in uncovering hidden paradoxes and logical contradictions, which is one of his signal strengths. Yet the effort demanded is well compensated. *Playing with History* is a notable achievement, essential for any reader concerned with the history and implications of HIP, and of value to a wider readership as well.

BERNARD D. SHERMAN


Berthold Hoeckner’s *Programming the Absolute* is an extraordinarily ambitious and accomplished essay in musical hermeneutics that focuses on central figures and works from the Austro-Germanic cultural pantheon. The profundity of Hoeckner’s ruminations, the scope of his interpretive methods, and the subtlety of his dialectical argumentation combine to lend this book an enduring value not only for scholars of music but also for the humanities in general.

The threat looms, however, that in the current climate Hoeckner’s book will not be judged according to its own merits but rather depreciated out of hand for trafficking in hermeneutics, a methodology that some members of the musicological community currently regard as suspect. This attitude is best represented in “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?” a widely read essay by Carolyn Abbate in which she accuses hermeneutical inquiry of having suppressed our direct relation to music in performance. In Abbate’s essay the term “hermeneutics” represents both the general search for meaning in music and the specific interpretive practice that treats music as a coded text whose successful decipherment requires expert knowledge and generates further text. Since all translation of musical experience into language threatens to es-


It is incontestable that the musical academy has historically neglected performance as a phenomenon worthy of discussion and scrutiny. It is also likely that this neglect has alienated music-academic discourse from those readers who seek a more explicit correspondence between scholarship and experience of performed music. Nonetheless, to blame musical hermeneutics for this situation is not a productive response to it. If the experience of performed music is, in fact, “drastic” and “ineffable,” as Abbate claims, how could any discourse about music (other than a nihilistic, self-abasing one) ever develop from it? If it is discourse itself that falsifies our experience of music, why must hermeneutics, as only one discursive phenomenon among many others, bear the albatross around its neck?

Lest we conclude, upon reading Abbate’s article, that the sole ethical choice remaining to scholars is to fall silent before music, we must first examine the validity of her claims. These claims falter at their source, the dichotomy between interpretation and performance—the “gnostic” and the “drastic,” respectively—that underpins her article. In a recent essay entitled “Musicology According to Don Giovanni, or: Should We Get Drastic?” Karol Berger challenges this dichotomy by arguing that every experience we have of music contains an element of the gnostic: “We cannot help it,” he exclaims at a climactic moment in his essay, “we are hermeneutic creatures through and through.”

This review may be read as a pendant to Berger’s essay, one that reinforces his critique and complements it. Whereas Berger dissolves Abbate’s dichotomy by emphasizing the ineradicable meaningfulness of the event, I seek rather to stress the eventfulness of meaning: or, in less poetic terms, meaning-as-event. To illustrate this particular point I will draw upon two texts: Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, a foundational work for philosophical hermeneutics, and Hoeckner’s *Programming the Absolute*, a new and exemplary feat of musical hermeneutics. In pursuing this project the review will

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3. Lawrence Kramer has recently proposed a relationship between musical performance and interpretive language that may help to diffuse anxiety about the latter potentially abusing the former: “It is true, of course, and obvious, that the words cannot substitute for the experience of hearing or playing the music; but it is equally true, and should be equally obvious, that they are not meant to. . . . All that is necessary is for us to hear or play the music as one would do when oriented, predisposed, by those particular words. Once we do that, meaning will emerge in full force and make itself available to our understanding” (Kramer, “Music, Metaphor and Metaphysics,” *Musical Times* 145, no. 1888 [Autumn 2004]: 9).


pass through three stages: an exposition of Abbate’s main claims, a critique of them via philosophical hermeneutics, and a reading of *Programming the Absolute* as a challenge to them through an approach that Hoeckner calls a “hermeneutics of the moment.” Although Hoeckner may have derived the latter methodology from the Critical Theory of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, it nevertheless overlaps with Gadamerian hermeneutics in sharing the notion that interpretation is an event of performance—or, in other words, that hermeneutics is a moment.

