

# Book Reviews

*Andrew Crow, Editor*

*A Heinrich Schütz Reader: Letters and Documents in Translation*

Gregory S. Johnston

326 pages; \$69 hardcover, \$39 softcover

Oxford University Press, 2013 (softcover, 2016)

ISBN: 978-0199812202

**D**uring his lifetime, Heinrich Schütz was lauded as a highly respected composer. Today he is widely accepted as the greatest German composer of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, contemporary scholars pursuing research regarding Schütz's life and the performance of his music may find it challenging to engage with primary sources. Significant linguistic barriers separate the modern reader—even readers with a working knowledge of the German language—from primary sources associated with the composer, including complexities of the seventeenth-century German language, unconventional spellings, ornate courtly language, and archaic handwriting. Through a translation of over 150 manuscript and printed sources, Gregory S. Johnston provides access to resources about Heinrich Schütz's life and work, the content of many of these documents appearing printed in English for the first time. Johnston's selections of texts, translations, and organization provide invaluable biographical information, historical perspective of courtly life in Germany in the seventeenth century, and implications for performance practice of Schütz's music that may be utilized by scholars, conductors, performers, and anyone with an interest in Baroque musical compositions or life in Germany around the time

of the Thirty Years War. Johnston's translations provide a comprehensive collection of documents associated with Schütz's life—an important addition to the library of anyone interested in Heinrich Schütz and music of the Baroque.

In *A Schütz Reader*, English translations of primary documents associated with Schütz are arranged chronologically in four large sections: Youth and Early Manhood (1611–27), Middle Age (1628–44), Old Age (1645–56), and The Last Years (1657–72). Selected documents include correspondences that provide insight into Schütz's life, as well as public sources associated with the composer: prefaces and forewords to selected works, texts and poems used in Schütz's choral compositions, memoranda, requests, and dedications. Each entry includes a title, a brief description of the manuscript, the parties involved, the date, the editor's one-sentence summary of the document, and details about the collection in which the original source may be found. Johnston deliberately avoids editorial commentary, only interjecting annotations useful to clarify the translation, cite sources, and provide context as

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needed. With this methodology, Johnston allows the documents to tell their own story. *Reader* also includes a glossary, bibliography, and extensive index that provide further ease of accessibility and an added layer of richness to this resource.

The first section, Youth and Early Manhood, begins with the dedication and title page to *Il Primo Libro de Madrigali*, underscoring the impact of Gabrieli's influence on Schütz's professional life. Documents from this time trace Schütz's activities from Kassel to Dresden, and include indications for performance practice of such notable works as *Psalmen David* and *Historia der auferstehung Jesu Christi*, SWV 50. Schütz's Middle Age (1628-44) was marked by years of strained resources at the Dresden court, and time spent at the court in Denmark. Despite his request to retire at the age of 60, Schütz continued to work as Kappellmeister at the Dresden Court until late in his life. Schütz continued to compose even after the petition to retire was finally granted following the death of Johann Georg I in 1657. Some well-known masterpieces, including the Passions and *Zwölf Geistliche Gesäng* were composed during Schütz's retirement. Memorandums by the composer provide valuable information regarding how the composer envisioned various pieces to be performed. The final entries include directives pertaining to the composer's last wishes and funereal arrangements, a title page of an unpublished psalm setting, and the *curriculum vitae* written by Martin Grier to be presented at Schütz's funeral.

Through Johnston's adept organization and thoughtful interpretation, we begin to formulate a comprehensive narrative that begins to take shape as we interact with these disparate primary resources. The reader's imagination is invited to fill in the temporal intervals between correspondences, and read between the lines of the ornate and formal language of the requests,

directives, and memorandums. Through Johnston's translation, we hear directly from Schütz how his *Historia* and other works may be performed: where the choir should stand, the role of the instruments, the desired affect and character of the music. We experience his frustration as Schütz contends with limited resources and a devastated population following the Thirty Years War and outbreaks of the plague. And we feel the desperation of the Dresden musicians as we read their repeated petitions to receive their wages in order to purchase food for their families and boots for their children. *A Heinrich Schütz Reader* is an invaluable resource for any musician or scholar interested in the performance practice of Schütz's music, and it provides fascinating biographical and historical context for the circumstances in which this extraordinary composer flourished.

