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AMERICAN HANDBOOKS OF MUSIC HISTORY: BREADTH, DEPTH, AND THE CRITIQUE OF PEDAGOGY

The music history *curricula* taught in American colleges and universities create the requirements for textbooks and, conversely, long-established textbooks shape the *curricula* in many schools. Among the many factors that affect these texts, this paper will address only three: (1) the American tradition of covering all of music history or “breadth”, (2) the resulting problems of including meaningful consideration of “depth” in these courses and finally (3) a consideration of the “pedagogy movement” in American musicology and its possible effects on music history classes and their textbooks.

1. *Breadth: The survey textbook*

In the United States, teaching music history to undergraduate music majors is usually centered on a sequence of courses covering the entire history of music from the Ancient Greeks to today. This survey has been the cornerstone of undergraduate teaching since Donald Jay Grout’s seminal text, *A History of Western Music* published by Norton in 1947.¹ Thus, the basic model of undergraduate music handbooks in America is a single-volume textbook that spans the entire range of music history, often with a set of supplemental scores and recordings.² These textbooks tend to focus on a selection of masterworks that are representative of style periods of history (Baroque, Classical, Romantic, etc.) and important genres (opera, symphony, string quartet, etc.). From these books American students are taught there is something called ‘the Baroque Era’ which lasted from 1600 to the death of J. S. Bach in 1750 and all music written during this period share common

¹ *A History of Western Music*, ed. by D. J. Grout, New York, Norton, 1947. The newest edition is *A History of Western Music*, ed. by J. P. Burkholder, D. J. Grout, and C. V. Palisca, 9th ed., New York, Norton, 2014, and the three-volume *Norton Anthology of Western Music*, 7th ed., New York, Norton, 2014, with recordings.

² Other books in this format include M. E. BONDS, *A History of Music in Western Culture*, 4th ed., Upper Saddle River, NJ, Pearson, 2013, with a two-volume set of scores and recordings, and C. WRIGHT - B. SIMMS, *Music in Western Civilization, Media Update*, Boston, Schirmer Cengage Learning, 2010, with a two-volume set of scores and recordings. The model of a survey textbook led Oxford University Press to issue a one-volume “College Edition” of Richard Taruskin’s five-volume encyclopedic *Oxford History of Western Music* with Christopher H. Gibbs (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013), with a three-volume anthology and recordings.

stylistic traits. Likewise, these handbooks tend to stress that there is something called ‘the symphony’ and that all works with this title share important common traits. As a result, many students assume that the music of Handel has more in common with Monteverdi than with Mozart, because Handel and Monteverdi are both in the “Baroque” era, while Mozart is in different style period, the “Classical”. In the same way, students are compelled to find connections between works by Stamitz and Mahler which both use the term ‘symphony’ in the title.

2. *Depth: Context and methodology*

Since the first edition of Grout’s text, the survey of music history has struggled to maintain its viability as a pedagogical model in American colleges, universities, and conservatories as the scholarship of music history continues to reveal new works, composers, styles, and genres. Music historians now study a wider range of popular musics from the past and present than Dr. Grout included (jazz, rock, pop, etc.) and the influences and importance of folk music both in Western countries and worldwide are seen as increasingly important. While style periods and genres allow courses to cover the entire breadth of music history for *students* who are just beginning their music studies, these approaches do not allow for the study of methodologies and concepts of the *professors* doing research in music history: music in society, ritual, patronage, development of instruments, philosophy, archival research, etc. In attempt to provide some depth into these topics most American music history books put add asides to the main text under such titles as “Source Readings” or “Further Study”. This creates disruptions to the main narrative text by the insertion of shaded boxes which add information outside the main narrative – excerpts from primary sources for music history such as personal letters, contracts, or theory treatises (see Fig. 1).

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By dramatizing the events in the story, then expressing the reactions of a contemporary believer, Bach's Passion setting pulled his listeners emotionally into the Gospel account and helped them experience it directly.

Although now performed as works for large choir and orchestra, recent research on the performance parts suggests that Bach's Passions were intended for just four solo and four ripieno singers, who divided the roles among them and joined together for the choral movements. Thus the same singers portrayed the roles in the Gospel story and commented on it in solo movements and chorales, embodying in themselves the identification of modern believers with the ancient events that the Passion was meant to promote.

Mass in B Minor

Bach assembled the Mass in B Minor, his only complete setting of the Catholic Mass Ordinary, between 1747 and 1749. He drew most of it from music he had composed much earlier. He had already presented the Kyrie and Gloria in 1733 to the Catholic elector of Saxony, in hopes of getting an honorary appointment to the electoral chapel, which he did receive three years later. The Sanctus was first performed on Christmas Day 1724. He adapted some of the other sections from cantata movements composed between 1714 and 1735, replacing the German text with the Latin words of the Mass and reworking the music. Of the newly composed sections, the opening of the Credo and the Confiteor (a later passage of the Credo) are in stile antico; the *Et in unum* (also in the Credo) and *Benedictus* (from the Sanctus) in modern styles.

