

Cravens on Kolb, ed. (2015)

Kolb, Katherine, editor. *Berlioz on Music: Selected Criticism 1824–1837*. Translated by Samuel N. Rosenberg, Oxford UP, 2015, pp. 300, ISBN 978-0-19-939195-0

Arline Cravens, Saint Louis University

The French musical press was in a state of transition in the 1830s. Artistic periodicals were proliferating, and established journals now included criticism on music and the arts. Kolb's in-depth and lengthy introduction to the collection, which is divided into three sections aptly subtitled "Revolution in Paris," "Revolution in the French Musical Press," and "Music Criticism as Revolutionary Practice," astutely situates Berlioz's criticism within the context of the music world at this time, while also providing impressive commentary on Parisian society and the developing genre of music journalism. The progressive *La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, founded in 1834 and for which Hector Berlioz was an associate editor and then later editor, provided the composer with a platform not only to review music compositions and performances, but to also publish his writings on the practice of music composition and orchestration. Robert Schumann's music journal, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik (New Journal of Music)*, was also founded in 1834. Both journals, as Kolb explains, attempted to broach the subject of music itself: debating the virtues and creeds of classical music and Romantic music, instrumental music and operatic music, as well as program music.

This collection of Berlioz's criticism focuses on the early years of his writing, while also providing a clear overview of his trajectory from music student and novice writer to renowned composer and music critic. An innovator (along with Schumann) in the arena of music criticism, Berlioz's articles chronicle the state of the music world and the development of Parisian music society through the critique of performances. His articles illuminate musicians of the time (Franz Liszt, Frédéric Chopin, and the Liszt-Thalberg rivalry), offer social commentary on audience behavior and the treatment of women, and provide historical context on the evolution of music composition and the progress of music education in France.

The chronological span of this collection (1824–37) was carefully established by Kolb and Rosenberg to cover the period predating Berlioz's self-published volumes of collected criticism, readily available in English. The collection of forty-four articles begins with Berlioz's second known work of criticism in print, dated January 1824, which appeared in *Le Corsaire*. Entering into the debate pitting French against Italian opera, it also includes a critique of audience behavior. The volume closes with an article for *La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* in 1837, which discusses the ballet *La Chatte métamorphosée en femme* and expresses Berlioz's reservations about ballet-pantomime. Each article is introduced by Kolb, whose rich annotations elucidate influences and driving forces that guided Berlioz's writing and criticism in the early years, as well as developments in the music world at the time of each article. The remaining forty-two articles, printed in their entirety or excerpted, include publications from *Le Corsaire*, *Le Correspondant*, *La Revue européenne*, *Le Rénovateur*, *La Gazette musicale de Paris*, *La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* (the renamed *Gazette* which had acquired its rival, *Revue musicale*, in 1835), and *Le Journal des débats*.

The volume highlights Berlioz's criticism on the state of music, as well as his impressions of leading musicians of the day. Of particular note in the collection is the third article "Observations on Classical Music and Romantic Music" (Oct. 1830, *Le Correspondant*). It includes Berlioz's debate on Classical and Romantic music, which is in reality a manifesto for Romantic music and the expressiveness of instrumental music. Berlioz begins the article: "If such a distinction obtains in literature, all the more must it obtain in music, the most essentially free of all the arts, yet the longest fettered by prejudice and arbitrary rules" (35). Kolb's expert annotations remind the reader of Berlioz's indebtedness to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (35), and particularly the opening to *Social Contract*: "Man is born free, yet is everywhere in chains." In addition, the fifth article "Concerts" (Dec. 1833, *Le Rénovateur*), reveals portraits of Liszt, Chopin, and Ferdinand Hiller at the outset of their careers. Berlioz details their performance and music practices, as well as their unique compositional styles. Berlioz once again champions his friend Liszt in article thirty-eight, "Liszt" (Jun. 1836, *La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*). Entering into the Liszt-Thalberg rivalry, Berlioz describes the mature Liszt as a modern Oedipus. He closes the article with the following assessment: "In his playing of a work still barely understood, Liszt proved himself to be the pianist of the future. To his great honor" (235).

Berlioz's criticism similarly includes reflections on the music world in Parisian society. Article six (Jan. 1834, *Le Rénovateur*), addresses the role of music in society and laments the slow progress of the public's music education. On the contrary, article forty-one (Sept. 1836, *Le Journal des débats*), measures the progress of music education in France with a sense of hope for the future: "As I said at the outset, we shall see a great and beautiful revolution in our culture whose marvels can be admired even

now and whose consequences for music are incalculable” (259). Article thirty-five (Feb. 1836, *Le Journal des débats*), offers a glimpse of finances in the music world, chronicling the effect of taxation on Parisian concerts and musicians.

This volume of Berlioz criticism, copiously annotated by Kolb and translated by Rosenberg, brings previously inaccessible Berlioz criticism to an Anglophone audience. Moreover, a companion website provides further material to complement the text: particularly useful is the complete text of articles that appear only in excerpt in the print volume. Elegantly written and meticulously researched, *Berlioz on Music* is a veritable treasure trove. It provides an indispensable resource for music and literary scholars by making an invaluable contribution to modern nineteenth-century studies.

Volume: 46.3-4

Year:

- 2018