when music seems to rise out of its generic and interpretive boundaries and signify more than the sum of its parts. Willener writes, "The contribution of a work is in the conscious negotiation, which establishes itself, in the best case, between the performer, the composer, and the situation of the moment."

This book is good reading for any serious trumpet player, including those (perhaps most of us) who have no particular interest in the book's intellectual argument. Willener's portrait of Maurice André is one of the high points of the book. Also memorable are his accounts of a master class with Tom Stevens and a day at the New York Brass Conference for Scholarships. His representation of the evolution of trumpet design and manufacture from Besson to Bach and Benge and finally to Schilke, Yamaha, and Monette may not be accepted by everyone, but this chapter has some useful and rarely discussed information. We can only hope that some day Mr. Willener will

translate this book into English for the benefit of us who do not read French. (Peter Ecklund)

Bands: The Brass Band Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries, edited by Trevor Herbert, Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991. 224 pages, 17 plates in black and white (Distributed in the USA by Taylor & Francis, 1900 Frost Road #101, Bristol, PA 19007) \$33.00 paperback, \$88.00 hardback

Nearly every brass enthusiast in the United States is aware of the high quality of British Brass Bands. Black Dyke Mills and the Besses o' th' Barn are familiar names to Americans. Some devotees may have even performed in one of the American versions of British brass bands that have sprung up in the past decade. Few, however, are fully aware of the history of the tradition in the British Isles and Australia. Few American musicians contemplate the aesthetic debate that "banding" has launched, or the depth of its rich brass band literature. Trevor Herbert and his contributors—Clifford Bevan, Duncan Bythell, Vic Gammon, Sheila Gammon, Arnold Myers and Dave Russell—make a valuable addition to these areas of study. Many British brass players had their first experiences in brass bands. The styles and concepts they learned affect the sound of brass playing in professional orchestras, chamber music groups, jazz bands, and other popular ensembles in Britain. In an era when all the orchestras in the world seem to sound alike, this influence has not gone unnoticed. Brass players speak of the "British School of Brass Playing" and recognize its features with positive adjectives such as "precise," "brilliant," "clear," "controlled" and even "fastidious." The younger British orchestral players have made the transition to a characteristic international orchestral style, but some retain elements of the band sound and style. The American analogy is: "You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy." I welcome these stylistic differences. From the safe distance created by the Atlantic, I can applaud my British counterparts for maintaining an identity and a tradition. Herbert makes the point that while the importance of this tradition is universally recognized by musicians, "banding" has been kept at arm's length from British institutions, media, the academy, and state sponsorship.

A neat illustration of the ghetto-like existence of brass bands is found in their treatment by *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, which acts as something of a catalyst for informed musical opinion and which by editorial admission 'reflects the tastes and preferences of the English-speaking world'. The space it gives under the entry 'Brass Bands' is only marginally longer than the entry of the history of the triangle, and while personalities such as Johann Petzmayer, the nineteenth-century Austrian zither player, are duly acknowledged with an entry, Harry Mortimer, probably the most influential figure in brass banding, is not (p. 3).

Such oversights are also common in the study of American band traditions. It has been an uphill battle to achieve and maintain high artistic standards that are acknowl-

edged by the musical community. Even giants in the field such as John Philip Sousa, Patrick S. Gilmore, Edwin Franco Goldman, and Frederick Fennell rolled up their sleeves and entered the fray to defend their musical values and the place of the wind band. American bands have the advantage of a foothold in the public schools and higher education. British banding is largely male, extracurricular, and characterized by a camaraderie that is climaxed by the ritual of contest.

There have been two good books on British Bands before this contribution. They are Russell and Elliot's *The Brass Band Movement* and Arthur Taylor's *Brass Bands*.¹ This book, along with Herbert's important article, "The Repertory of a Victorian Provincial Band," Herbert & Myers' "Instruments of the Cyfarthfa Band" and a number of post-graduate British studies cited by Herbert bring the scholarship up to date and set a standard that will permit future work in the history of British Brass Bands.²

Herbert's book is in six sections. Two are historical, and two are sociological. One treats the transplanting of the British Band in Australia. A postscript provides a tidy summary and asks questions that are worthy of future research. Three appendixes deal with instruments, the development of contests, and a list of contest winners from 1853-1989. Historical Brass Society readers will find the first chapter on 19th century bands by Herbert, the fourth chapter by Vic and Sheila Gammon on the nature of the change or "revolution" in the mid-19th-century band's social and musical contexts and the appendix on instruments by Myers to be the most interesting from a historical perspective. Dave Russell's chapter 'What's Wrong with Brass Bands?' treats issues of 20th century performance in chapter two. Cliff Bevan deals with the band contest phenomena in chapter three.

An anthology of this type invariably forces the reader to adjust to the change in tone, discussion and emphasis of the various contributors. For example, Myers spells Haliday (the inventor of the keyed bugle) correctly (p. 172). Herbert spells it Halliday (p.17). Myers says there is no evidence of keyed bugles playing all the treble parts in any brass bands (p. 169). Herbert cites MacFarlane's *Eight Popular Airs for Brass Bands* of 1836 (with three keyed bugles on the primo treble parts) as being the first British publication specifically for brass bands (p. 18). I take notice of such nits because this is my area of research, but this level of detail is the charge of the editor. There are a few other blemishes, such as John Philip Souza [*sic*] and Patrick Gilmour [*sic*] on page 5. Small criticisms aside, the writing is excellent and engaging. Herbert has made a wonderful contribution to filling in the details of the early-19th-century English band. His first chapter combined with the articles on the repertoire and the instruments of the Cyfarthfa band cited above are very important pieces of research. Arnold Myers' appendix on instrumentation is definitive. Clifford Bevan's engaging writing is always interesting and entertaining. Too often books on popular music themes lack the documentation that is given in this book. This makes it a particularly welcome addition to the resource material on bands. Americans will see much of their musical heritage in these pages and gain understanding of the banding tradition that has grown as a separate limb from the international family tree of brass playing. This is an excellent contribution to the field

