

BIMBERG, SIEGFRIED et al. (Eds.)

Manual of Music Aesthetics

[**"Handbuch der Musikästhetik"**]

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The significance of this manual lies in the breadth of its scope which, in accordance with its Marxist-Leninist ideological orientation, places the main stress on a number of aspects of the connection between social processes and the production of works of art, which it analyses with considerable differentiation; by contrast, it forces the history of aesthetics into the rigid categorical framework of the given Marxist theory of history and, proceeding from here, undertakes the philosophical evaluation of aesthetic theories with stringent delimitation and violent polemics against recent aesthetic tendencies in the Federal Republic of Germany.

In the first chapter, which is of a programmatic nature, Eberhard Lippold treats the topic, methods, and ideological and philosophical foundations

of music aesthetics. The main emphasis is laid on the category of "aesthetic behaviour", whose "laws of motion" must, it is stated, be elucidated. This means that, in contrast to the simple theory that regards works of art as reflections of reality, the specific nature of aesthetic intentionality is considered, both from the point of view of historical genetics and from that of its social functionality. Thus, for the whole of the ensuing discussion, a paradigmatic role is played by Boris Assaviev's "intonation theory", which does not proceed from the concept of the work (Zofia Lissa) nor from the notion of the mimesis of emotions (Georg Lukács), but sees in music as "intonation" the "complex acoustic expression of human processes of consciousness as a meaning content of sound imagery" (p. 58). This means that the character of (musical) art has no longer merely to be seen in analogy with material production, but as the reciprocal effect of the composer's intentionality and the social process, which gives rise to patterns of form by reason of "social selection" (ibid.). Correspondingly, in the second chapter, Siegfried Bimberg discusses production, interpretation and reception in the musical sphere proceeding from the theories of the Soviet psychologist Sergei Leonidovich Rubinstein, as a unity connected by their determination by social factors. This also goes for the process of musical communication (Wilhelm Baethge, Chap. 3), which, however, is only discussed relatively abstractly in relation to Georg Klaus's semiotics, without recent empirical investigations being taken into account. The fourth chapter (Walter Siegmund-Schulze) recapitulates the debate on Socialist Realism in the GDR and outlines its present position, particularly from the point of view of 'closeness to the people' and 'partiality', with illustrations from some recent compositions. In Chap. 5 (On the Problem of Values in Music), Werner Kaden presents too over-simplified a version of the category of the "utility value" of music in favour of its specific aesthetic content – this, he states, is both polyfunctional, according to the historical and social context concerned, and aesthetically determined, dependent on the musical genre and its contents. At the same time, he defines criteria of evaluation analogously to Chap. 4, according to which, for instance, reflections of Adorno along the lines that the arts can have an emancipatory effect precisely because they elude direct evaluation, have been too hastily rejected as resulting from the lack of perspective of advanced capitalism (p. 227). The quest for an aesthetic theory of genres in music able to provide a point of departure for a differentiated discrimination between "individual achievement and collective accomplishment" (Georg Knepler, p. 258) is, it is true, presented by Klaus Mehner as a problem to be dealt with, but unfortunately treated only very briefly within the overall context of the present volume. Here too, in contrast to other chapters, recent Western literature is

hardly mentioned, although it has concentrated particularly on this point (Carl Dahlhaus). The same goes for Chap. 7, in which Gerd Rienäcker discusses the potential of musical analysis, without for the most part going beyond a programmatic line. Here, analysis is characterised as an interdisciplinary procedure with the objective of moving from the analytical break-down to a synthesis in which the work is seen as a social-historical totality; the problems of the differences in aesthetic evaluation of the theories of music drawn upon are, however, not treated.

The longest chapter, no. 8, is devoted to the history of music aesthetics, which is outlined by Siegfried Bimberg in a full and well-illustrated manner. However, since history as such is regarded as linear and structured by the stages of the relation of the conditions of production to the productive forces, at many points there result estimates and evaluations that can only be understood against this background and against the background of a bias in the direction of the "intonation theory" (cf. Chap. 1). This frequently considerably affects the individual conclusions; thus, for instance, the rehabilitation of Eduard Hanslick, previously rejected as a 'formalist', is to be explained, as is the totally unsuccessful critique of Kant, by seeing him as an agnosticist whose position was "developed by the bourgeoisie into an interpretation completely hostile to cognition, and exploited by them" (p. 359). This misses the fact that, in the contemplation of art according to Kant, the powers of cognition are practised and developed, both by reconstruction of form (the observation of the beautiful) and by the cognition of its transcending (observation of the sublime); it also misses the way in which, in historical reconstruction in general, those aesthetic approaches that concentrate on the question of the development of subjective aesthetic competence are overshadowed by the varying demands of social utility. The estimation of historical significance stands or falls with the acceptance of the dogmatically prescribed system of history, which is largely determined by Manfred Buhr's version of recent philosophy. By means of reflection on the history of aesthetics, the various aesthetic theories are taken out of their historical contexts and acquire topical significance for self-reassurance, as provocation and as justification; this does not, however, mean at all that aesthetics is declared autonomous in a bourgeois sense, but that its history is attributed greater significance than that of a preliminary step to the final stage of self-appointed "progressivity", which then appears of necessity "imperfect" in history.

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