As if to rouse us from our scholarly quietude, Abbate begins her essay by invoking our collective conscience: “What does it mean to write about performed music? About an opera live and unfolding in time and not an operatic work? Shouldn’t this be what we do, since we love music for its reality, for voices and sounds that linger long after they are no longer there? Love is not based on great works as unperformed abstractions or even as subtended by an imagined or hypothetical performance.”6 According to Abbate, musical hermeneutics has alienated musicology from “real music,” diverting our attention away from music-as-performed to music-as-text. While the hermeneutic processes of abstraction that reify music into such categories as “text” or “work” may enable the production of musical meaning, they also threaten to obliterate more visceral feelings of mystery, pleasure, eroticism, discomfort, enervation, and boredom, among others. Hermeneutics does not simply cloud over the miracle of music in its glorious and essential ineffability, but rather exploits its muteness by speaking on its behalf, when it cannot speak for itself, and by exalting this interpretive maneuver as the only moral action possible, since to argue against musical meaning is (in the eyes of the “enlightened” hermeneut) to support the ideologies that have historically appropriated music for their own insidious purposes.

Abbate continues by proposing that the prospects for reforming musical hermeneutics are not promising. The attempt of so-called soft hermeneutics to relativize its claims by admitting its subjective and historical contingency ultimately fails, due to the overriding impulse of all hermeneutics to ground its authority by constraining interpretation. To further prop up this authority, hermeneutics has claimed privileged status for the meaning that music, as a particular representational medium, can encode, while simultaneously fetishizing the complexity of its encoding—a phenomenon that Abbate dubs “the cryptographic sublime.”7 Hermeneutics, in all modes of its operation, has not rescued classical music from its cultural irrelevance in the late twentieth century, but rather is a symptom of this decline.

Abbate’s essay is a stirring call-to-arms against hermeneutics in the name of live performance. Its most successful aspect may be the trenchant critique of the mystification that musical hermeneutics has often used to valorize its

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7. Ibid., 525.
practices. However, alongside these insights rest claims that are more problematic. The multiple binary oppositions in Abbate’s essay that line up with the “drastic/gnostic” contrast—real/abstract, event/work, present/distant, present/past, subjective/objective, wild/domestic, wordlessness/prolixity, in addition to others—bolster her polemics by creating many points of antagonism between performance and hermeneutics that collectively figure the alienation of hermeneutic musicology from “real music,” and by reinforcing her basic value judgment about the two: performance good, hermeneutics bad. While these oppositions may help to satisfy the more brutal requirements of a paradigm shift in academic discourse, destroying the temple of the “gnostic” in order to build a shrine to the “drastic” (as Nietzsche would say), they nevertheless misrepresent performance, hermeneutics, and their relationship.

Performance and hermeneutics do not stand in opposition to each other, as Abbate argues, but rather exist symbiotically. The value of hermeneutics for performance is apparent in the daily activity of music making, which brings the search for musical meaning into play in such scenarios as vocal and instrumental lessons, ensemble rehearsals, coachings, and master classes. Performers in these contexts use hermeneutics not to flee the reality of performance, but rather to intensify this reality as a momentary, communicative act that requires a simultaneous commitment of mind and body in the pursuit of particular expressive goals. While the regularity of practice tends to alienate the performer from the music to be performed, hermeneutics strives against this trend to allow the performer to appropriate and reappropriate this music—to make it his or her own.

The surface symbiosis between hermeneutics and performance is the visible flowering of a deeper philosophical relation between the two that receives its most detailed exposition in Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*. We may articulate this relation in several axiomatic phrases whose explication and exemplification will follow in due course: hermeneutics is performative and performance is hermeneutic; their approach to the work is dialectical, their context is tradition, and the mode of their occurrence is that of an event. Since the three major texts of this review (Abbate, Gadamer, and Hoeckner) are all invested in the concept of the event as an essential aspect of their respective concerns, we should briefly sketch out its basic features: the event occurs within the time frame of a moment, cannot be repeated, is remarkable in its context, alters that context, and exceeds attribution to any single actor.9


9. This phenomenological description of the event is drawn from Martin Seel, “Ereignis: Eine kleine Phänomenologie,” in *Ereignis: Eine fundamentale Kategorie der Zeiterfahrung, Anspruch und Aporien*, ed. Nikolaus Müller-Schöll and Philipp Schink, 37–47 (Bielefeld,
explore our initial proposition that meaning is an event, we need only replace the latter with the former in this string of characteristics.

