

Introduction

Richard Taruskin

The feeling of nation, which hitherto was considered something high and beautiful, has become like a spiritual syphilis which has devoured the brains and grins out through the empty eyesockets in senseless hate. What kind of bacillus is it that conquers the warring nations' best heads?... One thing I would wish: that this war should not end until the whole civilized world lies in ruins! Now we must do it thoroughly! Now we must finally finish it off. This must never happen again, therefore it must now be done with a vengeance.

— Carl Nielsen to Bror Beckman, 27 October 1914

The five essays that make up the contents of this special issue of *repercussions* were all written for a seminar I convened in the spring of 1996 under the rubric "Studies in Nationalism and Music."

I was just back from a leave during which I had been thinking strenuously about (the history of) nationalism and its (inter)relationship with (the history of) music. The strenuousness, and the sense of crisis I was feeling, were triggered by the false sentimentalism of the celebrations surrounding the centenary of Dvořák's "New World" Symphony that took place very early in my leave when I had lots of time for obsessions, and especially by the way it was reported in the press. I had dashed off a riposte for the *New*

York Times, in which I characterized (all right, denounced) what was usually viewed as nationalism in music as just the other side of the coin of German universalism, characterized the latter as a form of colonialism, and called for a deconstruction of our habitual oppositional (mainstream/peripheries) thinking, with all its attendant evasions, essentialisms, double standards, and dubious prescriptions. I append it to this introduction as a preparatory document exposing some of the ideas given fuller development in the essays that follow.

At any rate, back from leave with a spinning head, I announced a topic that would give me a chance to talk matters out with advanced graduate students who shared my interest in the question. It was a fruitful colloquy indeed, and a transformative experience for all concerned. In part this was simply because the topic has such compelling resonance with the struggles and agonies of today's world. But it was also, in part, because musicology has been so slow or reluctant to address the topic. We were all affected a bit by a sense of impatience at the complacency with which conventional music scholarship has handled—or sidetracked—so many volatile issues. But we were also heartened to recognize, as Leon Plantinga has put it, signs of “a new care and sophistication” in more recent work.¹ And as I realized on rereading his collected essays, Richard L. Crocker had been there ahead of us all, with a review published in *JAMS* all the way back in 1962.² I recommend it heartily to readers of *repercussions* in tribute to my nominee as the most visionary

1. Leon Plantinga, “Dvořák and the Meaning of Nationalism in Music,” in *Rethinking Dvořák: Views from Five Countries*, ed. David R. Beveridge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 220.

2. Richard Crocker, review of *Die Tonsprachen des Abendlandes*, by Hans Joachim Moser, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 15 (1962): 99–102; reprinted in Crocker, *Studies in Medieval Music Theory and the Early Sequence* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1997), I.

musicologist of the twentieth century. (He may have thought at the time that he was defending a truly comprehensive "Western" style-criticism, but he was in fact deconstructing it decades *avant la lettre*.)

Crusader's zeal imbued the seminar's activity with a degree, rare in my experience, of shared enterprise and mutual stimulation that may help account for the quality of the work produced and the decision by the editors of *repercussions* to publish it. The seminar had the desired effect on me as well, and on my book then in progress, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, 1997), which bears traces of our discussions on virtually every page.

The papers in this volume are also works in progress, I am happy to report, since most of them are draft dissertation chapters. The channeling of so much talent and energy into dissertations treating music in the context of nationalism is for me the most auspicious result of the seminar, since it presages a pressure that may one day be felt in the discipline at large, one that may even succeed in altering its course toward a better integration of history into music history, a more observant, better informed analytical purview, and a more self-conscious, hence responsible, historiographical practice.

These desiderata were matters of explicit discussion in the seminar and informed the work produced there by conscious design. The papers, being the product of a great deal of joint methodological reflection and debate, are presented in all candor as methodological case studies—or, if you prefer, theoretical ones (but the word "theory" brings with it, in today's musicological climate, a connotation of facile or premature generalization of a sort that we were much concerned to critique and as best we could avoid).

The method as such consisted, first, in locating musical problems as precisely and specifically as possible within the

history—an embarrassingly multifarious and complicated history—of nationalism itself. That meant, in the first place, studying that history (and the history of the study of that history) in some detail. The books and articles read and discussed toward this end are listed following this introduction. A corollary to this approach is that the study of music in the context of nationalism must always entail reception as well as production. Charting the nuances of reception (unwelcome as the news will be to modernists) will often help explain apparent vagaries or “aporias” in production: see especially the studies within by David Schneider and Gregory Dubinsky.

