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Review of Richard Will, *The Characteristic Symphony in the Age of Haydn and Beethoven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 329 pages.

John L. Snyder

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[1] The nature of the interesting and now unfortunately largely unknown subject matter of this book is perhaps not as readily apparent as it might be, for the title is somewhat ambiguous. This is the first of the three principal quibbles I have with the book, the other two of which will be dealt with in due course. Here, "characteristic" does not mean "prototypical," but refers instead to music having a specific "character" or "program" of some sort. (Consider the difference, say, between referring to a small composition for piano as "a characteristic piece by Chopin" or "a character piece by Chopin.") Our modern usages of these words notwithstanding, however, Prof. Will is on solid historical ground in his employment of the term: "'Characteristic' is the most common of several terms used in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to indicate instrumental music in which a subject is specified, usually by a text." (page 1) Once beyond any initial uncertainty, the reader will find in this book both a fascinating musical world, and an engaging and enlightening view of it.

[2] At the core of this study is the relationship, artificial as the distinction may at times be, between "absolute" and "program" music. Issues of musical form and coherence naturally arise, as well as the issue of whether a listener actually can recognize a programmatic work without the printed program. The question of "tone-painting" and its artistic status is also considered. The survey of these matters as they existed prior to the Romantic era, and the insights into them the author offers, are among the joys of the book.

[3] Prof. Will has drawn together an impressive array of writings, both modern and contemporaneous with the music in question, concerning many aspects of the question. These sources touch on fields as diverse as music itself: aesthetics, music criticism, religious thought and practice, rhetoric, folk music, and social customs of the period.

[4] The book is organized in five chapters preceded by an introduction, plus three appendixes. There are many musical examples, in short score (i.e., not piano reductions), which are particularly helpful in that much of this music is quite unavailable either in score or in recordings. The only complaint in this regard is that the musical typography is rather small, but that may be simply the price of having so much music in the book, and in any case I do not blame the author for it. The following paragraphs will give a brief tour of the book, with some observations and comments to follow.

[5] The Introduction, fittingly, provides an overview of the topic, beginning with the explanation of "characteristic" quoted above. Variant terminology is considered. More importantly, critical views of program music are introduced, along with the

problem of how character is represented in music (the issues of tone-painting and form). Finally, there is the question of whether a listener can recognize a program in the music without a printed guide. All of these issues resurface at various points in the succeeding chapters.

[6] Chapter 1, "Paradise lost: Dittersdorf's *Four Ages of the World* and the crisis of Austrian enlightened despotism," naturally concerns Dittersdorf's symphonies based on subjects taken from Ovid. There are also some asides on relevant works by Pichl and Gluck, and references also to Rosetti and Boccherini. Beyond the discussions of the musical works (and their programs), the chapter also contains interesting, enlightening, and valuable material on the eighteenth-century view of Antiquity, and (as the subtitle suggests) puts all of this into the social and political context of the time.

[7] Chapter 2, "Preaching without words: Reform Catholicism versus divine mystery in Haydn's *Seven Last Words,*" involves a good deal more than the work named in the title. Indeed, the introductory part of the chapter is followed by a lengthy excursus under the sub-heading "Pastoral symphonies and the rhetoric of emotion," which treats its subject via examples from pastoral symphonies by Stamitz, Gossec, Pichl, Rosetti, and Pokorny, all of which use or make reference to one of two particular folk carols in various ways. When the discussion returns to the Haydn, it is penetrating, touching on the problems of form, the relationship of word and text, and in no small part involves musico-religious exegesis. Critical reaction to the work is also considered. The final part of the chapter, "Wordless music, unfathomable harmony, and the divine," seeks to generalize the previous observations, showing how Haydn (and some others) stretched the conventions of Classical musical language (particularly in terms of harmonic practice) in the service of the program, and especially in the service of programs of a religious or mystic nature.

