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Elgar's Oratorios: The Creation of an Epic Narrative, by Charles Edward McGuire (review)

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does contain considerable helpful information and tabulation of textual details, Doebel's larger ambitions are seriously weakened by his need to engage the larger critical and conceptual issues raised by the topic. Perhaps Doebel would have been wiser to publish a study that encompassed only his solid textual research and left aside consideration of the historiographic, theoretical, and critical concerns that frustrate him.

The contrast with Bo Marschner's *Zwischen Einfühlung und Abstraktion* is marked. This book, which was written as a *Habilitations-schrift*, is an intellectually adventurous work by an experienced scholar. The bulk of the book comprises an extensive critical and analytical discussion, fairly well supplied with musical examples and graphic devices, that explores several key facets of Bruckner's symphonic discourse. Individual chapters cover Bruckner's expository theme-groups, development, reprise and coda, and "finality." Marschner does not cover all of Bruckner's works systematically, but places emphasis wisely; for example, he builds his chapter on finality around analyses of the last movements of the Third, Sixth, and Eighth Symphonies, each of which was pivotal in Bruckner's evolving conception of the symphonic finale.

Marschner constructs his musical discussion from a conceptual framework laid out in the opening third of the book. He begins by establishing the two poles of Bruckner analysis represented by Ernst Kurth's dynamic, synthetic approach and the syntactic and systematic methodology of Werner Korte (pp. 16–22). Marschner links this pairing to the art historian Wilhelm Worringer's twin concepts of *Einfühlung* and *Abstraktion* (derived from a 1909 study translated as *Empathy and Abstraction: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style* [New York: International Universities Press, 1953]), which provided him with his title. Throughout the work Marschner cast his net broadly, drawing from a wide range of literature both musicological and otherwise in German and English; he does not even shy away from calling on C. G. Jung and Wilhelm Dilthey in his pursuit of an interpretive scheme that squares formalist abstraction with hermeneutic empathy. The book is not easy—it is a bit idiosyncratic in its frames of reference and some-

times hermetic in its density—yet should reward those who are willing to work through it.

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Elgar's Oratorios: The Creation of an Epic Narrative. By Charles Edward McGuire. Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2002. [xvi, 339 p. ISBN 0-7546-0271-0. \$79.95.] Music examples, charts, bibliography, index.

Edward Elgar's reputation as the first British composer of international stature since Henry Purcell rests more on his instrumental music than on his choral music. Generally speaking, it is the "Enigma" Variations and the symphonies, the concertos and chamber music—and not the oratorios and cantatas—that are most prominently featured on radio and concert programs and in written commentaries about the composer.

How fine it is, then, to have a book devoted solely to the choral music, especially one that stresses the centrality of these works to Elgar's artistic achievement. Charles McGuire's focus is on the four sacred oratorios Elgar produced just as he was emerging on the international scene—*The Light of Life* (1896), *The Dream of Gerontius* (1900), *The Apostles* (1903), and *The Kingdom* (1906). The emphasis is well chosen, for the oratorios offer some of the clearest insight into Elgar's complex personality and manifold influences, notably his compositional ambition, his debt to Richard Wagner, and his profound Christian faith. Even more important, the focus on the oratorios permits McGuire to examine Elgar in a specifically English context. One of the best chapters in the book considers the background of the nineteenth-century British oratorio and touches on such diverse topics as the Tonic Sol-Fa method, the rise of the music festival, and the role of middle- and working-class notions of "self-improvement" in the success of the genre as a whole. This concern to contextualize Elgar's oratorios even prompts the author to undertake in appendix B the gargantuan task of examining 289 separate large-scale choral works—not all of them

oratorios—performed in Great Britain between 1730 and 1944. (Works by both British and foreign-born composers are considered.) Investigating these works for patterns of narrative and scene structure, among other things, he is able to establish the normative practices defining oratorio composition that Elgar would have known and absorbed from his work as a provincial violinist and conductor during the early stages of his career.

Establishing this practice is crucial, for McGuire's main argument is that (with the exception of the early and derivative *The Light of Life*) Elgar's oratorios represent a quantum leap from past oratorios in matters of structure and organization. Important here is Elgar's gradual abandonment of detachable "numbers," that old standby of oratorio construction, replacing them with large-scale movements and "tableaux" tied together by a seamless web of Wagner-like reminiscence themes. But even more fundamental, in McGuire's view, are the innovations that Elgar makes in the narrative structure of his oratorios. Whereas most nineteenth-century oratorios employ a limited number of narrative types—such as "vivid description," where a character relates action as it is occurring, or "framing narration," where an identified narrator relates past events to the audience—Elgar's oratorios use everything from hidden narrators to multiple narrators to no narrator at all. Indeed, McGuire's point is that these changes in narrative strategy themselves contribute to the story and long-range dramatic effect of the oratorios as a whole.

