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Review of Christopher Alan Reynolds, *Motives for Allusion: Context and Content in Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003)

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[1] Christopher Alan Reynolds's *Motives for Allusion* has received wide attention from reviewers who often seem to be as anxious to recount their own preoccupations with the topic of musical allusion as to provide a close reading and evaluation of the text itself. Given the elusive nature of the topic, this is understandable. Attempting to comprehend just how we should view and understand these musical puzzles leads many a scholar into the thorny territory of ascribing meaning and intention. Despite the inherent problems of the topic, Reynolds charges forward with his own views, ultimately leaving the reader to decide what she or he believes.

[2] Reynolds defines allusion as "an intentional reference to another work made by means of a resemblance that affects the meaning conveyed to those who recognize it" (p. 6). As reviewer Michael Klein notes, "Here all the troubles of allusion are laid bare: the problem of intention; of the likelihood that an audience will recognize the resemblance; and of the meaning that accrues its recognition."(1) Klein's statement casts a light on what are perhaps the most problematic aspects of allusion, especially that of authorial intention. He goes on to explain that, "In particular, embracing authorial intention seems courageous in the post-Barthesian world, where the 'death of the author' threatens to render moot any argument hoping to recover a poetic level of allusion."(2) Recognizing this knotty aspect, Reynolds admits, "intentionality is an important element, however problematic it may be to determine," and in the end, decides that intentionality is important for understanding the compositional process and in considering questions of originality (p. 6).

[3] Reynolds strives forward with nine chapters devoted to several different aspects of allusion, which explore how composers concealed their allusions (Chapter 2); whether composers chose to assimilate (Chapter 3) or contrast (Chapter 4) the original source of a musical allusion; the practice of adding a text to previously composed instrumental music (Chapter 5); the use of musical ciphers (Chapter 7); musical allusions as a form of tradition (Chapter 8); as well as the perennial problems of originality and intention (Chapter 6).

[4] In Chapter 2 ("Transformations"), Reynolds describes the various ways in which composers have concealed their appropriated motives (or themes).(3) In addition to changes in rhythm, meter, intervals, and the like, he introduces three other methods: motivic combination (occurring contrapuntally in two voices either simultaneously, melodically in succession,

or combined into one single motive); octave displacement (e.g., the substitution of an ascending fifth for a descending fourth, a seventh for a second, and so on); and change of genre (e.g., transfer of a melodic idea from an opera aria to a Mass, from a song to a symphony, and so on). Reynolds states that in the examples presented throughout the book, "generally the alluding motive and the source composition share at least three features" (p. 33).

[5] In Chapters 3 ("Assimilative Allusions") and 4 ("Contrastive Allusions"), Reynolds explores several examples in which composers choose either to create a meaning that is similar to the one borne by an original motive (assimilative), or to create a new meaning, often to distance the appropriation from its original source (contrastive). These categories are grounded in Mikhail Bakhtin's double-voiced discourse; in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin states that in any utterance or text, a speaker or author can use another's "discourse for his own purposes, by inserting a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own."(4) Working from this understanding, Reynolds introduces numerous examples of both assimilative and contrastive allusions.

[6] One example of the latter comes from Schumann's setting of "Schlußlied des Narren," the song that concludes Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Relying on musical similarities read against the backdrop of Schumann's life at the time of composition, Reynolds hears a contrastive allusion to Schubert's setting of "Erlkönig." While Schumann composed "Schlußlied," he and Clara Wieck were involved in court proceedings against Wieck's father, disputing his disapproval of their prospective marriage. Most of Friedrich Wieck's charges against Schumann had been dismissed, leaving only a claim of "habitual drunkenness" left to be disputed (p. 73–74).

[7] Reynolds interprets the text of "Schlußlied" as speaking to "both the past struggle and to the improved prospects of his [Schumann's] marriage" (p. 74). In addition, Reynolds strengthens his reading by presenting the verse that Schumann chose not to set, which speaks of drunkenness, the only charge pending against Schumann. Turning to Schumann's musical setting, Reynolds notes the appropriation of the opening motive from Schubert's "Erlkönig." While Schumann alters the mode and creates a dotted rhythm, the two maintain a similar melodic and rhythmic quality (**Examples 1 and 2**).

