· Introduction ·

Trajectories of twentieth-century music

NICHOLAS COOK WITH ANTHONY POPLE

> We have not even begun to tell the history of twentieth-century music.
>
> Susan McClary[1]

The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music? What sort of a history of twentieth-century music might that be? The word 'Cambridge' is something more than a publisher's imprint, for it locates this volume in a century-long tradition of *Cambridge Histories* and so emphasizes that this first large-scale, retrospective view of the twentieth century in music is a view *from somewhere*. As the title would lead you to expect, it is history written from a distinct and relatively homogeneous geographical, social, and cultural perspective: predominantly Anglo-American (though there are two authors from Germany and one each from South Africa and Australia), more male than female (gender representation in musicology, at least in the UK, remains far from equal), and white. That does not, of course, mean that our authors simply accept the traditional geographical, ethnic, and gender hierarchies of music history, for there is a strong revisionist strain in the book, one that attempts to contextualize and critique familiar narratives by juxtaposing them with alternative constructions of twentieth-century music. Like all historical writing, this *Cambridge History* is best understood as in essence a status report, a series of position statements in an ongoing dialogue, for no history can be more than a temporary stopping-point in a never-ending process of interpretation – which means that history is less a reflection of the facts than a construction of historians. What follows, then, is one particular set of constructions, the record of what a particular group of authors thought at a particular point in time.

If there is a problem with the title, it lies in 'The . . . History', that is to say 'History-with-a-capital-H'. Georg Knepler and Carl Dahlhaus, the respective grand old men of East and West German music historiography in the decades before reunion, represented almost diametrically opposed views of the past: for Knepler music was to be understood in terms of its social embeddedness and function, whereas for Dahlhaus it was to be understood in terms of its

1 Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form*, Berkeley, 2000, p. 196.

autonomy, its ability to transcend time and place (so that whereas for Knepler the basic category of music history was the musical event, for Dahlhaus it was the work). But their disagreement took place within a shared understanding of 'History', in other words history as an interpretive process that involves making joined-up sense of the facts – or to be more accurate, as Dahlhaus himself explained,[2] of the mass of data transmitted from the past, for even a fact is an interpretive construct. The historian literally *makes* the sense, that is to say, because it lies not in the data but in the interpretation, and there may be different ways of making it – but according to the Knepler/Dahlhaus viewpoint what turns the enterprise into history is the narrative construction, the building and judging of interpretive frameworks expressed in (and at the same time giving meaning to) chronologies, canonic repertories, and aesthetic values. One might call this 'critical' history, in the sense that it is predicated on an intimate relationship between historical interpretation and value judgement.

It would take an unusually stable historiographical juncture, or a hand-picked and unusually compliant set of authors, to make a collaborative history into anything more than a compromise when viewed in such a light. Certainly this volume, considered as a whole, does not exemplify that kind of history. The problem isn't simply one of aesthetic disagreement between the contributors, though there is certainly that (as will be clear from a comparison between, say, Alastair Williams's chapter on modernism at the century's end and Dai Griffiths's account of contemporary pop); some of our authors celebrate the breakdown of aesthetic categories in the later part of the century, while others are more inclined to deplore it – and some contrive to do both at once. The problem is more basic than that. It is that different authors work from different assumptions regarding the relationship between history and value judgement.

For Arnold Whittall, writing about the 'moderate modernisms' of the mid-century, critical selection lies at the heart of historical interpretation, and one might perhaps say that for him the most important role of history is to underpin aesthetic judgement; his approach is in this respect consistent with Dahlhaus's work-oriented approach to music history, direct echoes of which may be found in Hermann Danuser's account of what he calls 'modernist classicism'. At the opposite extreme, Jonathan Stock and Peter Franklin (writing respectively on the 'world music' context and music between the wars) explicitly argue the need to disengage historical interpretation from critical judgement, so that history can become something more than an attempt to legitimize and naturalize certain aesthetic values. And other contributors implicitly endorse the same position through refraining from overt value judgements – a position, however,