In the second place, the “method” requires the corroboration of secondary evidence with evidence from scores and vice versa. Musical analysis, practiced eclectically and with sensitivity to historical contexts, is far better integrated into the historiographical project than segregated from it, despite the many arguments heard of late from dogmatists and purists from both the “theory” and the “history” camps. The study of music in realistically assessed national and historical contexts exposes the universalist pretensions of analytical discourses as well as those of historiography.

In other words, when a Paul Henry Lang writes—

By the end of the [eighteenth] century we no longer speak of German music, for this music became the musical language of the world, as in the two previous supreme syntheses the musical language of the Franco-Flemish composers and later of the Neapolitans became the language of the world. For in the symphonies of Haydn, as in the works of Mozart and of the other masters of the era, there speaks a musicianship that is universal, timeless, and valid under all circumstances. This music is not one solution or one aspect, nor is it a personal matter; it speaks to all peoples.³

—we now instantly recognize it as an example of ethnocentrism, the happy conviction (as Stanley Hoffmann once put

it) that “there are universal values, and they happen to be mine.”⁴ We may not be so quick to recognize an ethnocentric discourse, though, when it is maintained by a writer of far greater finesse, not by outright assertion but by means of endless, sometimes invidious but almost always gratuitous comparisons (er, “dialectics”).⁵ And we are still, alas, least likely to notice it when it is done in the form of purportedly neutral, “purely musical” analytical methods that universalize the achievements of German composers. The essay within by Leslie Sprout ends with a crisp and thought-provoking example of universalist discourse (“the music itself”) serving a political—and a national—purpose, in a context made chilling by Germany’s proximate role in mandating its formulation. The cold-war underpinnings of our current universalist discourses are coolly foreshadowed there as well.

Finally, the method means trying harder to situate ourselves, and the “common-sense” positions we have learned to take for granted, in the historiographical flux. Everybody claims to know that this is necessary now, and to do it. How far, though, have we really come? The passage that, more than any other, set my head a-spinning years ago—not only on questions of nationalisms overt and covert, but also on matters of scholarly complacency and responsibility—was a paragraph from the first edition of Grout’s *History of Western Music* (a book that still educates our pupils), to which I called attention in an early consideration of musical nationalism.⁶ Introducing what I have come to call the “ghetto

3. *Music and History*, Helen Kenyon Lectureship, Lecture 11 (Poughkeepsie, NY: Vassar College, 1953), 24-25; reprinted in Paul Henry Lang, *Musicology and Performance*, ed. Alfred Mann and George T. Buelow (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 38.

4. Stanley Hoffmann, “Us and Them,” *The New Republic*, 12 July 1993, 32.

5. Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), *passim*.

chapter" one finds in most history texts, where "nationalist" composers (i.e., composers who were not German, French, or Italian) are stereotyped in opposition to the mainstream, Grout wrote:

Nationalism was an important force in nineteenth-century music. A distinction must be made, however, between early Romantic nationalism and the nationalism which appeared after 1860. The results of the early nineteenth-century German folk song revival were so thoroughly absorbed into the fabric of German music as to become an integral part of its style, which in the Romantic period was the nearest thing to an international European musical style. Thus, although Brahms, for instance, made arrangements of German folk songs and wrote melodies that resemble folk songs, and although Debussy called him the most Germanic of composers, *we still do not think of him* as any more a "nationalist" composer than Haydn, Schubert, Strauss, or Mahler, all of whom likewise more or less consciously made use of folk idioms. In similar fashion, the national qualities of nineteenth-century French and Italian music were assimilated to a firmly established tradition in each country. And as for the Polish elements in Chopin, or the Hungarian-Gypsy ones in Liszt and Brahms, these are for the most part only exotic accessories to a style fundamentally cosmopolitan.⁷

I made heaviest weather of the words italicized above, wringing my hands at perhaps immoderate length over their implied discouragement of critical thinking. The paragraph, happily enough, has been judiciously rewritten for the latest edition of the venerable textbook:

Nationalism in nineteenth-century music was marked by an emphasis on literary and linguistic traditions, an interest in folklore, a large dose of patriotism, and a craving for indepen-

6. Richard Taruskin, "Some Thoughts on the History and Historiography of Russian Music," *Journal of Musicology* 3 (1984): 326, n. 16.

7. Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music* (New York: Norton, 1960), 583-84.

dence and identity. A sense of pride in a language and its literature formed part of the national consciousness that led to German and Italian unification. Up to a point, Wagner and Verdi chose subject matter that reflected their patriotic feelings, but neither one was narrowly national in this respect. Verdi, as we saw, became a symbol for national unity, but that was owing to the character of his operas. Neither of these composers cultivated a style that was ethnically German or Italian. Brahms arranged German folksongs and wrote folk-like melodies. Haydn, Schubert, Schumann, Strauss, and Mahler all made conscious use of folk idioms, if not always those of their native countries. The Polish elements in Chopin and the Hungarian-gypsy traits in Liszt and Brahms were for the most part exotic accessories to cosmopolitan styles. Nationalism was not really an issue in the music of any of these composers.⁸

Up to the last sentence the moderation of the rhetoric, the increased subtlety of argument, and the greater inclusivity of viewpoint are all salutary and encouraging. But that last sentence! At the very least, one must insist that issues do not come to us ready-made. Defining (or deflecting) them is the work of the historian—our work—and we have to stand behind it, especially when we act as teachers. We must acknowledge our complicity in construction and assume responsibility for our emphases. Here a wise comment of Plantinga's is worth recalling: "It is more pleasing to observe the celebration of Czech cultural identity in the works of Smetana and Dvořák, surely, than to contemplate a similar impulse in the German Richard Wagner after the war of 1870."⁹

But if we refuse to make "an issue" of Brahms's nationalism, we will have scant defense when our opponent in debate confronts us with his *Triumphlied*, op. 55 ("Hallelujah!

8. Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 5th ed. (New York: Norton, 1996), 665-66.

9. Plantinga, "Dvořák and the Meaning of Nationalism," 118.

Hallelujah! Denn der allmächtige Gott hat das Reich eingenommen"), composed—when else?—in 1870, and headed *Seiner Majestät dem Deutschen Kaiser Wilhelm I. ehfurchtsvoll zugeeignet*.¹⁰ And if we choose to emphasize that Wagner, while patriotic (a plus, after all, for Americans), was "not narrowly national," we shall have a harder time explaining his activities as "K. Freigedank" to our students, and we will have to keep them from ever discovering such tragically misguided Wagnerian gasconades by Schoenberg (no favorite of Freigedank's) as this: "Wagner's music was not only the best and most significant of its age, ... but it was also the music of 1870 Germany, who conquered the world of her friends and enemies through all her achievements, not without arousing their envy and resistance."¹¹ Above all, we shall have to take extra care to keep hidden the link between Schoenberg's gloating rhetoric and that of his American followers, with some of whom some of our pupils still study theory and composition.

The residue of German universalism that remains even in the latest incarnation of "Grout" still represents what we must accept as current thinking in our field. So does this atrociously written paragraph:

10. Raymond Knapp has recently had the courage to take this thought further, suggesting, on the basis of the chronological proximity between the premieres of Brahms's First Symphony and the complete *Ring des Nibelungen*, that "Brahms's final push to complete his First Symphony, which allowed him to overcome whatever dissatisfactions had beleaguered the project, was motivated in part by his desire to offer an alternative monument to the spirit of German nationalism recently revitalized by the Franco-Prussian War—a circumstance that helps explain why the symphony was heard in Karlsruhe, Mannheim, and (perhaps most significantly) Munich before its premiere in Vienna, Brahms's adopted city" [review of Johannes Brahms, *Symphonie Nr. 1, C-moll, opus 68*, ed. Robert Pascall, in *Notes* 54 (1997-98): 554].

11. Schoenberg, "National Music," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 172.

Despite his considerable accomplishments, Janáček had surprisingly little influence upon subsequent musical developments. One reason for this, no doubt, is that opera, his main creative area, has lost in the twentieth century the central position it enjoyed in musical developments of the preceding. Another reason may be that Janáček has been overshadowed by the importance of Bartók. Although he actually anticipated Bartók's evolution in certain striking respects (notably in his use of folk music as a compositional resource), Janáček was considerably less influenced by the "progressive" elements in twentieth-century music than was his Hungarian colleague. In any event it was Bartók who came to be viewed as the dominant compositional voice of Eastern Europe during the first half of the century.¹²

So ingrained does Teutonic universalism remain even now, in other words, as to impose a *numerus clausus*, an old-fashioned ethnic quota, on candidates for admission to the canon of the influential great. "His Hungarian colleague" indeed! (But I thought all you Eastern Europeans knew one another....) Within the ghetto, moreover, uniformity of behavior is still expected. "Curiously," writes Morgan on another page, "Skryabin was not himself nationalist in orientation."¹³ Sure he was—nothing short of a Russian Messianist in fact. It's just that he didn't quote folk songs.

