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Review of Beethoven Studies 4, ed. Keith Chapin and David Wyn Jones

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Keith Chapin and David Wyn Jones, eds. *Beethoven Studies 4*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 247 pp. ISBN 978-1-108-42852-1.

The rather prosaic title of this collection of essays, edited by Keith Chapin and David Wyn Jones, is a deliberate attempt to resurrect a series of similarly-titled volumes published during the 1970s and 1980s: *Beethoven Studies* (1973), *Beethoven Studies 2* (1977) and *Beethoven Studies 3* (1982), all edited by the late Alan Tyson. *Beethoven Studies 4*, whose appearance coincides with the 250th anniversary of the composer's birth, comprises ten essays by leading scholars based in six different countries. These essays are arranged in rough chronological order, depending on the period of Beethoven's life emphasized in a given contribution: the first essay thus deals with Beethoven's youth in Bonn, the last with the late piano sonatas. Chapin and Jones offer a brief but helpful preface in which they identify affinities among the contributions that produce various groupings of multiple essays around a common theme. But otherwise what is most salient about the volume as a whole is the tremendous variety of topics and scholarly approaches represented, rather than any coherent overall structure. The "potpourri" nature of the book might make it less appealing as something to be read cover to cover, as opposed to a mere repository from which readers might extract individual essays of interest. Nevertheless, though the ten essays are very different from each other, a reader who chooses to engage with all of them will come away with a clear sense of the breadth and continued vitality of Beethoven scholarship nearly forty years after the last *Beethoven Studies* volume.

Beethoven Studies 4 opens with John D. Wilson's essay "From the Chapel to the Theatre to the *Akademiensaal*: Beethoven's Musical Apprenticeship at the Bonn Electoral Court, 1784–1792," which is based on two large-scale research projects directed by Birgit Lodes at the University of Vienna concerning the music library of Maximilian Franz, the ruling elector in Bonn in the 1780s, during Beethoven's youth. Wilson describes the vibrancy of musical life at Maximilian's court, a situation that undoubtedly shaped Beethoven's development as a composer, drawing particular attention to the prominence of sacred music and opera, as well as the increasing frequency of instrumental music concerts. More detailed

knowledge of this early period of Beethoven's career, Wilson argues, counteracts a longstanding tendency "to undervalue Beethoven's Bonn years" (p. 1), and has the potential to complicate how the composer's musical and personal identities are understood. "Bonn Beethoven," Wilson writes, is too often viewed retroactively as a harbinger of Vienna Beethoven, particularly Heroic Beethoven," and should instead be understood on its own terms (p. 2).

A similar de-centering of the "heroic" conception of Beethoven's music features prominently in the next essay, W. Dean Sutcliffe's "Gracious Beethoven?" Sutcliffe builds upon his own previous work on the staging of sociability in the music of Haydn and Mozart, and points out the "charming, funny and understated" aspects of Beethoven's piano sonatas that reflect the concept of sociability so central to Enlightenment culture (p. 24). Giving due attention to such features of Beethoven's style encourages us to hear familiar music in new ways, presenting an alternative to the "rugged individualism that is one of the most entrenched aspects of the Beethoven image, with its associated elements of heroic activity, titanic struggle and visionary power" (p. 24).

Barry Cooper provides the third essay, a comprehensive discussion of Beethoven's unfinished symphonies, as documented in musical sketches and verbal descriptions left behind by the composer. (A full inventory of these unfinished works is given as an appendix.) Cooper points out that none of the thirty-three "abandoned symphonies" he has identified closely resembles any of the completed symphonies (p. 72). Taken as a group, they demonstrate "the great diversity of ideas that Beethoven had for forming symphonies" (p. 73). Studying these incomplete works alongside the nine finished symphonies thus has the potential to create a more variegated picture of Beethoven's conception of this most important of instrumental genres.

The next two essays, by Michael Spitzer and Keith Chapin respectively, situate particular works by Beethoven in the social and intellectual context of the composer's cultural milieu. Unsurprisingly, both contributions draw heavily on sources outside of music studies. Spitzer's "Beethoven as Sentimentalist" uses research into the history of emotion to show how the funeral march and finale of the *Eroica* Symphony can be

heard to express the concept of glory as it was understood in Beethoven's culture. These movements, Spitzer argues, "stage glorious self-sacrifice in two moves, respectively that of death and resurrection" (p. 87). Spitzer shows that formal features of both movements can be heard as evoking contemporary understandings of state funerals and military battles, both of which were associated with glory.

Chapin's essay, "Beethoven's Nature: Idealism and Sovereignty from an Ecocritical Perspective," calls into question a longstanding tradition—going all the way back to E. T. A. Hoffmann—of hearing in Beethoven's music the triumph of an autonomous, rational human subject over nature. Not only does Chapin cite examples from Beethoven's music that call this view into question, but he suggests, too, that even the German Idealist philosophy so often invoked in connection with this image of Beethoven may have had a more nuanced attitude to nature than is usually thought. In this regard, Chapin draws particular attention to the prominent role that illness and physical pain played in both the writings and actual lives of figures such as Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller and Hoffmann—an obvious point of commonality with Beethoven's life and music.