Gadamerian hermeneutics treats the object of interpretation as an “answer” to a “question” whose formulation involves positions of understanding that are contemporary not only to the work but also to the questioner—as Gadamer says, “The text must be understood as an answer to a real question.” Every hermeneutic act, regardless of its context, occurs within an interpretive tradition and extends this tradition by “fusing” the epistemological “horizons” of past and present. Both “tradition” and the “fusion of horizons” are dynamic entities in Gadamer’s philosophy: tradition is an ongoing process of transmission (of values, practices, etc.) while fusion is a conversational dialectics, as indicated by the metaphor of the question/answer dichotomy. Insofar as the “prejudices” (or “prejudgments,” an alternate translation of Gadamer’s Vorurteile) of a specific community at a specific historical moment provide the basic substance of and the condition of possibility for interpretation, every individual act of interpretation represents much more than mere subjective caprice.

Within the hermeneutic triad formed by understanding, interpretation (which Gadamer at one point describes as “the explicit form of understanding”), and application, the latter is particularly helpful in illuminating the performative nature of hermeneutics. In legal hermeneutics, for example, a law is rendered concrete on every occasion that it is applied, just as a performance or an analysis concretizes a score.
interpreter is compelled to weigh historical situation and evidence of original intent (which, in the case of music, may include directions in the score, manuscript revisions, letters to friends and associates, published essays and interviews, etc.) against the various demands of the specific occasion to produce a meaningful and effective interpretation, thereby fusing the horizons of the past and the present; the performance that results simultaneously expresses and carries out this fusion of horizons.

Having singled out application from the hermeneutic triad, however, Gadamer is careful to reintegrate it, asserting that “application is neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but codetermines it as a whole from the beginning.”14 The fact that all three branches of the hermeneutic triad are typically carried out within the framework of a moment indicates that all hermeneutics is an event of performance. Harking back to our earlier phenomenological description of the event, this axiom holds regardless of the interpretive tradition in which the hermeneutic activity occurs, whether it produce a live musical performance, a musicological essay, a legal decision, a literary explication de texte, or a biblical exegesis. When brought into relation with Abbate’s claims, this axiom contradicts her oppositions between not only performance and hermeneutics but also their associated objects of “event” and “work,” respectively. In the process of dismantling the former opposition Gadamer also pauses to dismantle the latter: “Every performance is an event,” he explains, “but not one in any way separate from the work—the work itself is what ‘takes place’ (“[sich] ereignet”: also, “comes into its own”) in the event (“Ereignis”) of performance.”15

Over the past half century both Truth and Method and its larger field of philosophical hermeneutics have been touchstones for the self-understanding of the humanities. To the extent that we accept Gadamer’s theses as valid for musicology we must simultaneously reject Abbate’s diametrical opposition between hermeneutics and performance and, therewith, the slew of dichotomies that she generates from this opposition. If Abbate’s explicit decision not to

15. Ibid., 141.
consider “philosophical arguments about [musical] performance” in the course of her essay might ever have seemed advantageous, our review of the fundamental interrelation of performance and hermeneutics shows it, in fact, to have been a liability that erodes much of her critique.16

As a self-described “essay on musical and historical hermeneutics” (p. 3), Hoeckner’s Programming the Absolute participates in the tradition of inquiry laid out in Truth and Method. Although it owes a greater debt to the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School than to Gadamerian hermeneutics, it is nevertheless situated at a point of intersection between the two intellectual traditions where meaning and presence interact.17 While Gadamer explores this dialectic through the concept of the event, Hoeckner focuses on the “moment.” As Hoeckner explains to us, “The hermeneutics of [the moment] acknowledges, rather than suppresses, the fact that interpretations are selective, that every interpretation promotes a particular agenda. Indeed, reception aesthetics allows us to recognize that writers about music privilege not only striking passages or specific thematic transformations, but also entire structures or formal procedures; in sum, any feature that offers itself as an analogy to make a work “speak” for them.”18 A hermeneutics of the moment is a reflexive practice that not only acknowledges that “all interpretation is highlighting,” as Gadamer says, but also highlights its own activity as highly contingent, thereby moving itself to contemplate the fragility and urgency of the meaning that it, in the moment of finding, has found in the moment.19

