

The Musicology Review

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Foreword

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It is a singular pleasure to welcome this tenth volume of *The Musicology Review*, especially after an absence of some five years. Its appearance now could scarcely be more opportune: it is not too much to suggest that since the last issue appeared (in 2016), there has been a sea-change in Irish musicology that reflects a more general upsurge (especially within the domain of Anglo-American musicological discourse). In particular, women's studies (together with the relationship between music, politics and gender), film studies, the study of music in video games and gaming generally (elegantly coined as *ludomusicology* by an erstwhile member of the UCD School of Music), and popular music studies now burgeon on the Irish musicological landscape. The strong seam of papers on these subjects which has so strikingly featured in recent graduate and plenary meetings of the Society for Musicology in Ireland suffices to attest this richly interesting phenomenon. But this does not mean that older preoccupations with Western musical culture lie submerged, like a sunken cathedral, beneath the glittering surface of these more recent enterprises. Even a glance at the table of contents of this new volume would elegantly affirm otherwise. Alongside essays on aesthetics in relation to improvised music and on the symbolic meaning of popular music in film, this volume also comprehends the work of three composers (Ethel Smyth, A. J. Potter and Antonio Salieri), as well as an archival and cultural study of psalm tunes in eighteenth-century Dublin. And the issue opens with a close reading of Tchaikovsky that effortlessly reflects the growing intimacy between performance and research which has of late so markedly enriched the complexion of musical studies in UCD.

These essays represent, for the most part, the peer-reviewed research of a younger generation of musicologists. In that respect, they afford a future tense for the discipline itself. The idea of thinking seriously about music as a self-standing profession remains of fragile account, not least in the present moment. The aesthetics of entertainment come loud, and more than occasionally at the expense of serious scholarship, including (most emphatically) scholarship devoted to popular musical culture. This means in turn that the futurity of this scholarship, so impressively signified by the plural engagements contained in this volume of *The Musicology Review*, must not only be acclaimed but actively secured. That responsibility largely lies, perhaps, with an older generation of scholars, but it also lies within the more general domain of the humanities, not as a belaboured (or soothing) refuge and nostalgia for times past, but as a dynamic agent of historical, theoretical and cultural inquiry. Interdisciplinarity is almost certainly key to the fulfilment of this inquiry. Nevertheless, as I once remarked elsewhere, interdisciplinarity must function on equal terms. To ignore this imperative, most acutely in the case of musical studies, is to imperil the subject itself. The science and grammar of five lines and four spaces (for example) will not survive without this vigilance. And nor will literate access to the music which this science so miraculously allows. It is a commonplace that music is inscribed in history, but history is also inscribed in music. And there are other literacies and other grammars, for that matter, which musicological comprehension requires, especially when music intersects with different agents of cultural discourse, most obviously, perhaps, in the dominant art forms of our own day. (Can there be any artistic domain of greater significance for current musicological discourse than cinema?).

The upheavals and strenuously revisionist impulses of contemporary political thought also represent a distinct challenge to musicology, especially when these appear to undermine the legitimacy, and sometimes even the moral probity of continuing to engage with a repertory that is somehow discredited as an agent of colonial or even racist discourse. I don't discount the gravity of these upheavals. I merely resist the suggestion that these be allowed to govern the nature and purpose of musicological scholarship without the debate that is their due. Indeed, it is to be hoped that future volumes of this journal will attract thoughtful commentary on this decisive (and often divisive) issue, if only because its impact is already in evidence in neighbouring disciplines, as well as in the reformation of music curricula in the UK, the United States and Canada.

'Meanwhile, we continue': the contents of this volume (and here I also salute the authors of the Reviews Colloquium) are a signature of grace, as well as of intellectual well-being, insofar as we continue to attach value to the very enterprise of musicological thought. In this connection, I cannot resist the disclosure that one of the contributors to this issue also prepared the music copy for the very first volume of *Irish Musical Studies (Musicology in Ireland)*, back in 1990. That kind of continuity, fortuitously or otherwise, seems meaningful to me, because it reminds us that musicology in Ireland has a past as well as a present, and even a micro-history of its own. As we add to that history, we must congratulate not only the contributors to this issue, but also the editors, whose sovereign efforts to renew this journal have been so handsomely repaid. To emerge (one ardently hopes) into a post-pandemic climate of physical and mental well-being is a condition of feeling which music especially reverences and actuates. To celebrate likewise the publication of this volume of essays is no less important. It is an inspiring achievement.

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