

***Centre and Periphery, Roots and Exile: Interpreting the Music of István Anhalt, György Kurtág, and Sándor Veress.*** Friedemann Sallis, Robin Elliott, and Kenneth DeLong, editors. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2011. xviii, 461 p. ISBN 978-1-55458-148-1. \$85.00.

Do composers work in a vacuum, or do time and place play a role in the compositional process? Are such issues also important for the analysis or interpretation of a work? The three editors of *Centre and Periphery, Roots and Exile* have compiled a collection of twenty essays that certainly makes a compelling argument that such matters are central to composers' thinking, the art they produce, and how it is discussed and disseminated. As Friedemann Sallis announces: "This book brings together essays that examine how ideas of place and identity impinge on the creation, analysis, and interpretations of twentieth-century art music" (1). The objects of this study are three composers whose origins stem from Hungary—István Anhalt (1919-2012), György Kurtág (b. 1926), and Sándor Veress (1907-1992). The impetus for the majority of the essays was an international symposium of the same name that took place in January 2008 at the University of Calgary (although the editors do not indicate which articles were part of the conference).

Over half of the chapters in the book survey aspects of Anhalt's oeuvre. It is, of course, a welcome event when a publication appears about one of Canada's important composers and pedagogues of the last sixty years. In fact, a cottage industry of monographs devoted to Anhalt and his music seems to have sprung up. This is the third book in recent years devoted to the Hungarian-born composer, standing alongside the 2007 *Eagle Minds: Selected Correspondence of István Anhalt and George Rochberg* and the 2010 *Music Traditions, Cultures, and Contexts* (both books are also published by Wilfrid Laurier Press).

The book is in four large sections. Following an introductory essay by Sallis, there are three chapters under the heading of "First Word." Each essay is written by an individual close to one of the three composers at the center of the book. The first chapter is by John Beckwith, a colleague and close friend of Anhalt since the mid-1950s, who provides some personal and touching reflections about Anhalt. The second chapter is by Gergely Szokolay, a pianist who studied with Kurtág back in Hungary. The essay is valuable, as it provides a glimpse into Kurtág the teacher, a subject that has, unfortunately, received minimal attention by Kurtág scholars to date. The final chapter is by Veress's son, Claudio. The approach is novel: by interpreting characteristics of the eight movements from *Orbis tonorum*, one of his father's final works, the son connects each movement to biographical attributes of his father.

The next major section, entitled "Places and Displacement," contains seven chapters. The first is arguably the most valuable: it is the text Anhalt submitted as the keynote address for the symposium noted above. Anhalt brilliantly uses the binary model of centre-periphery as the modus operandi to describe his personal history, tracing his journey from Budapest to Kingston, Ontario. Kingston plays an important point of departure for Robin Elliott's and William Benjamin's two superb studies of Anhalt's orchestral work, *Kingston Triptych*, written between 2002 and 2005. The next chapter by Florian Scheduling is, unfortunately, one of the weakest in the collection. The author attempts to draw parallels between Anhalt and the Hungarian-born Mátyás Seiber by asserting that their interest in serial composition following World War II can be attributed to their respective displacements. However, the

features Scheduling identifies to support his arguments are, at best, tenuous, since they can be found in a wide variety of other serial composers—both displaced and not displaced, and in both musical centers and peripheries—thus substantially weakening his central thesis. Rachel Beckles Willson offers an attractive contribution in her essay, “Letters to America.” In her work, she uncovers direct and indirect meaning from two autobiographical statements that Veress prepared in the 1950s as part of his application to immigrate to the United States. Through her detailed study, Beckles Willson demonstrates that one’s identity can be reconstructed depending upon the intended destination. The point in itself is minor; far more significant, though, is what these statements imply about the orchestral work, *Sinfonia Minneapolitana* (1952-53). Gordon Smith’s intent, in his article entitled “Roots and Routes,” is similar to Scheduling’s, yet his arguments are far more convincing. Specifically, Smith’s impressive examination of Anhalt’s four operas (in particular, his 1995 opera, *Tikkun* (Traces)) provides a compelling case that Anhalt’s displacement plays a fundamental role in these works. Finally, Rachelle Chiasson-Taylor provides a much-needed update to the Anhalt collection held at Library and Archives Canada.