As we discover upon reading Hoeckner’s Programming the Absolute, the “moment” need not merely represent a feature of the musical work. Rather, Hoeckner presents it as a multivalent concept whose aesthetic and analytical, as well as historical and cultural connotations, lend it a broad and varied potential for musicological research. Within cultural discourse the term “moment” can mean a fragment of history whose content may both express and—from Adorno’s and Benjamin’s materialist perspectives—explode a unity,

such as the one projected by historicism. In *Programming the Absolute* the historical fragment under consideration is “the moment of German music,” the cultural *floruit* stretching from Beethoven to Schoenberg (p. 2). In invoking this “moment” Hoeckner is not simply embracing the heart of the Western classical-musical canon in uncritical affirmation; rather, he is categorizing this phenomenon as a “moment” in order to illuminate its position on various hermeneutic horizons, particularly that of German culture in its historical process of self-comprehension and self-critique. While nineteenth-century artists such as Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt, and Richard Wagner made confident appeal to a German musical tradition in shaping their compositional poetics, twentieth-century figures such as Arnold Schoenberg, Thomas Mann, and Theodor Adorno seized upon this tradition with nostalgia and anxiety as a moment past or about to pass, a defining cultural era all too vulnerable to the onslaught of oblivion.

The aesthetic sense of the “moment” in *Programming the Absolute* derives primarily from the Adornian *Augenblick*, a term that appears most famously in the gnomic claim from his *Aesthetic Theory* that “every artwork is a moment” (“Augenblick”). The pregnancy of this statement receives fullest consideration in a first chapter entitled “Beethoven’s Star.” Hoeckner begins by explaining how the moment-bound phenomenology of the artwork in Adorno’s aesthetics stakes a claim to truth on behalf of the artwork by bringing it into various dialectical oscillations that never produce synthesis: the part and whole, the particular and the universal, the expressible and the inexpressible, the historically immanent and the transcendent, etc. Hoeckner then adduces “the impossible tone B♭/B” of Beethoven’s opera as a musical correlative for the failure of dialectical synthesis in the artwork (p. 46).

In *Leonore*, the earlier version of the opera from 1805, the female protagonist’s high Bs interlink three pivotal moments: her act-1 aria “Komm, Hoffnung,” her heroic outcry in act 2 of “Tödt erst sein Weib!” and the final duet “O namenlose Freude.” Narrative progress among these moments outlines a smooth trajectory from hope to action and, finally, to fulfillment of that hope. In Beethoven’s revision of *Leonore* as *Fidelio* he lowers the outcry from a B to a B♭, a change that removes the dramatic moment from its previous narrative trajectory to place it into a different causal relation; her outcry no longer expresses Leonore’s inner hope but now (indirectly) summons the king, whose annunciatory trumpet answers her B♭ with another. Thus, spanning the two versions of the opera the speculative tone “B♭/B” represents the desire to reconcile “personal happiness and political action” as well as the impossibility of that reconciliation (p. 45).

In the second chapter Hoeckner sets aside political concerns to investigate the notion of “distance” in Early German Romanticism. Distance, in its various senses, was indispensable for the Romantic artist, not only enabling reflection upon the distant object but also transforming language into music as the former traveled across space and time to reach the listening ear; the desire to translate music back into language called upon hermeneutics. For Robert Schumann these general qualities of distance bore upon a specific personal matter: separation from the distant beloved, whether it be Clara or his home. Several moments that Hoeckner selects from Schumann’s music—the Aria from the Piano Sonata in F-sharp Minor, “Wie aus der Ferne” from Davidsbündlertänze, and the intertextual first movement of the Fantasie—all gesture toward overcoming physical, temporal, and emotional distance from the beloved object, thereby further ramifying the complex interrelation between meaning and presence in musical hermeneutics by bringing presence into a bittersweet dialectic with absence. A correlative for this dialectic is the voice exchange of E♭ and C in the Fantasie that, by means of Schumann’s symbolism and Hoeckner’s hermeneutics, simultaneously measures and overcomes the metaphorical distance between Robert and Clara. Any pressure that Hoeckner’s hermeneutics may have exerted upon this music is released at the moment that he performs the Fantasie for us, making it sing within our aural imagination.