The sixth essay, "(Cross-)Gendering the German Voice" by Katherine Hambridge, examines the career of the singer Pauline Anna Milder, who premiered the role of Fidelio in all three of its versions (1805, 1806 and 1814). Hambridge shows that the cross-dressing associated with this role was a "pronounced feature" of German opera and spoken theater in the early nineteenth century (p. 124), and a practice to which Milder was closely tied. In contrast to Italian opera of the same period, where it was most often employed when women took over castrato roles, cross-dressing in German opera was more common in situations where women sang roles originally written for tenor. Hambridge's historical insights thus provide a previously overlooked context for understanding Beethoven's only opera. In addition, critical discourse on Milder's performances demonstrates the role that gender played in the conception of a German operatic style separate from Italian and French traditions. Milder's voice and stage comportment were frequently described in masculine terms, her "masculinized soprano" conceived as a distinctively German form of singing (pp. 140–41).

Giorgio Sanguinetti's contribution, "Beethoven and Tonal Prototypes: An Inherited and Developing Relationship," turns the focus from reception history to musical analysis. Sanguinetti surveys Beethoven's use of what he calls "tonal prototypes," a catch-all term for traditional compositional formulae like galant schemata and partimento patterns: "pre-composed materials shared by composers through different generations, handed down by means of imitation and teaching" (p. 145). He begins by describing biographical and historical evidence of the role that these tonal prototypes played in Beethoven's training, then goes on to explore their relationship to improvisation, genre distinctions, and the traditional tripartite periodization of Beethoven's oeuvre.

In the eighth essay of the volume, David Wyn Jones investigates connections between the Austrian version of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (AMZÖ)—a journal modeled after the better-known Leipzig *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*—and the composition and reception of Beethoven's music during the final decade of his life ("Shared Identities and Thwarted Narratives: Beethoven and the Austrian *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 1817–1824"). Jones shows that the AMZÖ used music to construct a distinctive Austrian imperial identity during the 1810s and 1820s. He draws particular attention to the role played by Catholic religious music in this process, thus providing new ways of contextualizing both Beethoven's unrealized oratorio, *Der Sieg des Kreuzes*, and the *Missa solemnis*. Jones's study thus adds to recent reevaluations of the significance of religious music in Beethoven's output. Additionally, in pointing out Beethoven's apparent loyalty to the Habsburgs, it also extends previous efforts to reconsider the composer's political attitudes.

Religious music is also the focus of the next essay, Birgit Lodes's "Composing with a Dictionary: Sounding the Word in Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*." Lodes examines a document associated with the mass that has been mentioned in previous scholarship but not closely studied: Beethoven's transcription of portions of the Latin text of the Mass Ordinary, accompanied by German translations and additional annotations (Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, Mus. Ms autogr. Beethoven 35,25). Lodes demonstrates that the translations Beethoven used were derived from a book that he owned by a Lutheran priest named Ignatius Feßler. She further points out

that the composer indicated Latin vowel lengths for various words in the text and wrote down remarks in German concerning the meanings of certain words: both these features testify to his use of a particular Latin dictionary that he had in his library. Lodes goes on to connect the document's contents to specific compositional aspects of the *Missa solemnis*.

The tenth and final essay, Tom Beghin's "Deafly Performing Beethoven's Last Three Piano Sonatas," is arguably the least conventional. It describes the author's experience of playing Opp. 109, 110 and 111 on a replica of Beethoven's Broadwood piano, which was also outfitted with a special hearing machine similar to the one Beethoven is believed to have employed on his own Broadwood. Beghin reflects on the experience of attempting to reproduce the physical conditions under which Beethoven himself may have played these works, and argues for a broadened, "multi-sensorial" conception of musical analysis that embraces "feeling" and "seeing," rather than just "hearing" (p. 222)—an approach clearly indebted to the "carnal musicology" pioneered by Elisabeth Le Guin. The essay itself seeks to be multi-sensorial in that it invites the reader to watch six video clips, available on the website InsideTheHearingMachine.com, of the author demonstrating passages from the three sonatas on the replica Broadwood. (Unfortunately, I was not able to locate these videos through the main homepage of this website, but scanning the QR code provided on page 222 did take me to the right place [<https://www.insidethehearingmachine.com/demonstrations-at-the-piano>]). Beghin's project provides a poignant reminder of Beethoven's *embodied* humanity, something that cannot be captured in the pages of a printed score.

As the editors themselves discuss in their preface, the striking variety of the contributions in *Beethoven Studies 4* unavoidably reflects developments in music research in the nearly four decades since the last *Beethoven Studies* volume appeared. Put simply, as scholars increasingly turn to composers outside of the established art-music canon, and just as often to aspects of musical activity other than composition, Beethoven research no longer occupies the same dominant place in the field that it arguably used to. But the essays in this collection show that this state of affairs is hardly an impediment to scholars still interested in this most canonical of canonical composers. Rather, Beethoven research has been

pushed to move beyond the narrower focus on sketches, scores and biography that characterized almost all of the essays in the previous three installments of *Beethoven Studies*. Alongside new investigations into the broader contexts for Beethoven's life and music—whether those contexts be cultural, political or strictly musical—several contributions here engage in helpful dialogue with scholarly approaches not traditionally associated with Beethoven studies, from ecomusicology (Chapin), to gender and sexuality studies (Hambridge) and disability studies (Beghin). In a similar vein, the essays by Sutcliffe and Sanguinetti provide bridges between Beethoven studies and recent scholarship on Enlightenment sociability, schemata, and topic theory. Such efforts to link Beethoven research with other areas in the present-day landscape of music studies mean that this collection of essays can appeal to readers who may not have a specialized interest in Beethoven's music. New ways of approaching Beethoven and his music need not, however, displace the old ways: as the editors correctly observe, the ten contributions in this volume show that “sketches and scores remain important” (p. xiv). Rather, Beethoven research can only be enriched by being open to both the old and the new, by embracing the kind of diversity of topics and methods reflected in *Beethoven Studies 4*.

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