

Reviews

Histories of Heinrich Schütz, by Bettina Varwig. Musical Performance and Reception. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. xiv, 251 pp.

The fate of Heinrich Schütz's music has fluctuated dramatically across the centuries. His reputation peaked in the mid-seventeenth century: in 1657 he was heralded by the Leipzig musician Elias Nathusius as the “father of our modern music.”¹ Yet by 1700, Schütz's compositions were largely forgotten and had disappeared from the performing repertoires of most German churches.² In the nineteenth century Schütz's music was rediscovered by a few connoisseurs, composers, and scholars; yet it was in the early twentieth century that his reputation soared in Germany, with his motets seen as an essential partner of the Lutheran liturgy and the German language. Indeed, the revival of Schütz's output was spearheaded by the youth music movement that later became closely associated with Nazism. Perhaps because of these connotations, Schütz's music declined in prominence from the 1960s onwards, although since the 1990s a small-scale revival has been led by specialist ensembles, particularly those singing with one voice per part.

The changing fate of Schütz's music is explored in Bettina Varwig's book *Histories of Heinrich Schütz*. Varwig's volume is a welcome addition to the meager quantity of English-language monographs on Schütz, which previously consisted of Hans Joachim Moser's sprawling tome of 1959, now heavily outdated, and Basil Smallman's 2000 overview of Schütz's life and works.³ Unlike Moser and Smallman, Varwig does not attempt a comprehensive survey of Schütz's output, but instead picks out pivotal moments in the reception of his works. Her book does this via an unusual structure that symbolizes the discontinuities in the reception of Schütz's music.

The book consists of four chapters, each followed by a “Paraphrase.” The chapters envisage how seventeenth-century listeners might have reacted to Schütz's music at four points of his career: his polychoral psalm settings for the

1. “Parentem Musicae nostrae modernae,” Elias Nathusius, application for Thomaskantorate, Stadtarchiv Leipzig, Tit. VIII B 116, fol. 140r.

2. Friedhelm Krummacher, “Wirkung als Problem: Zur historischen Geltung von Heinrich Schütz,” *Schütz-Jahrbuch* 29 (2007): 111–22, at 115.

3. Hans Joachim Moser, *Heinrich Schütz: His Life and Work*, trans. Carl F. Pfatteicher (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1959); orig. publ. as *Heinrich Schütz: Sein Leben und Werk* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1936); Basil Smallman, *Schütz*, Master Musicians Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Reformation Centenary (1617), the music drama *Dafne* (1627), the funerary work *Musicalische Exequien* (1636), and the motets of the *Geistliche Chor-Music* (1648). By contrast, the Paraphrases examine trends in the reception of Schütz's music in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as indicated by their titles: "Lutheran Schütz," "Operatic Schütz," "Monumental Schütz," and "Rhetorical Schütz." Each Paraphrase refers, in greater or lesser detail, to the Schütz work discussed in the previous chapter. Varwig takes the term "paraphrase" from George Buchanan's *Paraphrasis psalmorum Davidis poetica* (1571), a recasting of the psalms in Latin verse; she explains that this term "is intended to capture the endless possibilities of reformulating and elaborating the same historical facts and narratives" (p. 6). Her juxtaposition of chapters and Paraphrases contrasts with the chronological narrative often taken in accounts of reception.⁴ Instead it suggests a reception history in which "interpretations begin to accumulate" and "different strata of these readings" get "stacked up" (p. 6). For Varwig, cultural history is not a single master-narrative but a series of overlapping and juxtaposed paraphrases.

Varwig's four chapters on the seventeenth-century meanings of Schütz's music are not reception history in its narrow sense. They do not present the documented responses of seventeenth-century listeners to specific pieces of his music. Such responses rarely survive from the period; if audiences recorded anything, it was usually a general impression of the performance as an event.⁵ Indeed, Varwig quotes several eyewitness accounts of music at the Dresden court (such as reports of the cacophony at the Reformation Centenary, pp. 17–18, or a description of music at a 1614 baptism, p. 138), but none of these identifies the compositions performed. Instead, Varwig offers her imaginative recreation of "some of the meanings engendered in the initial acts of performing and listening." Using an eclectic range of printed primary sources—including theological writings on music, iconography, and news-sheets—she seeks to uncover the "wider preoccupations among [Schütz's] audiences and their horizons of expectation" (p. 6).