Hoeckner extends the reach of his argument in this chapter to create a rapprochement between his critical methodology and Schumann’s by elucidating a hermeneutics of the moment in Schumann’s 1840 review of Schubert’s Great Symphony in C (D. 944). Here Schumann famously describes the entry of the horns immediately prior to the reprise of the main theme in bar 160 of the second movement as the appearance of a “heavenly guest” who brings the rest of the symphonic ensemble to rapt attention (and, we should add, to uncanny harmonic vacillation). The manifold mise en abyme, which bespeaks a continuity of concern for the “explosive” moment in the related traditions of classical-musical hermeneutics and poetics, has a dizzying effect: we witness Hoeckner listening to Schumann listening to Schubert listening to his symphony, which, according to Schumann, is listening to itself.

The trope of the failed synthesis recurs in chapter 3’s discussion of the shipwrecked relationship between Lohengrin and Elsa, whose successful pairing would be a matter of course in more conventional romance narratives. In pursuing the terms of this strange relationship Hoeckner diverts analytical focus away from the opera’s “outer frame,” the Prelude and its recapitulation in the Grail narrative (R61ff.), and redirects it toward the “inner frame,” formed by the two pairs of screams that Elsa makes upon invoking Lohengrin (at “Lüfte”

and “sah,” R15/28 and R25/22, respectively) and posing to him the for- 
dden question of his origin (at “dein” and “Art,” R35/27 and R38/1, re-
respectively). With the first pair Elsa manages to bridge her A-flat-major tonality 
with Lohengrin’s A major as her dream vision of the knight’s rescue is trans-
formed into reality, a moment of transition that, for Hoeckner, represents “the 
opera’s Augenblick of the whole” (p. 133). The potential synthesis of opposites —fantasy and reality, myth and history, the human and the divine that the initial 
moment seemed to promise—is annulled by Elsa’s second pair of screams. 
Although Elsa may ultimately die onstage in seeming atonement for her lapse 
in faith, Hoeckner draws upon both his own musical analyses of the score and 
pertinent passages in Wagner’s writings to recuperate her as a symbol of a rev-
olutionary music for which Wagner, by 1850, had not yet found a compatible 
counterpart in dramatic action. Wagner’s synthetic project of music drama is, 
therefore, both negated and preserved in Lohengrin, awaiting future realiza-
tion in his subsequent work.

In the fourth chapter Hoeckner locates Liszt’s first symphonic poem, Ce 
qu’on entend sur la montagne (premiered in 1857), at the crux of several di-
chotomies that informed musical poetics and aesthetics of the mid-nineteenth 
century: “autonomy and function, traditional and avant-garde techniques, 
personal and public expression” (p. 156). The feature that situates the work at 
the heart of this nexus of conflict is the religious chorale that occurs at the 
middle and the end. (Interpolated by Liszt into the source narrative, a poem 
by Victor Hugo, the chorale is also testament to the composer’s understand-
ing of the peculiar needs of the work in its historical moment.) On the one 
hand, the religious chorale is integrated into the work through its membership 
in a larger thematic family; on the other hand, its genre and gesture of prayer 
render it qualitatively distinct. The climactic breakthrough near the end of the 
piece (RZ in the standard Eulenburg edition) introduces a new element: a sec-
ular chorale in sublime grandeur, whose diametrical contrast with the serene 
tones of the religious chorale instantiates the heated contemporary dialectic 
between art religion (“Kunstreligion”) and religious art. Hoeckner’s high-
lighting of this dialectic does not merely reveal Liszt’s poem in its significance 
as a moment of history, but rather performs it for us, incorporating this dialec-
tic into its dramatic hermeneutics—breakthrough and all.