Throughout the work, he juxtaposed contrasting styles, making the Mass in B Minor a compendium of approaches to church music. Since the mass was never performed as a whole during Bach's lifetime, and is too long to perform well as service music, he may have intended it as an anthology of movements, each a model of its type, that could be performed separately. As a collection of exemplary works, the Mass in B Minor stands with *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, *The Art of Fugue*, and the *Musical Offering* as witness to Bach's desire to create comprehensive cycles that explore the furthest potential of a medium or genre.

BACH'S SYNTHESIS

Bach absorbed into his works all the genres, styles, and forms of his time and developed hitherto unsuspected potentialities in them. In his music, the often conflicting demands of harmony and counterpoint, of melody and polyphony, reach a tense but satisfying equilibrium. Many qualities give his works deep and lasting appeal: concentrated and distinctive themes, copious musical invention, balance between harmonic and contrapuntal forces, strong rhythmic drive, clarity of form, grand proportions, imaginative use of pictorial and symbolic figures, intensity of expression always controlled by a ruling architectural idea, and careful attention to every detail.

This recipe was too rich for some of his contemporaries, who preferred less complex, more tuneful music (see Source Reading). Throughout the 1720s and 1730s, the very decades during which Bach composed some of his most important works, the new style emanating from the opera houses of Italy invaded Germany and the rest of Europe (see chapters 20 and 21), making Bach's music seem old-fashioned. Never entirely forgotten, he was rediscovered and achieved enormous popularity in the nineteenth century, when music that could please both amateurs and connoisseurs and could keep its

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SOURCE READING

A CRITIQUE OF BACH'S STYLE

The composer and critic Johann Adolph Scheibe (1708–1776) considered Bach unapproachable as an organist and keyboard composer. However, he found much of the rest of Bach's music overly elaborate and confused, preferring the more tuneful and straightforward styles of younger composers such as Johann Adolph Hasse (see chapter 21). Scheibe's critique is only one volley in the long argument between advocates of Baroque styles and partisans of the new galant style.

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This great man would be the admiration of whole nations if he had more amenity, if he did not take away the natural element in his pieces by giving them a turgid and confused style, and if he did not darken their beauty by an excess of art. Since he judges according to his own fingers, his pieces are extremely difficult to play; for he demands that singers and instrumentalists should be able to do with their throats and instruments what

ever he can play on the clavichord. But this is impossible. Every ornament, every little grace, and everything that one thinks of as belonging to the method of playing, he expresses completely in notes, and this not only takes away from his pieces the beauty of harmony but completely covers the melody throughout. All the voices must work with each other and be of equal difficulty, and none of them can be recognized as the principal voice. In short, he is in music what Mr. von Lohenstein was in poetry. Turgidity has led them both from the natural to the artificial, and from the lofty to the somber; and in both one admires the onerous labor and uncommon effort—which, however, are vainly employed, since they conflict with Nature.

From an anonymous letter by "an able traveling musician" published in Scheibe's periodical review, *Der critische Musikus*, May 14, 1737, (reprinted in *The New Bach Reader*, ed. Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, rev. and ed. by Christoph Wolff [New York: Norton, 1998], 338).

appeal through many performances was highly prized. Perhaps only a composer who spent most of his life teaching, wrote excellent music for students at every level from beginning to advanced, worked in positions that constantly demanded new music for immediate performance, embraced a wide variety of genres and approaches, and aspired to explore all the possibilities of every kind of music he encountered, could achieve the central position Bach now occupies in the Western musical tradition.

George Frideric Handel

Unlike Vivaldi, Rameau, and Bach, who rarely traveled outside their countries, George Frideric Handel (1685–1759) moved comfortably among German-, Italian-, and English-speaking cities (see biography and Figure 19.2, p. 450). His German music teacher gave him a thorough education in organ, harpsichord, counterpoint, and current German and Italian idioms. When he was a young man, three years at the Hamburg opera house and four years in Italy helped to lay the foundations of his style. He matured as a composer in England, the country then most hospitable to foreign composers.

Fig. 1 – Example of “Source Reading” within text from *A History of Western Music*, ed. by J. P. Burkholder, D. J. Grout, and C. V. Palisca, 9th ed. (New York, Norton, 2014, p. 448 f.). Used with permission of W. W. Norton.

