

# Book Reviews

*Andrew Crow, Editor*

## *Nineteenth-Century Choral Music*

Donna M. Di Grazia, editor

Routledge, 2013

521 pages, \$67.95 paperback

ISBN: 978-0-415-98853-7

Also available as an e-book

Donna M. Di Grazia made a concerted effort throughout the collection of essays, *Nineteenth-Century Choral Music*, to “address choral music-making as a cultural phenomenon” that shaped society in the 19th century (x). Readers will find bold claims about the crucial role of communal singing during that era in Di Grazia’s own preface and in the three essays comprising Part I: Cultural Influences. Celia Applegate set a surprising tone with her opening chapter “Building Community through Choral Singing.” Applegate criticized the majority of choral compositions from the latter half of the 19th century in an essay more sociological than musicological. Combined with two other essays focused on repertoire and musical experiences gathered more from the fringe than the mainstream, a straight reading of Part I may yield a false impression. However, the best and most likely use of the volume would be non-linear as a helpful supplemental resource for a graduate seminar in choral literature. Each chapter essay is of manageable length for a student assignment, yet comprehensive on its topic.

Di Grazia’s selections reveal an effort to reflect variety within the Euro-centric genre of Part II: Selected Masterworks from the Choral-Orchestral Repertoire. This portion of the book with chapters dedicated to choral-orchestral masterworks by prominent composers naturally

skews the balance of the book toward long-form symphonic compositions, as we might expect in a book that begins by quoting Robert Schumann, “that the highest in musical expression is achieved through the chorus and orchestra” (ix). If the bias toward monumental compositions was the price to pay for engaging first-rate musicologists then I would judge the calculation was successful. Di Grazia’s list of contributors includes experts who have already published on the topics assigned to them. Many have previously written books or articles now standard as reference works in their assigned specialty. In my own research and teaching, I have frequently cited or assigned represented authors such as James Garratt, Virginia Hancock, Paul Hawkshaw, and Jeffrey Sposato.

Diversity of style and geographic origin are reflected within Part III: The Choral Repertoire Large and Small, where essays on the works of individual composers are introduced with a unifying essay to lead each grouping. Each essay presents a tableau from a designated geographical region. Emphasis again here falls on the social position and impact of choral music-making within each designated culture, which helps to unify the book. Some gaps in coverage are inevitable for a collection of essays and Di Grazia made no claim that the book would be

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comprehensive. Throughout, I found information about compositions and ensembles new to me alongside thorough treatment of the common canon placed in the context of each composer's oeuvre.

The authors collectively faced the challenge of determining when the 19th century ended: with the advent of modern tactics or with the turning calendar? In his chapter on the United States, N. Lee Orr acknowledged Charles Ives but ascribed most of his choral contributions to the 20th century on the basis of his "modernist experimental style that places it outside this study" (490). However, Orr perhaps missed an opportunity to give greater detail about a prominent female composer, Amy Beach, whose compositional language Orr seems to acknowledge retained a 19th-century character even for some compositions dated as late as 1928. Facing a similar determination, Vladimir Morosan accepted de facto that the 19th century for Russian choral music extended up to the 1917 political revolution. Morosan's overview of Russian choral music within society and his chapter on Russian choral repertoire will seem like a teaspoon from a barrel for those conductors familiar with his extensive work through *Musica Russica* publications. Di Grazia's choices demonstrate a thoughtful approach within the mainstream of Western choral music with considerate gestures toward the fringe.

Internal organization varies from essay to essay. Authors apparently self-selected whether to outline their subject according to individual works (David B. Levy on Beethoven), according to vocal genre (Virginia Hancock on Brahms), according to length and orchestration (Di Grazia on Berlioz), according to function (Carlo Caballero on Fauré), or according to chronology (Paul A. Bertagnolli on Liszt). Closing material is more uniform among the contributions: endnotes and a "Selected

Bibliography." Some of the more extensive bibliographies divide into sub-headings with prominent internal topics. Readers can search the concluding index by composer or ensemble name. Searching for a specific composition requires the composer's name. Most readers of *The Choral Scholar* will not seek *Nineteenth-Century Choral Music* as a desk reference, nor as a primary text for a choral literature seminar, but as a valuable supplement for extended knowledge.