Reynolds reads this allusion as contrastive because of the new meaning Schumann creates in appropriating Schubert: "In this contrastive reading, Clara's father has assumed the sinister role of the Erlkönig, and he—Robert—the role of protector" (p. 75). Reynolds's reading is convincing, no doubt attributable to his excitement for and careful presentation of the evidence. However, one may wonder just how likely it is that the allusion would be recognized without such extensive biographical information or, as Michael Klein calls it, Reynolds's "nimble detective work."(5)

[8] Chapter 5 ("Texting") digresses from the topic of allusions in order to explore composers' practice of adding text to an existing piece of instrumental music. Although texting is not specifically a type of allusion, introducing the topic allows Reynolds to investigate issues of inspiration and originality, which become the focus of Chapter 6 ("Inspiration"). Using Brahms as an example, Reynolds discusses the conflict many nineteenth-century composers faced "between individual originality and the need to be a part of a cultural/national tradition" (p. 102). The creative process of composition involves a dual world of both the conscious and unconscious, as well as the prospect of aligning oneself with the "masters" while maintaining a sense of originality, often leaving composers unwilling to admit their appropriations publicly. In addition, Reynolds argues that to understand the intention behind allusions, we must accept that there are interactions that fall between the two extremes of conscious and unconscious creativity. This allows a composer to create a motive and only later recognize its connection to another work, as well as to "begin with a conscious allusion and still permit that motive to be subjected to his own unconscious thought processes" (115).

[9] As an example, Reynolds introduces Brahms's lied "Die Mainacht," op. 43, no. 2, which bears several striking resemblances to Chopin's Impromptu in F♯ major, op. 36, no. 2. In addition to the same formal pattern—ABA—in which the A and B sections are tonally separated by a major third, the two pieces also share a similar opening motive (**Examples 3 and 4**).

Apparently, Brahms did not initially recognize the similarities between his and Chopin's compositions, but from documentary evidence and a speck of speculation, Reynolds suggests that Brahms eventually did recognize the resemblance. Reynolds uses Brahms's own description of his conscious and unconscious thought processes as evidence of Brahms's intentions.

[10] In a conversation with friend George Henschel—who later transcribed Brahms's statement—Brahms described his creativity as some sort of "mystical process":

> There is no real *creating* without hard work. That which you would call invention, that is to say, a thought, an idea, is simply an inspiration from above, for which I am not responsible, which is no merit of mine. Yea, it is a present, a gift, which I ought even to despise until I have made it my own by right of hard work (p. 111).

In the same conversation, Brahms then characterized his creativity as an unconscious act: "It is as with the seed-corn; it germinates unconsciously and in spite of ourselves" (p. 111). And, in perhaps the most provocative portion of the letter, Brahms notated the first phrase of "Die Mainacht" as an example to his friend Henschel. Reynolds argues that by taking Brahms at his word, a scenario begins to arise as to how Brahms created "Die Mainacht."

> . . . the opening motive popped into his head . . . it came from somewhere other than the conscious intellect. The moment at which Brahms then felt moved to despise the gift was the moment when Brahms . . . recognized this motive as having previously been used by Chopin. (p. 111)

After Brahms realized his unconscious appropriation, he began to make it his own via "unconscious germination" and conscious "hard work." (p. 111) Even though Brahms may have originally received the motive from inspiration (the unconscious), he maintained the resemblances to Chopin's original—a conscious act—thereby intending the allusion.

[11] Chapter 7 ("Naming") turns to the notion of allusion as a form of play, an idea drawn from the writings of Johan Huizinga. In his *Homo ludens*, Huizinga states that play is based on "a certain 'imagination' of reality,"(6) or, as Reynolds adds, "the representation of reality by means of images" (p. 118). Introducing several "naming" motives, such as Bach's BACH, Reynolds defines two general functions of this type of play: as a symbolic representation of an individual, or as a "means of depicting a person, usually by quoting or alluding to a work that had been composed by that individual, but sometimes by quoting or alluding to a motive from a work only associated with the individual" (p. 138). Reynolds concludes that, "the purpose of these tributes . . . is quite literally that which Huizinga defined as an element in higher forms of play: to name and thus to raise the named 'into the domain of the spirit'" (p. 137).