The stereotyping of minorities in our musicological texts reminds us of another factor complicating the question of nationalism in music and in musicology, one that unfortunately has not been helped but actually exacerbated by our current preoccupation with identity politics and the fetishizing of "alterity." National identity can be claimed by others on one's behalf, and can as easily confine as liberate—to the point of virtual stir-craziness. The predicament

12. Robert P. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music* (New York: Norton, 1991), 119.

13. *Ibid.*, 55. Italics mine.

of Ernest Bloch, set forth in Klára Móricz's essay (using a wealth of locally preserved primary source material), is a cautionary case in point.

Beth Levy addresses another embarrassing complication, that of appropriated identity, in her essay on American "Indianist" music. A century ago, American composers in the European tradition faced an interesting choice, which Levy pursues only by implication, of whose identity they should appropriate in white-face. MacDowell, in rejecting what he regarded as Dvořák's meddlesome advice, put it candidly enough, in blunt terms that might well be borne in mind when reading Levy's admirably restrained and subtle exposition. While denying the necessity of a national "trademark," MacDowell nevertheless insisted that "the stern but at least manly and free rudeness of the North American Indian" was in any case preferable to "the badge of whilom slavery."¹⁴

All that is missing from this collection to give it an all-round revisionary purview is a study of German musical nationalism itself, the repressed grand-daddy of all musical nationalisms, a study with many potentially transformative ramifications of its own. One branch would be the study of the nationalistic subtext that surrounded the German discourse of "absolute music" and provided it with its "unmarked" or universal cover. The work of Sanna Pederson has most directly attacked this aspect of the question.¹⁵ (A more oblique but still effective approach to it can

14. Quoted in Lawrence Gilman, *Edward MacDowell* (New York: John Lane, 1908), 84.

15. In addition to her dissertation, listed in the bibliography that follows, see Sanna Pederson, "On the Task of the Music Historian: The Myth of the Symphony after Beethoven," *repercussions* 2, no. 2 (1993): 5-30; and *idem*, "A. B. Marx, Berlin Concert Life, and German National Identity," *19th-Century Music* 18 (1994-95): 87-107.

be found in Scott Burnham's *Beethoven Hero* [Princeton, 1995].)

Another branch would concern the watershed in the history of German nationalism that is already broached (if dated inaccurately) by Grout in the extract given above from the first edition of his history. There has not yet been a comprehensive study of *Vormärz* nationalism in German music, covering the festivals, the institutions, the genres, and the discourses that (for example) enabled Felix Mendelssohn, an emancipated and baptized Jew, to become in effect the president of German musical culture in the last dozen years of his life. Nor has adequate attention been paid to the way in which that liberal nationalism gave way after 1848 to the more aggressive, exclusionary German nationalism with which we are so much more familiar, signaled less than three years after Mendelssohn's death by "K. Freigedank's" notorious screed (*Das Judentum in der Musik*), and culminating in Herr Freigedank's elevation, under his birth name, to the status (in Dahlhaus's words) of "uncrowned king of German music."¹⁶

What needs to be faced and dealt with is the coincidence of the universalizing impulse with the latter, aggressive phase of German nationalism rather than the former liberal one, the repressed relationship between the two discourses in our own thinking, and the toll that the consequent reaction formation has exacted on our ability to react to music, or to judge it, with full historical consciousness.

I would guess that aspects of the revisionary project adumbrated in this volume will occupy many of the better minds in musicology for at least the first half of the coming century. I take my fair share of parochial pride in the fact that some of our students are stealing a march on this

16. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 4.

undertaking, but I also greet with perhaps a more disinterested enthusiasm the decision of the *repercussions* editorial board to publicize their work. It is, I hope and trust, a decision that will keep the promise of the journal's name.

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Appendix

"Nationalism": Colonialism in Disguise? (*New York Times*, Arts and Leisure, 22 August 1993. Reprinted by permission.)