2 Carl Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History* (tr. J. B. Robinson), Cambridge, 1983, chapter 3.

which 'critical' historians might attack as not just an evasion of responsibility, but simply incoherent: after all, they might say, writing any history (let alone a one-volume history of a century's music) implies selection, for the simple reason that you can't fit everything in, and if this is not done by means of explicit criteria of value then it will be done silently, by sleight of hand, resulting in a history that purports simply to say how things were rather than engaging the reader in the process of interpretation. There is a kind of historiographical Catch-22 here: in trying to avoid the embrace of aesthetic ideology you merely fall deeper into it. The irresolvable tension between these two opposed positions gives rise, in this book, to a diversity of historiographical strategies. These range from critical interpretations that forge a close link between history and criticism, though the underlying aesthetic values may be quite different (Whittall, Williams, Griffiths), to explorations of specific musical or historical ideas (Danuser, Christopher Butler, and Leon Botstein on classicism, innovation, and the musical 'museum'); from comparisons of alternative historical interpretations (Franklin, Griffiths, and Robynn Stilwell) to chronologically organized narratives (Jim Collier and David Nicholls); from case studies (Stock) to chapters organized around a particular individual (Franklin), event (Joseph Auner) or technology (Andrew Blake).

One might say, then, that this book presents not so much 'The . . . History' of twentieth-century music, or even 'a history' of it, as a series of complementary, sometimes overlapping, and often competing histories that reflect the contested nature of interpretation. Different approaches and different selections reveal both individual priorities and effects of chance: it would probably be hard to read anything very significant into Franklin's focus on Tauber rather than Thill. And Williams's discussion of Gubaidulina and Saunders at the expense of, say, Lindberg and Adès may reflect little more than personal taste (perhaps coupled with the desire to resist a continuing bias towards males in both composition and composer-oriented histories of music – a bias that is sometimes challenged in this book, notably by Stilwell and by Susan Cook, but at other times simply reflected). Griffiths's self-proclaimed passing over of Abba and Lloyd Webber, on the other hand, exemplifies a critical resistance to the equation of cultural significance with commercial success; a similar resistance perhaps explains the absence of any reference to Ireland's extraordinary success in the Eurovision Song Contest during the 1990s, and the way in which our authors tended to swerve away from the references to light music in the editors' original plan (there was a stage at which it looked as if even Sinatra was going to slip through the net, and Derek Scott's chapter acts as a kind of long-stop for a number of historically under-represented individuals and trends). But what about the perhaps surprisingly limited attention given to progressive rock? Or

the way in which Bartók has been reduced to a series of cameo parts rather than the leading role he occupies in most histories written in the latter part of the twentieth century? It is hard to know whether this is to be seen as an accidental shortcoming that the editors should have remedied, or as symptomatic of a revaluation of twentieth-century classicism that makes Bartók's particular synthesis appear less important than it once did. Time will tell; pending that, our authors' priorities stand.

But if this volume takes the form of a series of competing histories, this is not merely a reflection of the authors' priorities: it reflects the competing attempts of twentieth-century musicians to inscribe themselves in history. This is most evident in the concept of the musical 'mainstream', which weaves confusingly in and out of the book. Historical surveys of twentieth-century music written in the last decades of the century are generally organized around what may be termed a progressive, modernist mainstream. According to this account, an energetic but diffuse avant-garde in the years before the First World War was consolidated and focused through Schoenberg's development of the serial technique, leading after the hiatus of the Second World War to the increasingly systematic approaches associated with the 'Darmstadt' composers; but total serialism was so to speak corroded from within by the influence of Cage's indeterminacy, resulting in an increasingly chaotic situation in the last part of the century as successive reactions (the 'New Romanticism' associated with Rihm, the 'New Complexity' associated with Ferneyhough) followed one another within increasing speed, ultimately coming to coexist in a kind of pluralistic steady state. This orthodoxy, offering a headline story around which a range of more conservative or simply different traditions can be clustered, not only construes history as a quasi-evolutionary process but also locates that process in compositional technique: it is the same kind of approach that you might use in writing the history of, say, the internal combustion engine, and for this reason Christopher Williams has dubbed it 'techno-essentialism'.[3] And this approach to history has been exported to other areas of twentieth-century music: Gunther Schuller has interpreted the history of jazz as an 'extraordinarily condensed', high-speed recapitulation of the technical development of 'art' music – an interpretation that not only assimilates jazz to modernist values, but contributes to deciding what jazz *is*, what is central to its story and what is peripheral or even not part of the story at all.[4] (Scott DeVeaux has emphasized the degree to which the very idea of 'jazz' represents an aesthetically or ideologically motivated construction: 'even a glance at jazz historiography makes it

