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Tim Blanning. *The Triumph of Music: The Rise of Composers, Musicians and Their Art.* Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008. x + 416 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-03104-3.

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Reflections on Music in the Modern Age

Tim Blanning's latest book is a curious work. It will strike some as unusual simply because it departs from the path he has paved with his study of Joseph II of Austria, his numerous inquiries into Napoleon's impact on German-speaking Europe, and more recently, his synthetic accounts of Old Regime and nineteenth-century Europe.[1] As Blanning avers in his introduction, it is also not a work of musicology, but rather "an exercise in social, cultural, and political history" (p. 7). Indeed, not only do we find very little here on musical forms and great works per se, this exploration of music–and its triumph in modern times–is remarkably wide-ranging. Blanning's purview extends from Louis XIV's Versailles to Buckingham Palace in 2002, where Ozzy Osborne, Brian May, and Paul McCartney all performed in Elizabeth II's golden jubilee bash. And while due attention is paid to such usual suspects as Johann Sebastian Bach and Ludwig von Beethoven, Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Wagner, Arnold Schoenberg and Benjamin Britten, Blanning's intent to treat not just serious or popular music leads him to remarks on John Coltrane and Marian Anderson, as well as Brits from the Beatles to Coldplay. Idiosyncratic, too, is the title's language of triumph, with its connotations of struggle, competition, and ultimate achievement. To be sure, Blanning's narrative probes the distance that music–as a social, cultural, and political force–has traveled in modern times. Where composers and musicians were once the lowly servants of royal and ecclesiastical courts and the opportunity to hear and play most kinds of music was restricted to the privileged few, today the ability to make and enjoy music has become thoroughly democratized. Moreover, the term "rock star" denotes not just successful popular musicians like Bono and Madonna, but celebrity in general. And yet, Blanning's story really is not one of music's victory over a particular set of obstacles, nor even–remarks in the introduction and conclusion notwithstanding–about music's progress vis-à-vis the other creative arts (not enough attention is paid to the other arts to permit any meaningful comparison). In fact, the subtitle provides the clearest indication of the author's intentions. For what Blanning delivers above all is a fascinating, insightful, and at times brilliant narrative of music's rise from eighteenth-century modesty to twenty-first-century fame, fortune, and power.

At heart, Blanning's argument about music's journey from "Bach to Bono" is straightforward. In part, music and musicians attained new heights of importance and influence in modern times because of changes in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries associated with the emergence of a "public sphere." The rise of subscription concerts and the expansion of musical publishing in the second half of the eighteenth century, Blanning observes in chapter 1, enabled talented musicians like Franz Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to eschew positions at aristocratic courts and make their living as freelance artists. Taking advantage of this new freedom, nineteenth-century musicians from Beethoven to Wagner played on the romantic cult of the individual, the force of their personalities, and their brilliance as performers to become celebrated cultural figures. From the perspective of social status, Blanning intimates, the leap from Niccolò Paganini and Franz Liszt to Coldplay and Bono was rather small. The latter pair just earn more money and can now use their celebrity status on behalf of a number of social and political causes. Nonetheless, thanks to the growing complexity of musical compositions by the end of the nineteenth century and the emergence of the notion of "classical" music, first conductors and then soloists and singers have come to eclipse the composer in the public's eye.

In chapter 2, Blanning investigates changing understandings of music's purpose. He concedes that, in some respects, many of music's functions have changed lit-

tle with the passing of time. People still expect it to be uplifting, or to transport them to a better or nobler place. It also continues to entertain and provide recreation, albeit for a much larger number of people than in Old Regime Europe. Nevertheless, he argues that as the nineteenth century began, the emergence of middle-class alternatives to the performance venues previously provided mostly by aristocratic and ecclesiastical courts and epitomized by the public concert hall set in motion a radical reconceptualization of music's purpose. No longer would it represent primarily the power of patrons or the glories of God. Instead, it came to express the feelings of the artist. Here, too, the Romantic spirit encouraged composers like Beethoven and Hector Berlioz to assert their individuality and explore music's expressive potential. As the nineteenth century advanced, Blanning stresses adroitly, this same mindset opened up a gap between musicians and their putative public, which widened to create the distinction between serious ("classical") and popular music. Nonetheless, by the 1960s, figures like Coltrane and Bob Dylan succeeded in popularizing artistic genius, while also delivering transcendent musical experiences akin to performances of *The Ring* at Wagner's "temple of music" in Bayreuth.