The strength of these chapters—which will come as a revelation to anyone familiar with the restricted remit of some German scholarship—is in Varwig's ability to place Schütz's music in the widest possible context. Chapter 1 argues that the trumpets and drums in Schütz's polychoral psalms for the Reformation Centenary might have been heard by the original listeners as bellicose war-mongering, as foreshadowing the apocalypse, or as a new type of Protestant ritual. Chapter 2 untangles the web of references surrounding

4. For a recent example of reception history organized chronologically, see Terence Cave, *Mignon's Afterlives: Crossing Cultures from Goethe to the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

5. As Tim Carter notes, some firsthand accounts of musical performances around 1600 suggest that in this period "the performance act is stronger than the musical text as a cultural identifier." See his "The Sound of Silence: Models for an Urban Musicology," *Urban History* 29 (2002): 8–18, at 15.

Dafne, the 1627 music drama for which the music is lost; Varwig examines the multiple meanings arising from pastoral poetry and from Lutheran adaptations of Classical mythology. Chapter 3 relates Schütz's *Musicalische Exequien* to Lutheran attitudes toward death and the afterlife, with particular attention to how these attitudes changed during the Thirty Years War.

Especially wide-ranging is chapter 4, which explores the “array of different overtones” (p. 183) projected by the *Geistliche Chor-Music* (1648). In his preface to this motet collection, Schütz famously defended the value of a traditional training in counterpoint. Accordingly, most previous scholars have examined these motets for their contrapuntal devices and text-setting. Although Varwig does not overlook Schütz's musical craftsmanship (pp. 184–89), she places the collection in a stimulating global perspective. She relates Schütz's suspicion of new musical styles to the debates surrounding innovation engendered by such diverse phenomena as the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the European discovery of the New World, and the Copernican model of the cosmos. As geographical and intellectual horizons expanded, many Europeans expressed nostalgia for the old—in Schütz's case, nostalgia for older contrapuntal styles.

Varwig grounds each chapter with close readings of salient musical passages. In chapter 3, on the *Musicalische Exequien*, she examines the Seraphic Chorus (choir 2) in the *Nunc dimittis*, SWV 281, and how its entries emerge out of the sound of choir 1 “almost like an amplified overtone” (p. 116). She suggests that these entries produce an “opaque effect,” echoing not choir 1 but “some other sound that is not actually present.” Hence the Seraphic Chorus is not a direct representation of the music of heaven, but “a series of ever-fainter worldly resonances, whose intangible quality renders any true understanding out of reach” (p. 118). Varwig then relates this musical detail to the speculative accounts of celestial music by seventeenth-century theologians such as Christoph Frick and Johann Matthäus Meyfart. The other chapters provide similarly memorable yet historically informed readings of Schütz's music. It is a shame, though, that most of the book's musical examples are transcribed from the sometimes unreliable texts of the *Neue Schütz Ausgabe*. Example 2.4 (p. 66) presents “Sei gegrüßet, Maria,” SWV 333, as given in Wilhelm Ehmann's edition of 1963, with his editorial breath marks and upward transposition by a tone.⁶ Anachronisms such as the two-sharp key signature detract from Varwig's efforts to reconstruct the mindset of Schütz's listeners.