3 Christopher Williams, 'Of Canons and Context: Toward a Historiography of Twentieth-Century Music', *Repercussions* 2/1 (1993), pp. 31–74.

4 Gunther Schuller, *Musings: The Musical Worlds of Gunther Schuller*, New York, 1986, p. 97.

clear that the idea of the "jazz tradition" is a construction of relatively recent vintage, an overarching narrative that has crowded out other possible interpretations of the complicated and variegated cultural phenomena that we cluster under the umbrella *jazz*'.[5])

Maybe this modernist orthodoxy should be called 'The Vienna History' of twentieth-century music; at all events, as Auner documents, its origins lie in Schoenberg's highly successful positioning of himself as the successor to Beethoven and Brahms – and the predecessor of the great German composers who would follow, for Schoenberg famously told his pupil Josef Rufer that 'Today I have discovered something which will assure the supremacy of German music for the next hundred years', the something in question being serialism.[6] In short, the significantly named 'Second Viennese School' took possession of the historical mainstream (though it is sobering to reflect just how marginal, in simply quantitative terms, the entire phenomenon of Viennese modernism probably seemed to the average Viennese culture consumer of the time, by comparison with the conservative traditions that history has largely left behind). But there were other, less successful contenders: Pfitzner, Schoenberg's reactionary contemporary, saw himself as defending the tradition of German music against the modernists, and had the Nazis won the Second World War it is possible that we would now see the musical mainstream of the first part of the century as stemming from Pfitzner (or at least Richard Strauss) instead of Schoenberg.

And that, of course, would still be a specifically (Austro-)German construction of the mainstream. A more dispersed Northern European mainstream might be imagined round – say – Ravel and Milhaud in France, Elgar and Holst in Britain, Nielsen and Sibelius in Scandinavia, Rachmaninov and Stravinsky in and out of Russia. (This kind of history might provide an adequate context for composers like Geirr Tveitt, who stand here as representative of the huge numbers of composers of astonishingly high-quality music who simply haven't made it into the history of twentieth-century music, whether for reasons of nationality, politics, or pure contingency: as a Norwegian composer who came dangerously close to collaborating with the Nazis, Tveitt never had a chance.) Then again, the picture would look different when seen from the other side of the Pyrenees (Barcelona was the centre of a modernism in many ways unlike any other), and even more so the Alps, for – as Stephen Banfield remarks in his

5 Quoted (from Scott DeVeaux, 'Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography', *Black American Literature Forum* 25 (1991), pp. 525–60) in Robert Walser (ed.), *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History*, New York, 1999, p. 422.

6 Josef Rufer, *The Works of Arnold Schoenberg: A Catalogue of his Compositions, Writings and Paintings* (tr. Dika Newlin), London, 1962, p. 45. The authenticity of Rufer's account has been questioned, but other writers record similar statements.

chapter – modernism was a fundamentally northern phenomenon. Nor is it just in the history of European 'art' music in the first part of the century that such issues arise: Stilwell points out that a major problem in rock historiography is that the music mainly developed in the southern states – the states that lost the American Civil War – whereas its historians have generally come from the dominant north. (History, it is often said, is written by the victors.) Indeed the relatively short history of rock offers particularly clear examples of how the idea of the mainstream is contested, and of how such contests are an integral part of musical culture rather than simply *post facto* constructions on the part of historians.