The emergence of a middle-class, public sphere in Europe, as we see in chapter 3, also enabled music to escape the confines of courtly and ecclesiastical spaces and, because it gained a "room of its own," develop in new ways. The discussion of musical space and place here is masterful, showing clearly why music should matter to historians of modern European cultural, social, and political life. Blanning's is basically a tale of two spaces: the opera house and the concert hall. The former was a place for extravagant spectacle; moreover, its very internal decoration and arrangement served to "advertise the majesty of the sovereign" (p. 128) while also reinforcing aristocratic notions of social order and taste. The latter fostered public performances of music other than opera, most notably oratorios and symphonies. And in the concert hall, music became king. Locales such as the Munich Odeon and the Leipzig Gewandhaus were not places for talking, but rather for hearing music. Indeed, increasingly middle-class Londoners and Berliners approached concert performances with the same type of reverence they (once) did religious services, a phenomenon that Blanning labels the "sacralization of music" (p. 134). Although much of this chapter is devoted to sites of serious music, Blanning uses the closing section to show how the move to the concert hall in the eighteenth century also commenced a broader trend of popularization, leading to nineteenth-century music and dance halls, the cinemas of the early twentieth century with their Wurlitzer organs, and eventually, by the 1960s, the massive open-air concerts at sports stadiums and former manors like Knebworth House.

In chapter 4, the argument leaves the realm of Jürgen Habermas for that of Karl Marx, as Blanning explores changes in the forces of musical production and their consequences for music's social and cultural position. In part, we are treated to a fascinating account of the new (and the improved) instruments whose existence transformed the practice of making music and opened up new sonic possibilities for composers. The development of the piano, for instance, reflected musicians' wish for an instrument with greater tone, range, and responsiveness than the harpsichord, and one that was also suitable for Europe's new, and larger, concert halls. This double imperative of greater virtuosic capacity and volume, Blanning observes, also encouraged the modernization of violins and cellos, produced keyed flutes, and led to the addition of valves to horns. The new instruments' capabilities necessitated a rebalancing of the orchestra (for example, larger string sections), and gave rise to new ensembles like the brass band. But they also promoted innovative approaches to orchestration itself, as the compositions of Berlioz, Gustav Mahler, and Richard Strauss attest. Moreover, industrial technology helped usher in a new musical culture. Not only could more and more people own instruments, the piano above all; they could also afford instruments of reasonably high quality. Then in the twentieth century, Blanning relates, technological progress radically altered how individuals related to and experienced music. The onset of recording and broadcast technology enabled music, classical and popular, to reach an ever wider and more varied audience. It gave performance-based (as opposed to "notation-based") genres, like jazz, a sense of permanence and, thus, reach. With the arrival of such devices as the jukebox, the Walkman, and the iPod, music escaped both the concert hall and the home, obscuring along the way the boundaries between listening and everyday life (to the dismay of cultural critics like Michael Chanan). And while these gadgets have enabled more solitary listening habits, they have also–thanks to advances in electronic amplification, the rise of electric instruments (think of Fender guitars and Moog synthesizers), and the Internet–nurtured new forms of collective musical experiences, whether at the discotheque or via YouTube.

Blanning gives the title "Liberation" to the last, longest, but also least compelling chapter. The weakness here does not come from the content. The discussion of music's contributions to the expression of patriotism and

nationalism in Europe (above all in the nineteenth century) certainly belongs in such a study. Worthwhile, too, is Blanning's attention to music's role in promoting civil rights for African Americans and sexual liberation on both sides of the Atlantic. Rather, the problem is chiefly one of narrative disconnect. For here, Blanning shifts his emphasis from charting the transformation of the musical landscape to investigating how music has been used for extra-musical purposes. The chapter also fails to cohere sufficiently. Roughly two-thirds of the chapter is devoted to the issue of nationalism and music, but this discussion amounts to little more than a grand survey of German, British, Italian, Czech, and Russian musical cultures. The information is solid and often interesting, but in terms of a synthetic argument Blanning leaves us with the rather bland observation that music "reflected the development of nations, and it illuminated and heated that development from within" (p. 298).

On balance, in line with his title, Blanning scores a triumph with this volume. One could quibble with his penchant for viewing the contemporary music scene largely through British lenses. Developments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would have benefited from additional scrutiny, as would the broader problematic of the relationship between modern popular and classical music. Furthermore, this is really not an account of "music," but only of Western music's rise. It would be fascinating to see how Blanning's arguments would play if approached from a truly global perspective, but that would be yet another book. Still, with his engaging prose, wry sense of humor, and clear delight in all things musical, Blanning has produced a book that is both a pleasure to read and blazes new paths in the historical understanding and appreciation of music.

Note

[1]. These works include: Tim Blanning, *Joseph II and Enlightened Despotism* (London: Longman, 1970), *Reform and Revolution in Mainz, 1743-1803* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), *The French Revolution in Germany: Occupation and Resistance in the Rhineland, 1792-1802* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (London: Arnold, 1986), Blanning, ed., *The Nineteenth Century: Europe, 1789-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe 1660-1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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