Chapter 5 begins with the conceit of “Schoenberg’s gaze,” which 
Hoeckner presents not only as a defining element in the composer’s series of 
self-portraits but also as a powerful metaphor for paradoxical aspects of his 
musical work. Just as Schoenberg alternated between painting his gaze deliv-
ered and withheld, so too is his music “torn between a critical moment and 
an affirmative one: the death of tonality and the life of the organic artwork” 
(p. 191). In addressing the challenge posed by the unblinking, “enucleated 
eye”—the eye that floats almost completely unmoored from the face in several 
of Schoenberg’s paintings—Hoeckner intensifies his hermeneutics to position 
the inexorable gaze within a fittingly dire dialectic, one that oscillates between
the “revolutionary renunciation of a central tonal perspective for the sake of new expression, and the regressive regime of an omnipresent, panoptical, \textit{Grundgestalt} for the sake of aesthetic coherence” (p. 194). Hoeckner follows Adorno in treating \textit{Erwartung} as exemplary of Schoenberg’s revolutionary expressionism and \textit{Die Jakobsleiter} as exemplary of his regressive constructivism; consideration of the two works together brings Schoenberg’s historical-poetic dialectic to a momentary standstill.

Individual moments within the works deepen and complicate this interpretation: Schoenberg’s embedded references in \textit{Erwartung} to his earlier song “Am Wegrand,” Op. 6, no. 6, briefly introduce tonality as if to project the past in its desirable but irrecoverable coherence, while in \textit{Die Jakobsleiter}, the Dying One’s transfiguration into the Soul simultaneously refuses and affirms representation, thereby transforming “the expressionless”—here, in the abandonment of language and the participation in the “absolute” realm of dodecaphony—into a means of expression. The hermeneutic moment of this chapter thus offers the double paradox of “gnostic” expressionism and “drastic” dodecaphony that not only contravenes conventional music-historical narratives but also helps to deconstruct the gnostic/drastic dichotomy that, as it turns out, is already embedded in these narratives.

Hoeckner’s frequent and telling reference to important works of German literature throughout \textit{Programming the Absolute}, which includes Goethe’s \textit{Wahlverwandtschaften}, Jean Paul’s \textit{Flegeljahre}, and Rilke’s \textit{Der neuen Gedichte anderer Teil}, culminates in the final chapter on Thomas Mann’s \textit{Doktor Faustus}. The selection is fitting: not only did the appearance of the novel coincide chronologically with the end of the “moment of German music” but it also incorporated reflection upon this historical moment through its biographical account of the fictive composer Adrian Leverkühn and his circle of familiairs. In addition to Leverkühn, two members of this circle, his musical preceptor Wendell Kretschmar and his nephew Nepomuk Schneidewein, otherwise known as “Echo,” play significant roles in Hoeckner’s argument. The shift in color of Echo’s eyes—blue in health and black in death—reflects the arc from hope to hopelessness that spans the musical moment of German culture from its rise to its fall. The \textit{Augenblick} of hope is represented musically by the C♯ passing tone that Beethoven interpolates into the Arietta theme at the very end of his Opus 111 Piano Sonata; toward the beginning of the novel Kretschmar, parroting Adorno, finds that this musical atom represents the transcendent particular that promises to reconcile humanity with aesthetic illusion. Echo’s premature death at the novel’s end compels Leverkühn to compose a cantata, \textit{Lamentations of Dr. Faustus}, in which the composer fuses the antithetical phenomena of absolute constructivism (dodecaphony) and utmost expressivism (the lament topos) to negate the affirmative message of Beethoven’s Ninth. Hoeckner’s reading of the musical moment in \textit{Doktor Faustus}, however, does not conclude on this note of black despair, but rather
seizes upon the end of the *Lamentations* to reopen the possibility of hope: the final high G in the cello that fades away in fraternity with the “dying sound,” the Romantic trope of transcendence.

The combination of profuse erudition and singular hermeneutic purpose in *Programming the Absolute* recalls a compositional aspect of Berg’s *Drei Orchesterstücke*, Op. 6, that Adorno exalted: the “vigilance in ensuring that plenitude is possible as a constructed reality.” While the book’s structural impulse arises from its consistent object and method of inquiry—the Adornian *Augenblick* in works representative of the Austro-Germanic musical tradition and its negative-dialectical interpretation—its richness of content springs from Hoeckner’s immersion in these musical and intellectual traditions and his desire to share with us the fruits of his immersion.

Although this brief overview cannot represent the full scope of thought in this book, it has nevertheless attempted to trace the main uses to which Hoeckner has directed his “hermeneutics of moment,” an interpretive mode that articulates the conjunction of meaning and presence in the artwork by performing it.