Section 3 of the book is entitled “Perspectives on Reception, Analysis, and Interpretation.” The primary theme of these essays is how one’s perception can affect both the response and understanding of a musical composition. Surprisingly, given that three composers are the focus of study in the book, four of the five chapters are devoted to Kurtág. (Austin Clarkson’s “Sewing Earth to Sky,” which explores Anhalt’s Jewish heritage and the role it played in forming his pedagogical views, is the sole exception.) Stefano Melis examines an intriguing aspect of Kurtág’s pedagogy—specifically, the intimate relationship between composition and interpretation contained in the eight volumes of piano music, collectively entitled *Játékok* (Games). The essay provides valuable insight into Kurtág the pedagogue; however, it strikes me as slightly odd that Melis does not introduce even a minimal discussion of the inspiration for *Játékok*, namely Bartók’s *Mikrokosmos*. The remaining three chapters by Alvaro Oviedo, Julia Glieva-Szokolay, and Dina Lentsner provide different analytical approaches to perhaps the most important portion of Kurtág’s oeuvre—his vocal music. Glieva-Szokolay’s insights concerning the Russian literary texts represent, to my mind, an important contribution to Kurtág research. Lentsner’s analytical model, which is indebted to the literary theorist Yuri Lotman, provides some fascinating insights into text/music analysis. My one criticism of this impressive work is that, when the author places the model in a larger context, she inexplicably addresses some vocal pieces by George Crumb. I believe a much stronger point would have been made by examining vocal works by one of the composers central to the focus of the book, or by other prominent Hungarian composers such as György Ligeti or Peter Eötvös, to name but two for whom vocal music plays a prominent role in their oeuvre.

The final major section of the book, entitled “The Presence of the Past and Memory in Contemporary Music,” examines how memory plays a role with identity in music. There are four chapters devoted to this theme. Jean Paul Olive and Ulrich Mosch, in their essays “György Kurtág et Walter Benjamin : consideration sur l’aura dans la musique” and “What Presence of the Past? Artistic Autobiography in György Kurtág’s Music,” explore how the past informs the compositional approach and content of Kurtág’s works. Particular attention is given to Kurtág’s miniatures and homage pieces. Alan Gillmor’s “‘Listening to Inner Voices’: István Anhalt’s *Sonance•Resonance* (*Welche Töne?*)” provides a captivating and brilliant interpretation of the Beethovenian allusions in this late orchestral work. Gillmor’s intertextual reading is a vital addition to Anhalt scholarship and should be required reading

for anyone undertaking study of the composer. Finally, in “Music Written from Memory in the Late Work of István Anhalt,” Friedemann Sallis provides a fascinating exploration of how memory engenders the integration of the musical relationships that underpin Anhalt’s *Four Portraits from Memory*, a work written between 2005 and 2007.

The book concludes with an interview between Robin Elliott and Anhalt undertaken on 6 July 2008. The springboard for their conversation was Lydia Goehr’s 1997 essay, “Music and Musicians in Exile: The Romantic Legacy of a Double Life.” Anhalt suggests that Goehr was short-sighted in her assertion that displaced composers experience a crisis of “doubleness,” and that, given the complexity of humans, “multipleness” would be a more appropriate term.

*Centre and Periphery* contains a wide variety of approaches that collectively provide valuable insights into the three composers and their work. Since over half the book is devoted to Anhalt, it is especially important as a contribution to the growing body of Anhalt research. Yet, it is precisely this skewed breakdown that makes this reviewer believe that an important opportunity has been lost. Specifically, it is a shame that a portion of the book could not have been devoted to the music of György Ligeti—unquestionably the most influential post-World War II composer from the “peripheral” country of Hungary. This is not meant as a slight to Veress’s art (although I note that the editors themselves felt that only two of the twenty chapters warrant inclusion about Veress). On the contrary, I am very much a fan of his music. However, I feel the claim that “all three composers have had an extraordinary impact on the cultural environments within which their work took place” (back cover) is excessive. In fact, even in the introduction, Sallis writes that “notwithstanding the enormous contribution he [i.e., Veress] made as a professor and composer in Switzerland, his postwar compositions [i.e., the ones written while displaced] never achieved the success that his pre-war compositions seemed to portend” (7). Ligeti and Kurtág are nearly exact contemporaries, and while Ligeti left Hungary during the 1956 revolution, Kurtág decided to remain in Hungary for the next forty odd years (or put another way, to stay centered within this peripheral area). However, unlike Anhalt and Veress, Ligeti chose to live for the remainder of his life and play a central role within one of Europe’s musical centres. As such, his work would have represented a wonderful contrast with that of Kurtág and could have substantially enriched the focus of the book.

The editorial work is top notch, with beautifully typeset musical examples and reproductions of manuscript pages. While a bibliography pertaining to each essay follows every contribution, it would have been highly desirable to have, at minimum, general bibliographies of each composer appearing at the end of the book. Rounding out the presentation are biographies of all the contributors as well as a first-rate index. As a final comment: unfortunately the book is not stitch bound, and the binding of my review copy split after only a day of use.

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