

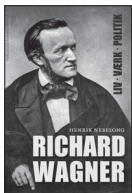
and enlightening; and Ryom reminds us that both church cantatas and secular cantatas can be re-arranged into other church cantatas, but church cantatas never into secular ones. Once sacred, always sacred!

Bach was the undisputed master of word painting and preaching by means of musico-rhetorical figures. A whole chapter is dedicated to this art of baroque expression. Numerous examples describe the foaming waves of the sea, earthquake, floods of tears, knocking at the door, the tick-tock of a clock, diligent paces, laughing and crying. This was Bach's way of creating the 'hermeneutical plus' of the weekly services. If he had written an opera, the music would not have turned out differently. These were his ways of expression that could not be repressed despite the demands of the town council that he should avoid the opera genre. Before his appointment Bach underwent a thorough theological examination that in fact took precedence over his compositional competence; thus Ryom's claim that Bach in his church music deliberately wanted to provoke or offend the signed conditions of the contract may be followed by a question mark. Presumably the churchgoers felt that with Bach a new kind of music had gained a footing in the church, but we have no record that they took offence. At this point it is inevitable to mention the much debated use of gematria. Certainly, many articles on that theme wildly exaggerate, and Ryom advises readers to be very sceptical of such mathematical calculations. On the other hand, it must be kept in mind that number symbolism, although a foreign way of thinking today, was then an accepted mode of thought. There are passages in Bach's musical universe where it seems obvious that he deliberately used number symbolism. But worth noticing is C.P.E. Bach's remark to Forkel in 'Biographische Mitteilungen über Johann Sebastian Bach', Hamburg, 13 January 1775: 'The blissfully deceased was like me and all other real musicians no lover of dry mathematical plays' (my translation).

The author dedicates his final chapter to the highly beloved and 'indispensable' Christmas Oratorio that has its natural place in the exposition of Bach's cantatas. The six secular cantatas re-arranged for this occasion are a perfect example of Bach's reworking and revising of earlier works, thus saving the exuberant music of these cantatas from oblivion. As Ryom states, the first performance of the only competitor to Handel's *Messiah* did not take place until 1857 in Berlin.

Peter Ryom's book on J.S. Bach's cantatas is highly recommended. May this publication be the incentive to the music lover and to the professional musician to enter the world of Bach's cantatas. Here is love for the music, music analysis, and profound theology summed up ... in Danish!

*Knud Svendsen*



Henrik Nebelong  
*Richard Wagner. Liv - verk - politik*  
 København: Forlaget Vandkunsten, 2008  
 520 pp., illus.  
 ISBN 978-87-7695-098-9  
 DKK 399

One cannot any longer expect the general audience to be in possession of what earlier times considered common knowledge about Richard Wagner's oeuvre. The stories his operas tell, the historical context of their composition, and even the history of nineteenth-century Germany and Europe are not necessarily well known today. From this point of view, one can only approve a new book introducing Richard Wagner to the Danish public. From a musicological point of view, however, the publication of Henrik Nebelong's *Richard Wagner: Liv - verk -*

*politik* (Richard Wagner: Life, Work, Politics) raises several questions. Already in the preface, Nebelong states that the study is not to be understood as a scholarly book (p. 10). In one sense this is perfectly acceptable. In the same passage he also mentions somewhat surprisingly that extensive parts of the biographical material are based on Martin Gregor-Dellings' *Richard Wagner – Sein Leben – Sein Werk – Sein Jahrhundert* (München, 1980). Hence a question arises: what kind of book has Nebelong written?

The book's basic narrative follows the story of Wagner's life, but it is not merely a biography: readers are also offered extensive presentations of the operas (or music dramas), this, of course, being the main point of interest for most wanting to engage with Wagner. Re-telling primarily German material for a Danish audience, as happens with the biographical material, may very well be important. When it comes to the interpretations of the operas, however, more pressing questions arise. Here, too, the preface is revealing. Writing about Wagner's librettos – and the fact that one could argue for Wagner also being part of the history of European literature – Nebelong in passing claims that the thematic content of Wagner's texts often are veiled 'af iscenesættelser, hvor instruktørerne ikke har evnet at se, hvad der lå i teksterne, eller hvor de har følt sig berettiget til at lægge deres egne moralske og politiske verdensbilleder ind over Wagners' (by stagings where the directors were unable to see what was in the texts or where they felt entitled to add their own moral and political viewpoints on top of Wagner's; p. 9f.). This statement speaks volumes about Nebelong's own, implicit, view of the operas' content – or message – which is inherent *in* the work. Thus the task for the directors and, one must assume, the singers and musicians would be simply to unfold it. The message should not be veiled by the views of later times, but handed on to the audience the way Wagner intended it. Here, the whole project faces long traditions, not only as regards scholarly studies on opera – an endeavour with which Nebelong is hardly concerned in this book – but also in the practice of opera-staging, where new interpretations are what opera – as a live art form and not as a musico-dramatic museum – is all about. In Nebelong's view, the operas seem to have one meaning only. Directors not grasping this ruin Wagner's work. Thus any alterations as well as any interpretations are in the danger of not presenting Wagner's work at all. Although never mentioned explicitly, this must consequently also include the performances at Bayreuth, often understood to ensure the preservation of the works.