The role of comprehensive survey textbooks in American universities created the sense of an accepted canon of musical works in music history. Works in these textbooks and anthologies were privileged as being “central” or “important” and works omitted by these textbooks were seen as peripheral or marginal – especially works by women composers and gay-lesbian-queer composers, or works in popular styles and genres. Teaching from a comprehensive survey book came to be seen by some musicologists as essentially supporting a European-centric, white, male, hegemonic view of music history.³

The 2015 meeting of the American Musicological Society included a session provocatively titled “The End of the Undergraduate History Survey?”. Melanie Lowe of Vanderbilt University stated the clearest move away from the traditional, central importance of an undergraduate history survey. In the

³ L. GOEHR, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2008; M. CITRON, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993 (reprint ed., Urbana-Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2000); *Disciplining Music: Musicology and its Canons*, ed. by K. Bergeron and Ph. V. Bohlman, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996; *Rethinking Music*, ed. by N. Cook and M. Everist, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999.

printed version of her paper, *Rethinking the Undergraduate Music History Sequence in the Information Age*, Lowe argues: “We’ve long since let go of universalist agendas in our scholarship, and the same aversion to hegemonic frameworks is now informing our teaching. There is an ever-growing body of literature on music history pedagogy that engages questions of not just *how* to teach but *what* to teach”.⁴ Lowe describes the revised history curriculum for Vanderbilt students, which begins with a pair of first-year courses: Music as Global Culture and a writing seminar on a topic in Music in Western Culture. The only survey class is Music of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries and the final capstone class in history is a “research intensive and musicologically oriented” seminar on a topic from the common practice period.⁵ Lowe argues that this curriculum allows the Vanderbilt musicology faculty to ask two important questions: “First, what music-historical knowledge do our students need to succeed in a wide variety of careers in and around music in the twenty-first century? And second, what music-historical skills do they need to succeed in those various careers?”⁶ Clearly, a curriculum like Vanderbilt’s has no need for a comprehensive survey text. Nor does such a curriculum create a single canon of Western masterpieces for the students. If more schools adopt this model, the market for large comprehensive survey textbooks would surely decline and the nature of American music history handbooks would change to meet the needs of these new courses.

3. *The critique of pedagogy*

No matter *what* we teach (whether depth or breadth), it is closely related to *how* we teach, and the simple fact is that until recently American musicologists have given little thought to the pedagogy of teaching music history to undergraduates. The assumption has been that the person with a Ph.D. stands in front of the students and lectures to them. It has only been in the last few years that serious scholarship on music history pedagogy has appeared by American scholars including collected essays on teaching by Mary Natvig, James Briscoe, and James Davis;⁷ the first journal devoted to music history

⁴ M. LOWE, “Rethinking the Undergraduate Music History Sequence in the Information Age”, *The Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, V/2, 2015, pp. 65-71: 65 (<http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmbhp/article/view/177/317>).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁷ *Teaching Music History*, ed. by M. Natvig, Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2002; *Vitalizing Music History Teaching*, ed. by J. Briscoe, Hillsdale, NY, Pendragon Press, 2010; *The Music History Classroom*, ed. by J. A. Davis, Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2012.

pedagogy;⁸ and dissertations investigating critical aspects of music history teaching. And it is only recently that this growing body of scholarship has had an impact on the American musicological institutions.

The detailed work of the recent dissertations give a new direction to how we can consider teaching music history and the role of the music history handbook. Kristy Swift's critical study of the Grout text included archival work on the papers of Grout, Palisca, and the publisher, as well as interviews with Burkholder and Palisca's family.⁹ Scott Dirkse's dissertation is not a study of textbooks, but an analysis of what he calls the 'Pedagogy movement' in American musicology; it nevertheless has implications for how pedagogical ideas can affect what and how we teach in the classroom.¹⁰ As more scholarly attention is focused on the pedagogy of music history, the result will be a deeper reflection on textbooks, their creators, and their role in teaching.

The reflective, scholarly study of the handbooks we use in our teaching and their role in what and how we teach are long over due. The critique of our music history textbooks now underway as part of the recent interest in pedagogy shows us that it is only by using the best methods of historical research on our own textbooks that we can begin to understand how they developed, how they are used, and how they can evolve in the future. What these discussions hold for the balancing of breadth and depth in our undergraduate teaching remains to be determined.

⁸ C. M. BALENSUELA, "Toward a Scholarship of Music History Pedagogy", *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, I/1, 2010, pp. 1-3 (<http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmbp/article/view/6/5>).

⁹ K. SWIFT, "Getting the Story Crooked": Donald Jay Grout, Claude V. Palisca, and J. Peter Burkholder's "A History of Western Music", 1960-2009, Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, 2013; see also "Grappling With Donald Jay Grout's Essays on Music Historiography", *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, I/2, 2011, pp. 135-166 (<http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmbp/article/view/7/48>).

¹⁰ S. DIRKSE, *Music History Pedagogy in the Twenty-First Century: The Pedagogy Movement in American Musicology*, Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2015.