Varwig states that the aim of her book is to shift attention away from verbal and musical texts to “what surrounds them—people, ideas, social and political realities” (p. 6). This is a fitting description for the rich tapestry of contexts she weaves around Schütz's music. However, the title of each chapter specifies a

6. Heinrich Schütz, *Kleine geistliche Konzerte 1636/1639. Abteilung 3*, ed. Wilhelm Ehmann, *Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke*, vol. 12 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1963), 37.

published collection or musical work by Schütz and thus may suggest to the unwary reader a stronger focus on his music than the book actually provides. Somewhat problematic is the title of chapter 1: “Trumpets and Drums (*Psalmen Davids*, 1617).” As already mentioned, this chapter discusses the bombastic music used in Dresden for the Reformation Centenary of 1617, including two of Schütz’s psalms that later appeared in his *Psalmen Davids* (1619). The chapter title, however, conflates the 1617 event with the subsequent 1619 publication. Furthermore, as Varwig admits in a footnote (p. 9n4), the two psalms she discusses (SWV 43 and 45) are not representative of the twenty-six pieces contained in the *Psalmen Davids*. It is unclear whether her arguments about the “aural indulgence” of SWV 43 and 45 apply to other pieces in the *Psalmen Davids*, such as “Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen,” SWV 29, or the penitential “An der Wassern zu Babel,” SWV 37. Here we might detect a tension inherent in any attempt to write a reception history of seventeenth-century music: the surviving historical evidence usually concerns events such as the Reformation Centenary, rather than the individual compositions that nowadays dominate scholarly attention.

The Paraphrases present a reception history of a more familiar kind, being based on the published statements made about Schütz’s music by German scholars and musicians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Varwig exposes the metaphors and ideologies behind the changing meanings that listeners and critics attributed to Schütz’s output. Paraphrase 1 (“Lutheran Schütz”) traces the efforts of Germans in the early twentieth century to claim his music for Lutheran use and to portray the composer as the “fifth Evangelist” (to quote Julius Smend’s 1925 epithet, p. 49). Such efforts were frustrated by Schütz’s limited use of chorale melodies; by the Nazi era, the *Psalmen Davids* were instead performed as symbols of Teutonic triumphalism (p. 53). Paraphrase 2 (“Operatic Schütz”) charts the attempts of German historians and musicologists since the mid-nineteenth century to claim *Dafne* as the first German opera. These attempts extended to a 1936 April Fool about a lost Schütz opera being found in the former residence of Carl Maria von Weber (p. 98). Paraphrase 3 (“Monumental Schütz”) traces the diverse ways in which Schütz was celebrated as a German national hero in the mid-twentieth century, including portrayals of the composer in a forged painting of ca. 1935 and in Günter Grass’s novella *Das Treffen in Telgte* (1979). Paraphrase 4 (“Rhetorical Schütz”) explains how German musicologists sought to make Schütz’s works comprehensible to non-specialist audiences by analyzing them as a series of rhetorical figures. A leading exponent of this approach was Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, whose interpretation of “Ich bin eine rufende Stimme,” SWV 383, is challenged by Varwig’s own reading of the motet (pp. 204–9).

By their nature, the Paraphrases do not provide an exhaustive account of the modern revivals of Schütz’s music. Further stories could be told, for instance of the Marxist image of the composer fostered by the German

Democratic Republic.⁷ Also worthy of exploration would be the varied sound-worlds with which performers have realized Schütz's music: the *Psalmen Davids*, for instance, have been performed in Mahlerian orchestrations of the 1910s,⁸ choral and brass renditions of the 1960s, and one-voice-per-part scorings since the 1990s. Still, Varwig provides the first English-language account of the modern reinventions of Schütz's music. As such, her book is valuable for scholars not just of Baroque music but also of German culture between the 1870s and 1950s.