—Andrew Crow

*Brothers, Sing On!: Conducting the Tenor-Bass Choir*

Jonathan Palant

Hal Leonard, 2014

200 pages, \$22.99 paperback

ISBN: 978-1-4803-2843-3

With his first book publication, Dr. Jonathan Palant offers *Brother's, Sing On!: Conducting the Tenor-Bass Choir* to directors and singers of male choirs. Prior publications about the administration of male choirs focus on youth choirs and leave the mature tenor-bass choir practically untouched. His discovery of the lack of texts about leading a male choir propelled the project. In this practical and well-organized guide, Palant covered general topics of male choral singing such as history, anatomy, choral sound, musicality, pedagogy, and administration. Intent to advocate for the perseverance of those working in the choral art, Palant gathered ideas and experiences from over twenty contributors to supplement his own expertise. He writes to experienced and novice directors for all types of male choruses including changing voices and mature voices in school choirs and community choirs.

Palant's own credentials include teaching as a university professor, a minister of music, a past director of the Turtle Creek Chorale, as well as the founding of CREDO—an ecumenical mixed choir. Additionally, Palant wrote a dissertation on male singing societies in nineteenth-century Germany. Regardless of his own qualifications, he chose to act as the self-elected scribe for a pool of established experts in the field answering basic, practical, and even desperate questions that many choral directors find themselves asking. In his entourage of contributors Palant included two otolaryngologists and a speech-language pathologist to discuss the physiological elements concerning the male voice and the pedagogy thereof. Selected musicians include male and female middle school choir directors, professional boy choir directors, university professors, and choral music composers. The diversity of contributors yields sometimes-varying opinions (regarding terminology for head voice and falsetto singing, for example).

After brief introductory pages, the eleven chapters address relevant questions by topic. A valuable set of appendices provides helpful resources dealing with choir associations, sight-reading materials, and a bibliography of other publications. The final three appendices list sample concert programs, as well as repertoire lists for both adolescent and mature male choirs. The author and contributors emphasize healthy and free singing in an environment that builds excitable unity of purpose. "One of the greatest reasons for joining a university glee club is camaraderie among men—the 'Brothers, Sing on!' attitude" (95). Although the table of contents presents a list of technical issues, the charge to care for the animate singer and not just the inanimate notes pervades the text. Dr. Anton Armstrong endorsed the project in his foreword with an appreciation for Palant's commitment

to bringing personal "wholeness" through choral music. Armstrong cited Palant's "own personal conversion due to the compelling power of the choral art and his personal witness to this with the singers he has conducted for so many years" (IX). In Palant's own words: "Maintaining positive morale and a safe learning environment in our rehearsal space is important, and as teachers we must never forget to ensure the vocal and emotional well-being of our male singers" (38).

This new resource is compelling on many counts. The eye-catching cover seems to indicate the easily approachable stylistic language of the book. Palant's gentle use of sarcasm and good humor make for enjoyable reading. Palant should also be praised for his thorough examination of the subject and his resolution to avoid any assumptions about his readers' prior knowledge. For someone who is approaching a tenor-bass choir for the first time, the practical and factual insights give a solid foundation from which to start. With special attention given also to female conductors reading his book, Palant is empowering, insightful, and logical. Experienced conductors of male choirs may find much of the material remedial, but would surely find a refreshed perspective from trusted colleagues. For all these musicians—amateur or accomplished—who might have been asked to start a male choir, asked to take up the conducting of one left to them, or discouraged by the progress of the one they've had for years, this book will put their minds at ease and remind them of the noble calling they have undertaken.

—*Renae Timbie*