The principle of historicism, particularly associated with nineteenth-century historiography, sees the historian's central task as to articulate and explain the terms in which past ages saw themselves and the values that informed them. (So, for example, Jim Samson defends a focus on 'great music' in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music* on the grounds that 'this was an age which thought of itself in precisely those terms'.[7]) There is a historicist element in much contemporary historiography – as illustrated for instance by Auner's chapter, which attempts to reconstruct the values underlying Schoenberg's claim to the mainstream, as well as to establish and assess the connections between such values and those of the present day. But there is also a quite different conception of the historian's task, which is embodied in Walter Benjamin's maxim that history should be written from the standpoint of the vanquished rather than the victors.[8] There is a literal sense in which that is just what Stilwell attempts. But so, in a more general way, do other contributors. Banfield reconstructs the world of 'bourgeois tonality' in the first half of the century, a world of conventional music supporting conventional social values – and one which has been sidelined by 'techno-essentialist' historiography, with its identification of the bourgeois and the boring (as David Osmond-Smith, citing Baudelaire, puts it in his chapter on the post-war European avant-garde): thus Whittall's account of the 'moderate mainstream' in the years after the Second World War is consciously opposed to the orthodox interpretation according to which the mainstream of the post-war period flowed through Darmstadt. These, then, are examples of what might be termed oppositional mainstreams, like Michael Nyman's 'alternative history' of twentieth-century music that runs from Satie through Ives and the Futurists to Cage, and in this way 'studiously – or perhaps, rather, deliberately unstudiously – avoids all composers with claims to historical significance as part of Western formal

7 Jim Samson, 'Editor's Preface', in Jim Samson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, Cambridge, 2002, pp. xiii–xv; p. xiv.

8 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (ed. Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zohn), London, 1973, pp. 258–9.

music's main narrative, or "mainstream" '.[9] (Even that, however, appears conventional by comparison with Wadada Leo Smith's genealogy of free jazz: Henry Cowell, William Grant Still, Harry Partch, Thomas J. Anderson, Henry Brant, John Cage, Milton Babbitt, Edgard Varèse, and Ollie Wilson.[10])

Mainstreams in twentieth-century music, then, have been multiple and contested – which is really a way of saying, as does Michael Walter, that there was no mainstream after the 1930s, or even (as Susan McClary has written) that 'there never was such a thing'.[11] But how do you write history without a mainstream to provide the central narrative thread, to locate different developments in relation to one another, and to create a sense of continuity? It is a remarkable fact that modernist music history – Christopher Williams's techno-essentialism – survived the heyday of modernist music by the best part of a generation: purism gave way to pluralism (as Richard Toop puts it in his chapter) around 1970, but the 'far more diversified way of telling the history of music than we have previously permitted ourselves to entertain' that McClary has called for remained a largely unrealized project at the century's end. Some of the central issues, however, are clear, and once again we can focus matters round this book's title, this time passing over 'The', 'Cambridge', and 'History' to alight on 'Music'. To speak of a 'history of music' is to posit a stable object of investigation – an effect that is even more pronounced in German, where one speaks not of 'music' or even 'Music-with-a-capital-M', but of *die Musik*. (As Philip Bohlman puts it, the definite article ascribes a 'hegemonic universality' to the concept.[12]) But if this book is a series of complementary or competing histories, its subject matter is a series of complementary and competing constructions of what music is and might be: to define a mainstream is not only to invoke a particular kind of 'History-with-a-capital-H', but to say what music *is*. This book, then, is about different ideas of what music is. In a word, it is about different musics.

The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Musics, then? Yes, but this still begs the question: *whose* musics? The issue revolves around the word that should really have been in the title, but couldn't be, owing to the series in which the book appears: 'Western'. The reader will look in vain for an account of Beijing opera between the wars, even though this genre has as much right as any to representation in a genuinely comprehensive, which is to say infinitely extensive, history of twentieth-century music(s). There are, however,

9 Keith Potter, 'Cornelius Cardew: Some Postmodern (?) Reflections on Experimental Music and Political Music', in Mark Dalaere (ed.), *New Music, Aesthetics and Ideology*, Wilhemshaven, 1995, pp. 152–69; p. 155, referring to Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (2nd edn), Cambridge, 1999.