Dialectics reminds us, however, that each advantage may be tempered by a concomitant disadvantage. On the one hand, Hoeckner’s analytical consistency may tax readers as they proceed through the book by offering little respite from the dichotomies of Critical Theory and the process of locating their correlates in the artwork. On the other hand, it is hard to imagine how Hoeckner might fulfill his commitment to Critical Theory—a deeply melancholic enterprise for which compulsive repetition is characteristic—and simultaneously avoid such thematic and structural repetition. The associative plenitude of his thought is a boon in this regard, offsetting the more doctrinaire elements of his analysis while maintaining a compelling pertinence at every moment to the topics at hand.

The wealth of ideas in this book also bares an Achilles heel: the risk that Hoeckner’s desire to incorporate a maximum of voices and interpretive perspectives will obscure differences among them. This risk comes to a head in his treatment of the strains of Critical Theory represented by the writings of Benjamin and Adorno, the twin pillars that sustain Hoeckner’s monograph. Central critical terms in Benjamin—including the constellation, dialectics at a standstill, the aura, and the shock, all of which Adorno appropriated with various degrees of mediation—point to a static and visually allusive element in his thought that is indebted to surrealism and emphasizes the utopian, revelatory,

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and even messianic promise of the Moment; Adorno, allergic to those magical-theological aspects of Benjamin’s thought that both harbored “a remnant of undialectical positivity” and gestured toward dissolving the subject, strove instead to keep the subject-object relation in a continual dialectical Bewegung.

Hoeckner is well aware of the basic differences in method and ideology that distinguish Benjamin from Adorno, as demonstrated by his comparison of the two in chapter 1. Multiple subsequent references to Benjaminian “standstills” in the midst of Adornian dialectics, however, threaten to erase these hard-won distinctions instead of developing them further. As a musicologist Hoeckner naturally has more urgent tasks to perform in Programming the Absolute than writing a treatise that sorts out the extremely complex relations between the conceptual worlds of Benjamin and Adorno. Nevertheless, the central contribution that Benjamin makes to Hoeckner’s interpretive method seems to call for a clear exposition of a Benjaminian “hermeneutics of the moment” that is held independent from Adorno’s as far and as long as possible. By avoiding both the subordination of one to the other and their mutual subsumption under the rubric of Critical Theory, this separation of hermeneutic methodologies would give us an opportunity to judge the two on their own terms and decide how we might wish to incorporate them into our own interpretive practices. While Adorno may have been the musician of the two philosophers, Benjamin’s ideas are no less promising for musical hermeneutics, as Hoeckner amply demonstrates.

When one reads Hoeckner’s meticulously documented and intellectually extraordinary Programming the Absolute, it will, one hopes, become evident...
that musical hermeneutics is neither an outmoded nor an irresponsible mode of scholarship, nor does it exclude issues of presence and performance, as Abbate wishes us to believe. Rather than “fleeing from the unknown” in experience, hermeneutics is a primary way that we pay homage to it, illuminating it indirectly through constellations of myriad hermeneutic hypotheses, all discrete fragments of a continuous search for meaning that is the hermeneutic tradition. In describing the “reality” of music as “voices and sounds that linger long after they are no longer there,” Abbate—despite herself—encapsulates the fundamental hermeneutic scenario in the opening paragraph of her article.²⁷ Realizing Jean Paul’s “beautiful infinity,” hermeneutics keeps the dying sound alive and resonant in the space of memory and the imagination.

MICHAEL JAMES PURI


David Milsom summarizes his “principal motivation” in writing this book as “the comparison between the written theories, and the practice of early recordings of violin performance” (p. 127). He has worked his way through violin treatises of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and analyzed recordings by violinists (and singers) active in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Although the earliest of these recordings was not made until 1903, it nevertheless seems reasonable to assume that they can, indeed, throw light on “Style in Performance, 1850–1900.” A CD of excerpts is supplied with the book. Milsom’s main preoccupation is with stylistic differences between the Franco-Belgian and German schools of playing. Thus the book promises to supplement the work of scholars such as Clive Brown (at one time Milsom’s graduate supervisor) and Robert Philip.¹

The selection of historical recordings on the accompanying CD is interesting in itself. In several instances, Milsom has juxtaposed performances of the same pieces. Joseph Joachim (1903) and Arnold Rosé (1928) subject the
