Introduction

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All histories are partial. All histories are simplifications. Anyone professing to write about history, to write a history, never mind writing or compiling *the* history of anything should be aware of these twin a priori limitations. Even before considering the prejudices, philosophy or political intent of the author, history is written from a particular perspective, at a particular time, with access to particular evidence. While such basic observations are readily apparent with any area of historical investigation, two factors make them especially pertinent for the study of music criticism. First, although music criticism has long been an integral aspect of musical life, and is an obvious source material for musicological areas such as reception studies, it is only relatively recently that it has been regarded as a field of study in its own right. Second, although this translates to a paucity of secondary sources compared to other subjects of musicological enquiry, there is a vast amount of primary source material.

It is true there have been many collections of writings by individual critics as well as compilations with a broader scope. Nonetheless, actual studies of criticism have been much scarcer, books such as those by Katherine Ellis and Sandra McColl providing notable landmarks in a largely barren landscape in the 1990s,[1] while the most extensive historical overview of music criticism was the article in the second edition of *The New Grove Dictionary*.[2] The past two decades have seen a flourishing of interest, not just with bespoke conferences on areas of music criticism, and numerous monographs and articles (many by contributors to the present volume), but also initiatives such as the Francophone Music Criticism project[3] and, more recently, the Music

[1] Katharine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris, 1834–1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Sandra McColl, *Music Criticism in Vienna 1896–1897: Critically Moving Forms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
[2] Fred Everett Maus, Glenn Stanley, Katharine Ellis, Leanne Langley, Nigel Scaife, Marcello Conati, Marco Capra, Stuart Campbell, Mark N. Grant and Edward Rothstein, 'Criticism', *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, available at www.oxfordmusiconline (accessed 4 September 2018).
[3] See music.sas.ac.uk/fmc.html.

Criticism Network,[4] the latter also hosting the *Journal of Music Criticism*. Nevertheless, even with this recent proliferation of research on music criticism, the secondary literature remains modest. This is reflected in the fact that several of the chapters in the present volume have no precedent. Even in areas that are reasonably well trodden, such as nineteenth-century British, French or German criticism, the primary sources are overwhelming in number and, even with ever-increasing amounts of material made available on digital archives, they are widely dispersed and often challenging to collate reliably.

As elsewhere, digitisation has transformed the possibilities for drawing on this vast wealth of material. In previous periods, scholars understandably tended to consult music-oriented journals rather than newspapers to seek contemporary views of musical events and developments. Such sources are invaluable, but it is also important to remember that, for at least two centuries, most people have received the majority of their knowledge about practical music-making, performers, current trends, new developments and significant new works not from the long-considered arguments posited in books and scholarly articles, but from the almost instantaneous response of music critics in newspapers, from the columns of *The Times* rather than *The Musical Times*. For this reason, what might be termed 'higher' criticism, the exploration of musical philosophy, aesthetics and analysis, gradually retreats from the story told in the later chapters. It is not that it is irrelevant, for such things form an essential part of the critical hinterland, but the focus tends to be on the evolution of the everyday discourse.

Critics make easy targets for scorn; their *raison d'être* is to have opinions, to raise their heads above the parapet and state what they think, within a very limited number of words. Indeed, the speed of reaction, allied to the need for some kind of value judgement, has meant that critics and their writings have often been dismissed as worthless ephemera. Like any evidence, the writings of critics are flawed and should not be taken as representative of the general thoughts of the age. There are good, bad and indifferent critics, though whether such assessments apply equally to their own time and our own perspective is often debatable. Regardless, music criticism essentially supplies a continuous contemporaneous record of what was happening in music, and how it was viewed by some. Far from a fatal flaw, its generally unguarded lack of consideration is often the prime value of music criticism. Moreover, music criticism frequently provides the only record of what actually happened and even how it sounded.

[4] See www.music-criticism.com.