This criticism might seem to imply that I only advocate 'radical' approaches to Wagner's operas whether that be exposing the 'hidden' ideological content, a deconstruction of the work, a critical engagement with whatever Wagner meant to say, or several other dimensions often subsumed under the concept of a 'postmodern' interpretation of opera. There is, quite obviously, long traditions of such work, including, interestingly enough, work done at Bayreuth. Thus one might claim that even within 'Wagnerism' (whatever that is), there are possibilities for radical reinterpretations of the work. Across different traditions of performance one would find ways to engage with Wagner's work where stagings are not about presenting the one true interpretation. More traditional musicological approaches to Wagner are also open to the fact that staging works entails more than transmitting the score, libretto, or intentions of the author, acknowledging that the works are kept alive by being a part of the cultural developments. The works are given meaning by being staged and by being talked and written about, and here Nebelong, with his knowledge of Wagner and his work, could have given *his* interpretation and have argued for it.

Providing an overview of the action of an opera may seem neutral, but there is only a small step from a description to an interpretation, and it is doubtful that any neutral description is possible. Nebelong's book is full of interpretative statements, even if they are presented as the truth. A more somber discussion, presenting interpretations as interpretations and engag-

ing with the possibility of multiple meanings of the works, would have made the book more convincing. In this context, I also miss an engagement with the literature on Wagner. There is an overwhelming amount of studies on Wagner and one cannot expect any author to have read them all; however, the almost total lack of such references in this book means that the conversations on what Wagner means for our cultural climate almost disappears. A discussion of different stagings of Wagner operas could also have enriched the argument, but here too it seems as if the ideal performances are imaginary. Thus by presenting *the* interpretation the book fails. This may seem harsh, and it may be missing the point of Nebelong's book, but by presenting a canonical re-telling of the librettos, he risks misrepresenting what the operas mean in their cultural context. This shows how even Wagner must be defended against his admirers.

Erik Steinskog



Mogens Andersen  
*Historien om vor tids musik*, ed. Finn Gravesen and Agneta Mei Hytten  
 Copenhagen: Wilhelm Hansen, 2009  
 366 pp., illus.  
 ISBN 978-87-598-1771-1  
 DKK 299

Mogens Andersens pludselige død i 2008 forhindrede ham i selv at færdiggøre det manuskript, som han havde arbejdet på siden 1999 som en del af forskningsprojektet Danmarks Radio og den ny musik efter Anden Verdenskrig. Det giver selvfølgelig problemer, som de to udgivere, Finn Gravesen og Agneta Mei Hytten, forholder sig til i forordet. De har valgt at redigere det efterladte materiale uden at foretage den gennemskrivning af materialet, som forfatteren selv var klar over manglede. Dette begrundes rimeligt nok i, at de har ønsket stadig at lade det være Mogens Andersens stemme og engagement, der bærer teksten, med den bevidste omkostning, at det derfor er et ikke helt færdigskrevet manuskript, der udgives. En konsekvens er, at nogle dele er mere gennearbejdede end andre og at teksten “fremtræder med en blanding af jeg-fortælling og dokumentarisk fremstilling af musikforskning” (s. 15). Det betyder, at det i eminent grad er Mogens Andersen, der kommer til orde, hvilket både er bogens svaghed og styrke. Det er *hans* historie om den ny musik i Danmarks radio efter 1945, centreret om udsendelserne med ny musik i radio og fjernsyn, som han selv gennem årtier var den centrale formidler af som medarbejder i DR fra 1955 til sin pensionering i 1999. Dermed er omslagene mellem jeg-fortælling og dokumentation begrundede i sagen, men ikke uden problemer. Især den konkrete, men også den generelle fortælling om den ny musik har ofte Mogens Andersens opfattelse og erindring – støttet på en stor mængde kildemateriale – som den instans, der afgør, hvad der er ‘historien om vor tids musik’.

Bogen er et værdifuldt bidrag til denne historie, især som dokumentation og fremstilling af Danmarks Radios rolle i ny musik-livet. Tidligere fremstillinger på området har beskæftiget sig med komponisterne, musikken, koncertlivet og foreningslivet omkring den ny musik, med Danmarks Radio mere generelt eller som Martin Granau's *Holms vision* (København 2000) med Radiosymfoniorkestrets historie. I Mogens Andersens egen formulering er formålet med denne bog “at vise sammenhængen mellem de registrerede udsendelser og andre aktiviteter og at sætte aktiviteterne i relation til Danmarks Radios virksomhed i almindelighed, til det øvrige musikliv og til forandringerne i den samtidige kompositionsmusik” (s. 18).

Mogens Andersens primære kildemateriale er radioens arkiver og samtidige artikler i *Dansk Musiktidsskrift* og andre steder. Der er således uden diskussion tale om en kildebaseret