> The *Seven Last Words* would have invoked redemption simply by virtue of its subject matter, but one piece of evidence connects this central mystery of the crucifixion specifically to the harmonic digression and tutti outbursts. When Friebert added vocal texts to the Sonatas, he aligned most such passages with references to sin and especially to redemption, an aspect of his arrangement that survived Haydn's revisions. In the first Sonata, for instance, the entire text ruminates on sin but Friebert saves redemption for the slide into F minor and D♭ at the end of the exposition. . . . (page 118)

[8] These first two chapters are a pair, dealing respectively with secular and sacred program music of the later eighteenth century. Will makes this connection explicit, at the same time putting both spheres into the overall socio-political context:

> Despite enormous differences in subject matter, musical structure, and means of representation, Haydn's orchestral Passion thus has at least one thing in common with Dittersdorf's symphonic Ovid. Both are products of an age that believed in the perfectibility of humankind, and more specifically of a society whose leader tried to legislate this central ideal of the Enlightenment into practice, in no small part by turning his church into a house of moral instruction. Yet both works leave some question as to whether the emperor's hopes are realistic, and they use similar means to do so: fast, violent finales that depart to a greater or lesser extent from the conventions of form, phrase, and rhythm observed in the preceding movements. (page 128)

[9] Chapter 3, "The boundaries of the art: characteristic music in contemporary criticism and aesthetics," is in part a survey of contemporaneous aesthetic theory of and critical reaction to characteristic music. The chapter also includes discussion of critical response to particular works, especially the Dittersdorf symphonies that were the subject of Chapter 1, along with Haydn's *Seasons* and *Creation* (with references also to the previous chapter concerning the *Seven Last Words*). In general, mere representation of physical objects ("tone-painting") was held in low esteem; *expression of feeling* in response to physical objects (or stories, etc.), was more acceptable. Hence the significance of the subtitle to Beethoven's Sixth: "More the expression of emotions than painting." (page 129)

> With the adoption of mimesis as the basis for musical aesthetics in the early eighteenth century, tone-painting and expression were set up as separate categories of imitation. To express meant to imitate emotions, conceived of as the discrete, tangible states of mind called "characters" . . . ; to paint meant to copy the sounds or motions of storms, running water, wind, birds, and battles, or simply to suggest motion per se, especially ascent, descent, swiftness, and slowness. Expression ranked higher from the beginning. . . . (page 130)

Will assembles a wide-ranging array of views by German, French, and English writers, including Charles Avison, Johann Georg Sulzer, Christian Gottfried Krause, Jean-Baptiste DuBos, Charles Batteux, Johann Jakob Engel, James Harris, and

others. The final section of the chapter, "Imitation and the ineffable," explores the aesthetic situation at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth, taking Haydn's last oratorios and Beethoven's Sixth as focal points.

[10] Chapter 4, "Paradise regained: time, morality, and humanity in Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony," takes its departure from Beethoven's Sixth (foreshadowed in the last parts of the preceding chapter), but also treats other issues. One of these is the issue of overall form; the *Pastoral* resembles the typical four-movement plan more than many characteristic symphonies, with the obvious exception of the storm.

> In effect, the *Pastoral* sits halfway between a symphony with independent and formally closed movements, and a characteristic symphony of the type representing series of scenes or emotion, where the penchant is for continuity and formal freedom in moments of action. The transition between paradise and trouble becomes a passage not simply from one musical style to another but between genres. (page 157)

Besides comparisons with other symphonic works bearing on nature, and a probing treatment of the storm, Will offers a discussion on the relationship between historical and idyllic time, and a digression on the subject of run-on and compound movements.