10 Eric Porter, *What is this Thing called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists*, Berkeley, 2002, p. 263.

11 McClary, *Conventional Wisdom*, p. 169.

12 Philip Bohlman, 'Ontologies of Music', in Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (eds.), *Rethinking Music*, Oxford, 1999, pp. 17–34; p. 25.

references to many encounters (to borrow Stock's word) between Western and non-Western musics. These include, of course, such familiar examples as the influence of traditional Japanese musics – not always as traditional as they might appear[13] – on Messiaen and Sculthorpe, as well as on the internationally minded composers of the post-war Japanese avant-garde; more radically, Martin Scherzinger emphasizes the 'systematically under-narrated' contribution of African music to Western 'art' composition in the final decades of the century, while any number of contributors provide support for McClary's related claim that 'the musical innovations that have most shaped people in the course of this century have principally come from African Americans'.[14] (As might be expected, such issues have been fought out most explicitly in the history of jazz: claims that the music embodies a distinctively African or African-American sensibility have been countered by those who see this as marginalizing the contribution of white jazz musicians, and who accordingly claim that 'the music may at one time have been African-American, but it is no longer exclusively so'.[15]) The encounters documented in this book also include the reverse influence: the impact of Western musical practices, commodities, and institutions upon non-Western cultures, as evidenced in particular by Stock's case studies (which, coming at the beginning of the book, provide a larger context for the understanding of Western traditions, and are matched at the end of the book by Scherzinger's account of 'art' composition in contemporary Africa). The rationale, in short, is that non-Western musics fall within the book's scope to the extent that they can be seen as integral to the historical development of Western music, 'our' music. That can't to any great extent be said of Beijing opera between the wars, but it becomes more generally the case as the century progresses, with globalization replacing a pattern of sporadic encounters by one of sustained interaction. Indeed there is a sense in which, by the time you get to the end of the century, it is in principle impossible to justify leaving *any* music, anywhere, out of the book. (At which point, of course, you have to give up on principles.)

And it is here that, for all its attempts to eschew taken-for-granted mainstreams, totalizing narratives, and 'History-with-a-capital-H', the book arguably ends up constructing a grand narrative of its own. It charts a transition between two quite different conceptions of 'our' music: on the one hand,

13 A consensus has recently emerged that *gagaku*, long seen as the traditional Japanese music par excellence, is a primarily nineteenth-century construction (papers presented by Allan Marett, Endō Tōru, Tsukahara Yasuko, and Terauchi Naoko at the round table '*Gagaku* and Studies on *Gagaku* in the Twentieth Century', International Congress of the Japanese Musicological Society, Shizuoka, November 2002).

14 McClary, *Conventional Wisdom*, p. 60.

15 Travis A. Jackson, 'Jazz as Musical Practice', in Mervyn Cooke and David Horn (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 83–113; p. 93.

the Western 'art' tradition that was accorded hegemonic status within an overly, or at least overtly, confident imperial culture centred on Europe at the turn of the twentieth century (a culture perhaps now distant enough to have become 'their' music rather than 'ours'), and on the other hand, a global, post-colonial culture at the turn of the twenty-first, in which 'world' music from Africa, Asia, or South America is as much 'our' music as Beethoven, and in which Beethoven occupies as prominent a place in Japanese culture as in German, British, or American. To put it another way, the book charts a kind of diaspora: 'Western' music, clearly located around 1900 in the urban centres of Europe and North America, has become a global currency in the same way as the hamburger, and one sometimes has the impression that the 'art' tradition flourishes more in East Asia, Israel, and parts of South America than in its former heartlands. It is not so much that there has been a relocation from the centre to the periphery as that the distinction between centre and periphery has become increasingly fuzzy (except economically, since the transnational capital generated by 'world' music flows from the Third to the First World). And so it is appropriate that the accumulating emphasis, as the book proceeds, on increasingly globalized and hybridized popular musics leads, in Scherzinger's chapter, to a kind of reverse discourse: issues of musical modernism and autonomy, increasingly sidelined in the First World, ironically take on a new cultural significance when relocated to the Third. (This chapter might be described as a sustained case study in the relocation of musical values, and the local perspective that it offers upon twentieth-century music history could have been replicated from any number of other places: Norway, Barcelona, Argentina, or East Asia, for example. In fact our first idea was to offer in its place a study of the musics of the Pacific Rim at the century's end.)