Varwig's book presents so many contending images of Schütz that it raises the question: what, if anything, holds together these disparate "histories"? At times she takes a relativistic view in which the responses of all listeners (including herself) are equally valid: "The stories told here constitute one more possible reformulation, one more paraphrase around the impenetrable and endlessly fascinating chaos of historical reality" (p. 7). Yet connecting all these diverse interpretations is Schütz's music and the "presence" it achieves in performance (p. 214). Whilst Varwig repudiates any notion of "the music itself," she identifies three factors that may explain the ongoing "allure of Schütz's music:" "its compositional fluency, productive openness to interpretation and a potential for intense sensual stimulation" (pp. 214–15). Indeed, her readings of individual compositions reveal her persuasive view of Schütz's music as primarily a sonic fabric, rather than one that enunciates a Biblical text. Thus Schütz's psalms for the Reformation Centenary, SWV 43 and 45, are exercises in "mass sound manipulation" rather than clearly presenting the words (p. 37). His motet "O quam tu pulchra es," SWV 265, ends with "waves of untexted sound . . . [that] invite a self-reflective meditation on music's own sonic power" (p. 84). The motet "Es ist erschienen die heilsame Gnade Gottes," SWV 371, uses techniques of variation and amplification to create a musically coherent opening "that respects and utilises the syntactical properties of his text, but works independently of its semantic content" (p. 186). Further analyses of Schütz's procedures of variation and amplification can be found in a 2009 article by Varwig.⁹

Thus Varwig's book is significant for providing a refreshing variety of interpretations of Schütz's music, interpretations that challenge old notions of the composer as an ardent preacher of Lutheran texts. Moreover, her monograph

7. Walter Werbeck, "Das Schütz-Bild in der DDR," in *Schütz-Rezeption im Wandel der Zeit: Kolloquium anlässlich des Festwochenendes "50 Jahre Ausstellungen zu Heinrich Schütz in seinem Geburtshaus,"* ed. Friederike Böcher, 89–109 (Bad Köstritz, Germany: Heinrich-Schütz-Haus, 2005).

8. See Max Schneider's orchestration of "Zion spricht, der Herr hat mich verlassen," SWV 46, published by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1919; an extract is given as a supplement to his article "Die Besetzung der vielstimmigen Musik des 17. und 16. Jahrhunderts," *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 1 (1918/19): 205–34.

9. Bettina Varwig, "'Mutato Semper Habitu': Heinrich Schütz and the Culture of Rhetoric," *Music & Letters* 90 (2009): 215–39.

raises wider questions about the writing of music history. Could the reception of the music of other composers or epochs be similarly interpreted as a “stacking up” of contending paraphrases? Would this approach work for compositions that, unlike Schütz’s, have remained part of the performing repertory since their creation? These are not questions that Varwig addresses, but they are a measure of the power of her monograph to stimulate new ways of thinking about music history.

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Desire and Pleasure in Seventeenth-Century Music, by Susan McClary. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012. xi, 340 pp.

“The eighteenth century was a period of almost unparalleled confidence in the viability of a public sphere in which ideas could be successfully communicated, difference negotiated, consensus achieved: . . . people . . . put a premium on intelligibility and the efficacy of shared discourses.”¹

Thus wrote Susan McClary, in her 2000 book *Conventional Wisdom*. Although she might not have meant it at the time, McClary’s comment could serve as one hermeneutic key to her life’s work as a musicologist. At least since the 1991 publication of *Feminine Endings*, that work has been characterized by the premium she herself places on “intelligibility and the efficacy of shared discourses”—whether it be the intelligibility across disciplinary boundaries of her own arguments about music or, more important to her, the intelligibility of musical texts and reception practices to students and scholars of other discourses.² Becoming ever more skilled at writing a musicology that thinkers outside our field eagerly read, she has provided ever new models for how such writing might be done. *Desire and Pleasure in Seventeenth-Century Music* confirms McClary’s place as one of our discipline’s most effective emissaries to the wider intellectual world, and therefore as one of our few public intellectuals.

Beautifully written, rich with astute readings of pieces from Giulio Caccini’s “Amarilli mia bella” to the chaconne of J. S. Bach’s D-Minor violin partita (BWV 1004), the book makes several sustained, intertwining arguments. Implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, McClary argues for a nonteleological understanding of the multiple approaches to pitch organization that characterized European music in the seventeenth century. Tonality was not, she asserts, an intrinsically superior, more highly evolved system of pitch organization than the modality of sixteenth-century music. Rather, she shows, the practices

1. Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 64–65.

2. Idem, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).