—Katie Gardiner

*English Cathedral Music and Liturgy in the Twentieth Century*

Martin Thomas

Routledge, 2017

284 pages; \$54.95 softcover

ISBN: 978-1138053120

**A**t first glance, a book on the history and development of English cathedral music, let alone one focused on the twentieth century only, may seem a narrow selection. However, Martin Thomas's detailed analysis and contextualization of diverse sources from cathedral archives, historical journals, proceedings of church music societies, and numerous musical scores provide a surprisingly broad range of entry points for readers with varying interests and backgrounds. Informative and practical, *English Cathedral Music and Liturgy in the Twentieth Century* will prove useful to musicians and researchers in a variety of ways: as a historical

guide to trends in performance, style, and liturgy; as a source of repertoire for church musicians and collegiate conductors alike; and as a primer on building institutional legacy through collaboration and commissioning new works.

As the publisher's biography states, the Reverend Dr. Martin Thomas studied music and theology at the universities of Edinburgh, Oxford, and East Anglia. He had a long career as a parish priest and Canon Precentor in the Church of England, with his primary tenure at St. Edmundsbury Cathedral. A prolific author and scholar, Thomas has contributed articles on music, liturgy, and theology to a variety of journals and trade magazines throughout the U.S. and U.K.

In the introductory essay, Thomas lays out the methodology and goals for his book: "to explore the links between stylistic changes in cathedral music and liturgy and the emergence of a standardized musical genre [through]...examination of primary sources at cathedral libraries and archives and through discussion of the music itself" (pages 2–3). Chapter 1 opens in the nineteenth century, showing the reader an England that had not yet developed the disciplined and systematic advanced musical training of cathedral choirs we associate with the Anglican church today. He charts the rise of the choral evensong and Sunday morning eucharist, services which demanded an outpouring of suitable musical settings for choirs of boys and men with organ, chief among them the services written by Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924).

As the book proceeds chronologically, in each chapter Thomas paints a similarly dismal picture of a conservative cathedral music scene hopelessly out of touch and behind the times. Chapter 2, 1900–1950, picks up on the ubiquity of Stanford's musical settings and the failure of church composers to move on from the Victorian style, using musical reviews and score samples

to demonstrate the widening gulf between the music of the European concert hall and the English cathedral during each successive decade of the first half century, to the point that "the idea that stylistic innovation was in some way un-English was encountered by composers after the Second World War" (page 45). In chapter 4, 1950–2005, Thomas contrasts the creative possibilities of newly-introduced liturgies, continual change in the world of art music, and a drive to include popular music into worship against the stifling force of major institutions like the Royal School of Church Music, whose publications and traditions were driving church music into an increasing state of anachronism.

A particularly strong feature of Thomas's scholarship follows in chapters 3 and 5 in the form of case studies. Thomas examines the institutional legacies of specific cathedrals using their liturgical practices, participation in choral festivals, patterns of programming and commissioning of new works, and internal administrative structures to define their relative success during these periods of study. Here and throughout the text he also provides counterexamples to his negative outlook on the church music scene, pointing out specific composers and pieces who he feels broke out of the mold to provide pieces of lasting artistic and liturgical value.

Conductors and church musicians will find a valuable programming resource in the lists of composers and musical examples scattered throughout the book. Historians will enjoy Thomas's rich use of primary sources in pursuit of his thesis. Administrators will gain insights into patterns of musical, collegial, and civic engagement that can define the health of an institution. All will benefit from Thomas's warning against musical complacency and stagnation.