It is a compelling argument, especially in view of the painstaking care Elgar took over the construction of his libretti for *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*. The first two of a projected trilogy of oratorios, these "epic" works—which, one suspects, provide the real justification for this study—sprang from the depths of Elgar's Catholic faith and mark the culmination of the composer's narrative innovations. McGuire provides an absorbing account of Elgar's engagement with the Bible and contemporaneous biblical scholarship, and makes a persuasive case for his consistency and skill in marshalling Old and New Testament texts. He further demonstrates the new flexibility of Elgar's leitmotifs in these works, and indicates the complex ways these contribute to

the unfolding of the narrative. Above all, he shows how the composer's emphasis on character development—itself a novelty in oratorio— dovetails with this narrative strategy, so that by the climactic ending of *The Kingdom* all traditional forms of narration have been dropped as the Apostles, now risen from humble origins to be God's messengers, themselves become their own narrators. As McGuire puts it, the Apostles "are now transformed by the power of God through the mediator-narrator into the power of the Church" (p. 57). Through a radically new approach to storytelling, Elgar manages to dramatize and humanize the exacting and often remote didacticism of nineteenth-century oratorio.

This closely argued book is not without faults. The iron consistency of Elgar's "rules" (p. 214) for Old and New Testament source quotation in *The Apostles* is perhaps a bit overstated, as McGuire's duly noted exceptions make clear. It seems odd that Charles Jessop's *The Galileans*, frequently invoked as an exemplar of normative oratorio practice, is not listed in appendix B; as a result, we have no idea when this work was written or premiered. Similarly, certain citations, like "Moore 1987" and "Moore 1999," are found neither in the bibliography nor in the opening list of abbreviations. (These may be misprints, but if so they do not appear to resemble other Moore citations given in the text.) The organization of the book is also a bit disjointed and mechanical. This is partly a consequence of the complex nature of an investigation that tackles textual and musical issues in equal measure, and that does so while traversing the four oratorios in turn. (Each gets a chapter of its own.) But it is also owing to the highly theoretical nature of the narratological discussion, the literature of which McGuire quotes and copiously summarizes. Such an interdisciplinary approach is not only to be welcomed; judging from the valuable new light it sheds on Elgar's work, it is clearly indispensable. Nonetheless, one wishes the concepts were sometimes more clearly presented and explained—I looked in vain for a definition of "covert" and "overt" narrator, terms that evidently do not mean what common sense would assume—and that their application throughout the text were somehow less unwieldy.

But these are minor frustrations that do not take away from the qualities of this useful new book. Charles McGuire is to be congratulated for bringing novel perspectives to bear on a neglected area of Elgar's output, and on a neglected genre generally.

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The Music of Louis Andriessen. Edited by Maja Trochimczyk. (Studies in Contemporary Music and Culture, 7.) New York: Routledge, 2002. [xii, 327 p. ISBN 0-8153-3789-2. \$85.] Music examples, illustrations, discography, index.

Louis Andriessen is one of the most important living composers of Western art music. Call that a bias—a bias that the reviewer shares with Maja Trochimczyk, editor of the present book, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*. For those who share such high regard for this composer's music, publication of this varied compilation devoted to the composer and his work is a highly significant milestone, for it is the first book-length study available in the United States on the subject. (Note, however, that 2002 also saw the publication in the United Kingdom of a composer-supervised selection of his own writings in English translation, *Louis Andriessen: The Art of Stealing Time*, ed. Mirjam Zegers and trans. Clare Yates [London: ARC Publications, 2002].) As such, it should be a priority acquisition for most music libraries and interested individuals.

Among the many qualities that make Andriessen's music stand out in his overcrowded and too frequently undifferentiated field, one quality holds particular rewards for scholarly study, and this is an uncommonly powerful bond between thinking and musicmaking. In this respect, his compositions are resonant feedback loops—abstract ideas find thought-provoking, concrete realization in musical structures, while engaging musical surfaces lay out a sequence of suggestive metaphors pointing back toward abstract ideas. By some ways of thinking, the abstract ideas to which I refer represent extramusical impositions on purely musical phenomena. (Stravinsky's

infamous taunt about music's inherent incapacities still hangs heavily in the air.) Andriessen's work argues forcefully that the "extra" in the preceding formulation is accurate only if interpreted to mean *extremely*. His compositions demonstrate the key role played in the mysterious echo chamber of musical meaning by the interactive play of abstract ideas and musical phenomena.

Trochimczyk's efforts show a keen sense of the richness that Andriessen's music offers to scholars and critics in its integrity, complexity, depth, and paradox. Her book succeeds in raising important themes and, at the same time, presents challenges to its readers. One of the greatest involves the question of its genre, and, by extension, its intended use.

A listing of the book's chapters by type suggests the assortment offered: four "dialogues" between the editor and Andriessen, a previously published "conversation" between another scholar and the composer, a "conversation" between the editor and one of the composer's longtime collaborators, a brief summary of the composer's Dutch milieu by another scholar, a summary quasi-overview of the composer's oeuvre by the editor, and the editor's transcription of a series of the composer's lectures. Four additional chapters are essays (one previously published) by the editor herself, two focusing on specific works, one on a series of related works, and one attempting some kind of summary consideration of Andriessen's compositional art.

For a reader proceeding sequentially from the beginning of the book to the end, this varied selection breeds uncertainty. It may well be that Trochimczyk's intent is to experiment with a series of overlapping small narratives as a replacement for the singular grand narrative of more traditional monographs. This possibility is given credence by general editor Joseph Auner's laudable emphasis on new critical approaches as described in his general introduction to the series of which this book is a part (Studies in Contemporary Music and Culture). In some cases the freedom to experiment with structures of approach and presentation certainly can lead to fresh models. And surprising contrasts and juxtapositions certainly can illuminate new pathways to our understanding of music and musical practices. Lamentably, such suc-