Western and non-Western is not, of course, the only way the 'Whose musics?' cookie crumbles. Another obvious way is the high-middle-lowbrow distinction, a kind of social categorization of music that was often made in the first half of the century – and particularly in the class-obsessed culture of the United Kingdom. (The programming policy of the British Broadcasting Corporation, which weaves in and out of the book, can hardly be understood without reference to such categories.) Whittall quotes the composer Robin Holloway, who characterized the Western 'art' tradition around 1970 in terms of a 'flight to the extremes that leaves the centre empty'; Scott, in his chapter, concurs, even as he traces a continuing, though increasingly marginalized, 'middle ground' from light music to easy listening to chill-out. Overall, then, and while recognizing the internal stratification of both the 'art' and popular traditions, one may speak of a three-way division (with light music combining the immediate appeal of popular music with the technical resources of classical music, and so

encouraging crossover) being supplanted by a two-way one. Fundamental to this development was the rise in 1960s America and Britain of youth culture, charted in Stilwell's chapter, which embodied a division between 'ours' and 'theirs' that cut across social classes, and so reduced music to two broad categories: 'art' (combining classical and modern) and 'popular'. Any division based on a generational gap, however, is necessarily time-limited, and the category of 'popular' music grew steadily less well defined as the 1960s generation grew up, without however giving up on the music of their teenage years: on the contrary, it was this generation who replaced their ageing vinyl collections in the 1980s and 90s with CD reissues of rock classics from the 1960s and 70s – and the term 'rock classics', of course, illustrates the blurring of hitherto more or less clearly defined boundaries (a blurring anticipated by the 'classic jazz' of Collier's chapter title).

All this provides the context for another, and perhaps even grander, narrative that emerged (rather to the editors' surprise) from this book. The story begins with the connection drawn by Whittall between his 'moderate mainstream' and minimalism, on the grounds of their shared 'embrace of comprehensibility and positive thinking' (Toop similarly refers to minimalism's 'affirmative' qualities). In saying this Whittall seeks to locate minimalism between Holloway's extremes, but the contributors to the final section of the book take the story in a different direction: Fink sees minimalism and its direct successors (what he calls 'post-minimalism') as representing 'a new mainstream', and he goes further – much further – when he claims, near the end of his chapter, that 'The future belongs to minimalism's stepchildren: ambient and electronic dance music.' That in turn links up with Griffiths's refreshingly old-fashioned characterization of pop music as 'arguably, the supreme art form of the late twentieth century' (no qualms about value judgements here!), suggesting a history of music in the twenty-first century that is remote indeed from how most present-day music historians, at least in academia, see that of the twentieth. (It has to be said that if Griffiths and Fink are right – and frankly who can tell? – then today's music students are for the most part poorly prepared for the world that lies ahead of them.) And in case Griffiths's and Fink's diagnosis seems too drastic, Walter takes an even more direct route to the same conclusion when he speaks of the fragmentation and decline of 'serious' music in the face of a newly global popular culture; as early as the 1940s, he says, 'the dominance of serious music . . . had obviously reached its end'. Maybe as much is implied by Nicholls's comparison between pre-war experimentalism and 1990s club culture. It is also striking that historical patterns previously characteristic of the 'art' tradition, such as the tension between modernism and conservatism,