

EDITORIAL



I clearly remember that when this journal was first devised there lay some niggling doubt behind my tremendous enthusiasm for this timely initiative. Wasn't there something problematic about viewing the eighteenth century as a whole? Did I intuit some sort of fundamental divide, perhaps somewhere between the deaths of J. S. Bach and Handel, one that somehow cast this century into two irreconcilable worlds? The seventeenth century was perhaps enough of a mess for its disunity to become a historiographical topic in its own right, its separate threads providing at least some narrative potential, even if these could never convincingly be drawn into a single whole. And the nineteenth century was perhaps sufficiently punctuated with various revolutions and restorations, together with an overriding story of industrial progress, to fall into a coherent (if divisive) family of narratives. Even the twentieth century – that which surely saw the largest number of changes in the human condition and the exponential pluralizing of 'legitimate' musical traditions – seems to have a clear enough trajectory, much of the music at its end having a discernible genealogical connection with that of its beginning. So what was it that was worrying me about the eighteenth century?

Perhaps some of the answer is provided in Karol Berger's most recent book, which is centred around the eighteenth century, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow: An Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). This brilliant and searching essay suggests that the middle of the century marks in musical terms the move from pre-modernity to modernity, something most easily grasped as a move from viewing harmony as a metaphor for God towards viewing God as a metaphor for harmony. The crucial difference between Bach and Mozart (several fragments of whose music could surely be indistinguishable in isolation) lies for Berger in his belief that Bach subordinated linear, progressive musical time to the cyclic (that is, 'God's time'), while Mozart's concern with the linear ordering of events evidenced a critical concern for the necessary contingency of the human subject in a world in which human concerns no longer necessarily connected directly to a broader cosmic plan. It may be that the actual implications for time in the music of Bach and Mozart (and many other composers besides) are more complex than this dichotomy suggests, but it at least provides a heuristic model for conceptualizing the differences between the two halves of the century. Berger's is also the story of secularization, of course, the familiar narrative by which the Enlightenment fulfilled the implications of two centuries' progress in the sciences and rational thought, and finally dispensed with the notion of a personal God who took an active interest in human concerns. But – one might add – religion has hardly disappeared within the ambit of Western modernity, and it has reappeared in several different forms at the most unexpected of times. Indeed, many facets of the culture we might call 'classical music' rely on metaphors and ideology that clearly parallel some of the psychological and structural aspects of religion (witness the writings of Heinrich Schenker).

Even if Berger is correct, the divide that he perceives in the mid-eighteenth century need not be something that renders the century ungovernable for music historians, but rather might be the crucial fulcrum on which the culture to which we still belong rests. The interplay of pre-modern and modern is certainly an important element in my current study of Bach's Passions, which makes the claim that much in this music is a dialogue between traditional elements (that which is bound to a specific doctrinal context, in which all elements of music and text relate to a pre-established order) and those that point towards modernity (such as the implicit autonomy of many of the vocal lines, the narrative patterning implied by the tonal flow, the reworking of traditional elements in such a way that they seem to transcend their original meaning and connotations, and the implications for the development of subjective time-consciousness). I suggest that it is this dialogic nature that has rendered these works so significant at several moments in the modern era, the interplay of pre-modern and modern often uncannily resonating with later experiences of this flux. In other words, perhaps it was the eighteenth century that bequeathed to us not only the Enlightenment dream of clear rational progress, but also some of the ways in which this mindset could co-exist with (and mutually inflect) others of a less rational and predictable nature. Perhaps an appreciation



of the ways a dialogue can be forged between modern and ‘non-modern’ cultures is of especially crucial importance for us today, when the values of Western modernity are under constant challenge from within and without.

There are several other signs that musicologists are beginning to find ways of productively bridging the eighteenth-century divide. Our very own Dean Sutcliffe, for instance, has developed formidable expertise on both sides of the century (Domenico Scarlatti and Haydn), and the new festschrift for Christoph Wolff (*The Century of Bach and Mozart* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008)) celebrates the dual specialities of this seminal scholar. Contributions to the present issue of *Eighteenth-Century Music* also show that scholars are adopting a broader historical perspective on the early part of the century. Bettina Varwig suggests that Bach’s music can be productively viewed according to the model of Erasmian rhetoric. This puts the emphasis on composition as variation and amplification rather than duplicating what is so common in rhetorically based studies of the German Baroque – viewing musical ‘figures’ as directly mimicking verbal formulations and merely waiting to be translated, like a code to be cracked. In other words, the development of a rhetorical framework for Bach that stresses the inventive and generative implications of rhetorical discipline throws the spotlight onto music as a mode of thought and expression that goes well beyond its relation to speech and text. This is something that very much connects this composer to some of the concerns of later cultures of music, those which tended to prize it more as an art with its own autonomous expression.

Keith Chapin shows how J. A. Scheibe’s famous polemic against Bach had its roots in a (mis)reading of the late seventeenth-century formulation of ‘classicism’ in French literary culture. In other words, Scheibe was participating in a much broader historical debate than the local politics of Leipzig might initially imply. His condemnation of Bach stemmed from a selective application of a broader doctrine, emphasizing its concern for simplicity without balancing this with considerations of the actual effect on the listener. Scheibe was one of several contemporary writers who served to render music an art that could be discussed in relation to the ‘classic’, and it was ultimately the very notion of a ‘classical music’ that led to the rehabilitation of Bach and his co-option as one of the earliest composers in the classical canon.

And then there’s Handel, for so long the model for a sort of tired English worthiness of musical style, now increasingly brought to life as one of the greatest dramatic geniuses of the modern age. What is so striking about Ilias Chrissochoidis’s micro-history of Handel’s ‘annus horribilis’ of 1737 is how contemporary this story of stress and chronic health problems seems. This vivid picture of the downside of the culture of enterprise and commercial risk clashes with the seeming certainty of Bach’s lifestyle, punctuated in equal measure by disputes about his position in the ‘natural order’ of civic life and the birth of the next child. Yes, the time has never seemed more appropriate for a journal devoted to the music of this most pivotal of centuries.

JOHN BUTT