[12] One of Reynolds's more problematic assertions involves a transposition of the BACH (B♭—A—C—B♮) motive to A♭—G—B♭—A♮ in Fanny Hensel's Allegro agitato in G minor. Although Reynolds interprets it as a statement of the BACH motive, R. Larry Todd attributes less significance to the example, hearing it as a mere doubling of the soprano line of F—E♭—G—F (**Example 5**).(7) Hensel's practice of using the BACH motive in many of her compositions lends credence to the allusion, but ultimately, the reader is left to evaluate the plausibility of Reynolds's reading. In concluding the chapter, Reynolds notes that although BACH functioned first as a musical signature in Bach's own pieces, it gradually emerged as a more global symbol of "German musical nationalism" (p. 138). The symbolic status of the motive grew into a web of allusions to both the progenitor as well as those others—such as Beethoven—who appropriated it in a show of nationalistic pride. Reynolds continues, "In this way nineteenth-century uses of BACH take on characteristics of the allusive traditions for specific motives" (p. 139).

[13] Early in the book, Reynolds identifies the intertextual histories that motives acquire with extended use: "Motives have histories. The later in the nineteenth century a composer worked, the longer the history, the richer the possibilities for associations, whether meaningful or coincidental" (p. 3). From this understanding, Reynolds unfolds his definition of an allusive tradition as "the repeated use of a motive by many composers with an assimilative or contrastive symbolic meaning" (p. 145). He also qualifies that "it is not necessarily the first use of the motive with a particular meaning that defines a motive as symbolically significant, but [often] a subsequent usage" (p. 145).

[14] As an example, Reynolds introduces the motive for Jesus' last words, "Es ist vollbracht" from Bach's St. John Passion. The examples range from the obvious to the tenuous including usages from C.P.E. Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Hensel, and Schumann. Complicating the discussion is how usage of the motive appears to change after Beethoven's appropriations, after which the motive seemed always to be associated with cello or the bass register of the piano (p. 159). This leads Reynolds to theorize that while Beethoven may have been alluding to Bach, subsequent usages by Hensel, Mendelssohn, and Schumann may have alluded to Beethoven and Bach: " . . . it is only after Beethoven that the theme develops additional traits of orchestration, key, or combinations with BACH that allow us to recognize even more substantial variations of the intervals . . . as possessing a symbolic meaning that encompasses Beethoven as well as Bach" (p. 159).

[15] In the final chapter ("Motives for Allusion"), Reynolds concludes that allusions were primarily a form of play in which

composers would conceal their musical debts just to the point where discussion can lead to debate. And in the end, Reynolds reckons that allusions are likely &ldquomore important for how music is made than how it is heard" (p. 182). In spite of this conclusion, Reynolds notes the satisfaction allusion has on our ears when we do recognize it. Countering this view is Raymond Knapp, who in his review of the book argues that allusions are equally important for us as listeners, as they color our musical experiences, and criticizes Reynolds for not addressing the how" and "why" of that aspect.[8]

[16] Despite this and other inherent problems, *Motives for Allusion* has been universally praised for the breadth and depth of the information it contains. The in-depth analyses offer a variety of approaches to understanding allusions, including consideration of both musical and biographical events. Although he is unable to resolve perennially contentious issues such as authorial intention and just what, specifically, determines or conveys musical meaning, Reynolds's book serves as an excellent resource for scholars with interests in nineteenth-century music, semiotics, and hermeneutics, among other topics. In addition, and most exciting to the present reviewer, Reynolds's research may act as a template for the study of allusions in other eras of music, both past and present.

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Footnotes

1. Michael Klein, Review of *Motives for Allusion: Context and Content in Nineteenth-Century Music*, *Music Theory Spectrum* 28, no. 1 (2006): 111.
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2. Ibid.
Return to text

3. Although Reynolds does not define what he considers a motive, from the musical examples he presents the reader must assume that a motive consists of a short rhythmic or melodic idea that is defined enough to retain its identity throughout the process of structural and presentational transformation.
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4. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 189.
Return to text

5. 2006, 115.
Return to text

6. Christopher Alan Reynolds, *Motives for Allusion: Context and Content in Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 118.
Return to text

7. R. Larry Todd, Review of *Motives for Allusion: Context and Content in Nineteenth-Century Music*, *Journal of Musicological Research* 24 (2005): 74.
Return to text

8. Raymond Knapp, Review of *Motives for Allusion: Context and Content in Nineteenth-Century Music*, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 58, no. 3 (2005): 744.
Return to text

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