On page 1 of the *Times* recently, there was a report of lethal violence against peacekeepers in Somalia. Page 2 told of new threats to Middle East peace talks. Page 3 had several accounts of atrocities and hopelessness in Bosnia. Page 4 brought news of extreme hardship in the Caucasus as a result of territorial hostilities and ethnic separatism.

And on the arts page there was a rosy dispatch from a music critic attending a Dvořák festival in Spillville, Iowa, all about what a marvelous thing nationalism is.

You could not hope for a better illustration of what makes classical music seem so quaint and irrelevant in today's world, so barren of intellectual interest, so deserving of relegation to upscale consumer culture and academic backwaters. The ossification of its repertory has been accompanied by an ossification of attitudes. Both repertory and attitudes are nostalgic throwbacks to an imagined prelapsarian age preceding World War I, the original nationalist disaster.

The pretext for all the Dvořák fever, both in Spillville and now at Bard College, in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, is the centennial of the "New World" Symphony, composed in New York during Dvořák's first year as director of Jeanette Thurber's National Conservatory of Music. Dvořák intended the work as an object lesson to his American pupils on how they might achieve an authentic American school of composition. As quoted by the critic Henry Krehbiel, Dvořák urged that they submit the indigenous musics of their country, namely Indian melodies and Negro spirituals, "to beautiful treatment in the higher forms of art." That was his "nationalist" creed, and as a Bohemian subject of the Austrian crown, he practiced what he preached.

But as usual, what is most significant about this prescription is what it allowed to go unsaid. The "higher forms of art" that would justify and canonize the national were themselves considered not national but universal—or, to put it as a modern linguist would, "unmarked." Yet they were national all along. They were German. Mrs. Thurber's conservatory, like all 19th-century conservatories outside the German-speaking lands, was an agency of musical colo-

nialism. Dvořák was brought in to direct it not as a Bohemian or nationalist but as master of the unmarked mother tongue.

Like other colonialisms, this one sought justification in the claim that it could develop local resources better than the natives unaided. Like other colonialisms, it maintained itself by manufacturing and administering ersatz "national" traditions that reinforced dependence on the mother country. The benign picturesque "nationalism" Dvořák preached and practiced was of this type—a matter of superficially "marking" received techniques, forms and media with regionalisms (drones, "horn fifths," polkas in place of minuets), as one might don a native holiday costume.

But colonialist "nationalism" was a double bind. Dvořák's Bohemianisms were at once the vehicle of his international appeal (as a "naif") and the guarantee of his secondary status vis-à-vis natural-born Universals (say Brahms). Without the native costume, a "peripheral" composer could never achieve even secondary canonical rank, but with it he could never achieve more. If this was true for the mentor, how much truer would it be for the Americans whose "tradition" Dvořák purported to establish.

And so it has turned out. Nationalism, in music as elsewhere in the 20th century, has been a curse and a strait-jacket. Some American composers have successfully traded on it the way Dvořák did, particularly a greatly gifted left-leaning homosexual Jew from Brooklyn (a pupil of a Dvořák pupil), who managed to confect out of Paris and Stravinsky an ingratiating white-bread-of-the-prairie idiom that could be applied ad libitum to the higher forms of art. (But then, refused permission to relinquish his invented regionalisms, Aaron Copland ended his career embittered.) More often nationalism has been an invidious normative or exclusionary standard, a means of critical ethnic cleansing

by which the legitimacy of American composers who do not choose to don a Stetson or grow an Afro can be impugned. (What business did Ellen Zwilich have vying with Mahler for a seat at the grown-ups' table? He's not part of her background, say I.)

But the demand that American composers—or any others—reflect their immediate geographical and temporal background (that is, stay put in their place) is not only patronizing or authoritarian. It betrays an altogether anachronistic idea of what anybody's immediate background is in an age when all the world's music, along with the music of all of history, is instantly available, electronically, to one and all. That does not mean that all must now partake in what Olivier Messiaen once called "the international gray on gray." That, thankfully, is another anachronism, albeit of more recent vintage. The present, and the foreseeable future, is an era of idiolects. No one has a place to stay put in anymore, and beware of those who say that they do (or worse, that you do).

"We are all individual music cultures," as the ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin puts it, co-existing in a "fascinating counterpoint of near and far, large and small, neighborhood and national, home and away." The most boring thing American composers could do, and the most regressive, would be to heed the advice from Spillville and at this late date "obey" Dvořák's "command that Americans be Americans."