—*Christopher G. McGinley*

*The Solo Singer in the Choral Setting: A Handbook for Achieving Vocal Health*

Margaret Olson

220 pages; \$102 hardcover, \$51 softcover

Scarecrow Press, 2010

ISBN: 9780810869131

With the intriguing title *Solo Singer in the Choral Setting: A Handbook for Achieving Vocal Health*, both choral conductors and singers should be curious about the content of this book. In the introductory chapter, the author states that “The purpose of this book is to present issues relevant to the solo singer in the choral setting and to offer practical solutions for resolving these issues” (p. ix). While the book has strengths, it falls short of the author’s stated purpose.

Early in the book, Margaret Olson includes valid points about tessitura (p. 19) as she points out that choral composers of the contemporary style period often make extreme demands on the tessitura, and choral conductors should be more aware of this as they select literature for their ensemble. She also offers advice to choral directors to heighten their knowledge of vocal science—registration, phonation, resonance, coordination, and so on—for their choral ensembles (p. xviii). A realistic acknowledgment she offers is, “One should consider that most singers do not earn a living as soloists, but through a combination of choral and solo work. Therefore, it is imperative that solo singers in training learn to use their voices successfully in the choral environment” (p. xvii). The final chapter is practical because it provides well-thought-out and usable vocal exercises for choral ensembles with fair justification.

Margaret Olson is a singer and voice teacher with degrees in voice performance and pedagogy as well as opera performance. The overall content, as stated

by the author in her introduction, is divided into five categories: 1) Physiological, 2) Pedagogical, 3) Psychological, 4) Interpretive, and 5) Acoustic. However, the actual book layout contradicts that information, with ten chapters organized very differently from what is proposed in the Introduction. (Perhaps the book editor at Scarecrow Press did not read or directly edit the author’s introduction, yielding this incongruity between Introduction and book content.) Physiological issues of the singing voice are certainly fair game for a vocal pedagogue to address, and Olson references work by Barbara Doscher and Richard Miller, among other pedagogues. However, the psychological issues of the choral ensemble, vis-à-vis the choral singer, are well beyond the scope of this text and something that would imply scholarly input from a degreed psychologist or psychoanalyst, not a vocal pedagogue.

In one of the many awkward and hypothetical Teaching Examples presented throughout the book, Olson discusses a 22-year-old soprano attending a liberal arts college in the Midwest who gets lightheaded when singing in their “world-famous choir” (p. 68). Olson proceeds to attribute the soprano’s lightheadedness to being asked to employ singing *mesa di voce* in the *secondo passaggio*. It is alarming that the author would solely attribute this as the cause for lightheadedness when this college student may simply not be eating lunch regularly before each choral rehearsal. Olson’s Teaching Examples consistently lack legitimacy due, in part, to a seemingly biased intent. Other unbelievable set-ups throughout the book include “non-vibrato singing in the choir” (p. 72) and the “justified use of straight tone” (p. 73). Here, Olson presents information that is overly generalized, not common practice, and, quite frankly, uninformed.

Olson’s knowledge of contemporary choral conductors who are actively instructing, mentoring, and conducting in the field appears

quite incomplete. She consistently cites choral directors who are either no longer living, not very well known, or (aside from Dr. Timothy Stalter, a notable exception) not in the mainstream as choral mentors and trendsetters. In addition, her experience singing in a choral setting would appear to be limited to the university level, where she was required to sing in choir during her graduate doctoral program. As a footnote adding context to her scholarship, Margaret Olson wrote a second book, published more recently, entitled *Bon Jovi: America's Ultimate Band*.

One of the strongest points of this book is that it opens-up a long overdue conversation (all be it one-sided, from the solo singer viewpoint), about what defines healthy collaboration between faculty of a choral area and a voice area in the collegiate

setting. The author states that ideally there should be clear communication and understanding in order to protect an individual singer's vocal health. Indeed, along with artistry, the student's success and vocal health should be at the forefront, in both the choral setting and the vocal studio. But in reality, this is rarely the case, and Olson recognizes that. In summary, *The Solo Singer in the Choral Setting* is not recommended as a purchase for one's individual music library (the cost seems exorbitant, among other concerns), but it presents some topics of interest, and choral conductors should be aware of this publication.

—Gregory Gentry and Anna Wheeler Gentry