As a consequence, a history of music criticism itself becomes an alternate history of music, considering those who do the observing, chronicling and critiquing rather than the object of their musings. For recent centuries, such a history is generally concerned with those writing in newspapers, magazines and journals. It would have been easy in the present volume to start with the rise of the press in northern Europe, broadly coinciding with the Industrial Revolution, and concentrate on the principal centres of Western art music. This period and these areas are, naturally, central to this volume. However, they could only be countenanced as the exclusive focus if music criticism were to be defined purely by the media in which it appears and a closed perspective adopted on the genres or territory worthy of discussion. If instead music criticism is understood as the chronicle and discourse of music, then the potential scope of its history expands markedly in terms of period, geography and musical genre to cover all music, of all times, all places and all types where there is evidence of discussion and reflection upon it. While that inclusive view of music criticism underpins the approach of the following chapters, a full realisation of such a project is sadly beyond the confines of this volume and, for that matter, the state of the discipline at this time. Rather, while covering what is (currently) central to our understanding of music criticism, various chapters go beyond that, not in pretence of comprehensiveness, but drawing attention to the inevitable partialities and omissions.

Christopher Page's opening chapter on the discourse around plainsong in the Middle Ages starts the history several centuries earlier than might have been expected, but it would certainly have been conceivable to start with a much earlier period and in other parts of the world. For instance, it is clear that there was extensive discussion and debate about music in ancient cultures, with evidence of the outcomes, at least, in numerous theoretical writings from both China and Greece. If we might regard these as music criticism, it is important also to note that the purpose of and framework for debate were fundamentally different from discussion of music as an art form. Both cultures viewed music as embodying universal principles that were intrinsic to the well-being of society as a whole. In China, Confucius (551–479 BCE) 'promoted music as a means of governance and self-cultivation and denounced the use of music as entertainment'.[5] The resulting proliferation of influence of Confucian texts (c. third and second

[5] Joseph S. C. Lam, 'China: II. History and Theory: 2. Antiquity to the Warring States Period (to 221 BCE)', *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, available at www.oxfordmusiconline.com (accessed 4 March 2018).

centuries BCE), including extensive theories of musical philosophy and practice, led to music being regarded as key to maintaining norms of behaviour and integral to government administration as part of the cosmological order.[6] While the ancient Greeks were certainly not averse to *mousikē* being used for entertainment, it was also regarded as both an art and a means of scientific enquiry, an integral element of fundamental laws of nature as well as a catalyst for higher understanding and intrinsic to society. It also went beyond sound, incorporating aspects such as text and dancing.[7] Indeed, the importance of music to the entire workings of society is one of the recurrent themes of Plato's *Republic*, with various passages reading, superficially at least, as a form of music criticism. It would be fascinating to see whether an examination of musical thought in these and other ancient cultures seen through the lens of music criticism would provide a distinctive perspective from that of music philosophy or theory. Sadly, such a venture was beyond the bounds of the present volume.

At the other end of the historical span, the chapters respectively exploring music criticism in Singapore and Alejo Carpentier's straddling of Cuba and France are not intended to stand in lieu of chapters on other countries and linguistic areas in Asia or Latin America. Rather, they show that there are distinctive histories to be explored. Similarly, it is likely that a significant number of Anglophone readers would not have noticed if there were no chapter on Norway, but its inclusion rightly raises the question of what the history of music criticism comprises in Sweden, Denmark or Iceland, or, for that matter, each of the Baltic states. There are chapters on music criticism in genres such as popular music, jazz and world music, but the absence of, for instance, folk music, musicals, film music or TV music is apparent. Less obvious, though noted by various authors, is that the chapters covering what might be viewed as the standard history concentrate primarily on dominant cities, such as Paris, London and New York, yet other provinces and regions also have their own distinctive histories that, for a variety of reasons, it was not possible to incorporate adequately here. Then there is the simple fact that the following chapters are each indicative of at least one, if not several, book-length studies. This litany does not indicate a lack of editorial confidence in what follows; the chapters are informative and remarkably diverse in

[6] Alan R. Thrasher, 'China, People's Republic of: §1. Introduction: Historical, Regional and Study Perspectives; 3. Sources and Perspectives: i) The Imperial Period', *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, available at www.oxfordmusiconline.com (accessed 4 March 2018).
[7] Thomas J. Mathiesen, Dimitri Conomos, George Leotsakos, Sotirios Chianis and Rudolph M. Brandl, 'Greece: 1. Introduction'; '3. Scope', *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, available at www.oxfordmusiconline.com (accessed 4 March 2018).

content and approach, as well as being thoroughly absorbing. Rather, it is to emphasise that, from its conception, the intention has been that, in going far beyond any previous overview, *The Cambridge History of Music Criticism* will make apparent the partialities and simplifications of current understanding. The hope is that the thirty-five chapters not only provide a substantial foundation for exploring music criticism, but will also act as a catalyst for a whole range of much-needed further study.