[11] The final chapter, "Making memories: symphonies of war, death, and celebration," explores symphonic treatments of the three categories mentioned. The first of these is represented by the *Eroica* and *Wellingtons Sieg,* along with pieces by various *Kleinmeister*. Death is illustrated by symphonic tributes to such luminaries as Voltaire and Lord Nelson; the discussion includes Kraus's *Symphonie funèbre,* and also treats Mozart's *Requiem* and *Mauerische Trauermusik*. The celebrations are largely linked to battle pieces, but some, such as Wranitzky's *Grande Sinfonie caractéristique* and Hoffmeister's *Festa della pace,* were written to commemorate peace treaties. As in the preceding chapters, Will's discussion is revealing, both in purely musical terms and in his painting of these works' *milieux*.

[12] The overall organization of this presentation is exquisite. Nevertheless (my second quibble), the digressions and excursus within chapters were somewhat troubling, the clues given by the sub-headings notwithstanding. For example, in Chapter 2, after just over two pages of introduction focused on the *Seven Last Words,* more than a dozen pages follow concerning pastoral symphonies and their rhetoric; this section includes the first dozen musical examples (2.1–2.9, some of which have more than one part). Similarly, Chapter 4 includes a substantial excursus on compound and run-on movements (triggered, of course, by the fact that the last three movements of the Sixth are run together; but still, it interrupts the flow of the chapter). On a different scale, while Chapter 3 is concerned primarily with the aesthetics and criticism associated with the genre, no small amount of related material appears in other chapters.

[13] The book concludes with three appendixes, a bibliography (which is very extensive), and an index. The appendixes are very useful, but (here is my final and biggest quibble) appreciably less so than they might be, owing to some content and organizational decisions. Appendix 1, "Index of characteristic symphonies," lists all of the works fitting the criteria for the genre, by composer, with dates, sources, instrumentation, movements, and for many, incipits. The drawback here is that the works of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven are excluded. Appendix 2 lists "additional symphonies and movements bearing only the title word pastoral" (page 242); this appendix does not include instrumentation or incipits. Thus Ignaz von Beeke's *Pastorale sinfonie,* for example, appears in Appendix 1 (with a cross reference from Appendix 2), but Francesco Arrieta's *Sinfonia con Pastorale* is listed only in Appendix 2. This seems to me rather arbitrary and confusing, and from the point of view of anyone attempting to survey the sub-genre comprising pastoral symphonies, inefficient. Appendix 3 lists "Symphonies and movements by subject." This is, in effect, a re-ordering of Appendix 1, though (for obvious reasons of space) without all of the movement and source information. It is the only appendix of the three to include the music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. "Pastoral," interestingly, is not among the subject categories, though "Hunts" and "Storms" are. Again, one wonders about the criteria for inclusion here: Haydn's Symphony No. 26, *Lamentatione,* for example, is included under "Mourning," but his Symphony No. 44, *Trauer-Symphonie,* is not listed. I would very much have preferred only Appendixes 1 and 3, with at least Appendix 1 as exhaustive as possible.

[14] What is missing here is a discography, though it must be admitted that a great many of the works involved have never been recorded (my own quick search drew many blanks). Others (such as those of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven) have been recorded so often as to require any discography to be selective to be useful, and the problems attendant in that are obvious.

[15] These few complaints should not be taken as more than the quibbles I have described them to be. Prof. Will has given

us a valuable account of a genre that is now almost entirely overlooked. It is to be hoped that this book will stimulate discussion and further research along many lines, and perhaps even more, lead to performances and recordings of more of these works. And, along these very lines (if I may close on a personal note), my Houston Symphony season-ticket renewal information came while I was finishing this book, and I was both delighted and intrigued to see that the HSO will perform Joseph Martin Kraus's *Symphonie funèbre* during the current season.[(1)] I will look forward to this event more eagerly, and hear it far more knowledgeably, than would have been possible without having read this book.

John L. Snyder
Moores School of Music
University of Houston
Houston, TX 77204-4017
JLSnyder@uh.edu

Footnotes

1. April 16, 17, and 18, 2005, at Jones Hall in Houston; Claus Peter Flor will conduct.
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