

**Antoni Pizà, ed. 2022. The Way of the Moderns: Six Perspectives on Modernism in Music. Brepols. 172 pp. ISBN: 978-2-503-59773-7 (hardcover)**

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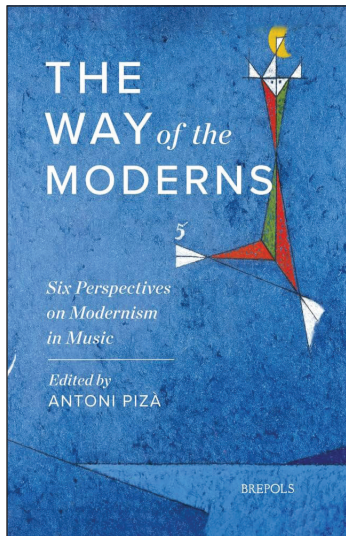
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*The Way of the Moderns: Six Perspectives on Modernism in Music* offers a curated collection of edited lectures and vibrant discussions featuring some of the most eminent musical leaders from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Among the contributors are Charles Rosen (1927–2012), Paul Griffiths (b. 1947), Philip Glass (b. 1937), Roger Scruton (1944–2020), David Harrington (b. 1949), and Richard Taruskin (1945–2020). Editor Antoni Pizà provides the volume with an insightful introductory section, while the heart of the book unfolds through a series of compelling (and sometimes controversial) proceedings and transcribed interviews held at the Barry S. Brook Center of Music Research and Documentation, spanning the years 2012 to 2016. Collectively, the authors lay out the questions related to musical mod-

ernism from the early twentieth century to the present, especially the increased challenges of newness since the abandonment of tonality and the “academicization” of music around 1900; however, the book also explores broader topics and issues related to the concept of musical innovation, applying these insights to case studies from the eighteenth century onwards.

For those seeking an introduction to the infamous “Shostakovich wars,” Taruskin’s proceedings titled “The Many Dangers of Music” provide a summary of many of the controversies for which he became known during his career. Among these are his uncompromising criticism of certain musicologists’ tendency to divorce music analysis from music’s historicity, as he had previously outlined in *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* and the turbulent historiography surrounding *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* of the 1980s and 1990s (Taruskin 2010). Here, Taruskin continues his argument that many contemporary theorists still view music analysis as a “safe space,” concentrating exclusively on formal structures and systematically avoiding ethical questions related to the ideological context in which the music was composed. He contends that this distancing, rooted in Enlightenment ideals of music’s autonomy, erroneously places music beyond sociopolitical critique.

Of course, not everyone has been on board with Taruskin's "moral readings." Björn Heile, in his own review of *The Way of the Moderns* published in *Music and Letters* in 2023, argues that while Taruskin's interpretations are valid, they are overly simplistic and not the only possible readings of complex works, which can support a broader spectrum of meanings (2023). Heile writes that Taruskin's reading of antisemitism in John Adams's *The Death of Klinghoffer*—the 1991 opera featuring singing terrorists who murder a Jewish Israeli in a wheelchair—is "singularly reductive." While I do not wish to go down the rabbit holes of *Lady Macbeth* or *Klinghoffer* here, I do propose that Taruskin's writings on the "danger of music" in this book and elsewhere continue to be not only relevant but remain a central issue of contemporary music studies—far from an "outdated approach" to modernism that Heile claims "predominates" in the book. Consider Serge Dorny's 2023 production of Prokofiev's *War and Peace* for the Bavarian State Opera; in a bizarre reversal of the current Russian invasion of Ukraine, the scenes depicted Russian civilians hiding from bombs in subway stations in Moscow (Barone 2023). If Taruskin's "The Many Dangers of Music" is merely passé, then the same could be said for many musicologists, musicians, and artistic directors today who still operate within the laissez-faire fantasy world of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992).

If any of the discussions could be construed as "outdated," it might be Griffiths's "We Are What We Hear" and Scruton's "Walking Among Noise." Both these critiques of the contemporary musical landscape illuminate a paradoxical culture that values exclusivity and absolute artistic autonomy in contemporary music, while also lamenting the waning public interest in it. Griffiths adopts a deterministic stance toward music history, regarding tonality as antiquated and dismissing the possibility of its revival, given the strides music has taken since roughly the 1910s. He argues that only through atonality could composers of the early twentieth century authentically "convey fear, terror, and dislocation," which assumes that these emotions hold a higher level of authenticity than others. Likewise, Scruton writes that "We yearn for a way forward that can renew the tradition without lapsing into cliché and pastiche," even if uncanny, retrospective, fungus-coated "schmaltz" was precisely what post-modernists such as Valentin Silvestrov (b. 1937) and Alfred Schnittke (1934–98) so often aimed to achieve throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Rosen's concern in "The Challenges of Modernist Music" is not necessarily any specific aesthetic practice of the past hundred and twenty years, but rather approaching modernism with a small "m" as far as the term can apply to a general "taste for difficulty" and newness. Like Griffiths, however, Rosen takes a stadial approach to cultural history, asserting that once people acquired such a refined "taste," they cannot return to the "easy" art. If one can approach these discussions with some historical perspective, however, the reader will find that Griffiths, Scruton, and Rosen accurately capture the thoughts of the modernist composers, performers, and thinkers they examine. While not all the perspectives

of Griffiths, Scruton, and Rosen may represent truths to accept outright, they certainly do summarize in a nutshell what seminal musical modernists from Schoenberg to Boulez believed to be true.

Viewed as a primary source, this book is important because it provides a concise outline of the major debates, thoughts, and theories of musicologists who dominated the field from approximately the 1980s to the 2010s, three of whom are no longer with us. In that sense, the book *is* music history as much as an analysis of it.

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