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JOCELYNE KISS

Tanya Buchdahl Tintner. 2013. *Out of Time: The Vexed Life of Georg Tintner*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, x, 420 pp. ISBN 978-1-55458-938-8.

*Out of Time: The Vexed Life of Georg Tintner* is a brilliant biography of one of the most fascinating figures to have shaped several musical communities on three continents in the second half of the twentieth century. Evolving from the passionate dedication and thorough research of Georg Tintner's third wife, the journalist Tanya Buchdahl Tintner, the book provides a great deal of information about the man and the musician through the various chapters of his remarkable life. It might more aptly be considered, as one critic observed, "a detailed cultural history of a century" (Wurz 2012). The book is structured in four parts: the first of covers Tintner's first thirty-seven years; the second his life from thirty-seven to forty-eight; the third from ages forty-nine to seventy; and finally, the years from age seventy until his death at eighty-two. The images throughout the book, though regrettably they are few, help to situate the events in this epic story in time and place.

My initial concern, admittedly, was that as Tintner's third wife, the author (Buchdahl) would not be able to deliver the objectivity expected of biography, but the book does not suffer on this count. Surprisingly, Buchdahl was quite unaware of the details of many of the earlier chapters of Tintner's life and was

therefore forced into a period of intense research in order to fill in the blanks, conducting more than two hundred interviews and sifting through Tintner's materials.<sup>1</sup> She explains in the preface that his life was difficult to piece together, as he used "no appointment books or diaries, kept few concert programs and reviews, and only a handful of letters" (2). The resulting biography is therefore impressive on this count, for it features remarkable detail, particularly in the early years, on which supposedly there would have been very little to rely in terms of primary documents of Tintner's life, and the years with which Buchdahl would have been the least familiar (they didn't meet until 1975). Perhaps surprisingly, the first two sections of the book are the most detailed, and I also found them the most insightful.

In addition to being an impressive biography of a musician who made important contributions to musical communities in England, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada, the book also makes a significant contribution to the growing literature on émigré and displacement studies. Case studies abound of musicians who, like Tintner, forever feel as "other" and constantly struggle to belong, and whose music expresses the physical and emotional distress of their uprooting. In many ways, the book betrays the concealment of darker narratives of racism and nationalism that so powerfully shaped the musical realities of the twentieth century; though Buchdahl doesn't foreground these issues as she could (or perhaps should), it is still evidence of how the musical history of the century was indeed shaped by the forces behind these historical evils. As Florian Scheding and Erik Levi remind us in their introduction to *Music and Displacement*, "The narratives of music in displacement fail to reach happy endings, and the past does not lend itself to nostalgia and revival" (Levi and Scheding 2010, viii). This is certainly the sense that one gets in following Buchdahl's negotiation of Tintner's displaced career in music on three continents.

Tintner's sense of estrangement was fostered, sadly, from his early childhood and became the most significant narrative to shape all the chapters of his life. He is perhaps most famous as the only Jewish boy accepted into the Vienna Boys Choir, and much of his formative musical training occurred here (including his earliest experiences as a conductor). Still, the pain that this membership caused the young Georg is palpable in his accounts. He describes his four years with the choir as "musically... important and formative, but in every other respect ... traumatic in the extreme so I have forgotten all of it except the music" (20). A striking memory of one of the worst moments of his life as Georg recalled it, is an event at the end of his time with them—one that is representative of the way in which he was treated throughout his time in the choir (and, indeed, a herald of racism to come); after calling out all members in

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<sup>1</sup> Also, Buchdahl inspires further faith in her reader by acknowledging the limits of the biographical medium at several points—for example, she mentions mysteries such as the fate of his opera *'Tis Pity*, a major composition mentioned by several people interviewed for the book, which Tintner had nearly completed in 1962, but had all but disappeared from his records and documents by 1977. I would have liked to have read more of such details and come across more instances where the challenges of Buchdahl's biographical work were foregrounded.

alphabetical order to award all of them certificates, Rektor Schnitt passed the young Georg over and said at the end, “And of course there is nothing for the Jew” (19). His Jewish heritage proved troublesome for his job as a conductor at the Vienna Volksoper (at age nineteen, nonetheless), eventually forcing him to lose the coveted position (a ruling over which he, foolishly, threatened to sue!) before being forced to flee for his life to England in 1939. The story of his escape from Nazi imprisonment is nothing short of miraculous—similar tales have been recounted by other Canadian émigré composers including Istvan Anhalt and Gerhard Wuensch.

Tintner sailed to New Zealand in 1940 but continued to face life as an “enemy alien,” as they referred to him, though he managed to get work conducting church choirs and other amateur groups. His depression over the lack of progression in his musical career is poignantly described in many sections of the book. He mentions, for example, that he was musically starved in New Zealand, and upon the occasion of his twenty-fifth birthday, wrote in his exercise book, “I have achieved almost nothing ... How it will go on, I think so often that I don’t make the most of this mercy of living in peace ... My parents’ life fills me with shame, the poverty of the world overwhelms me in my impotence. I have *everything* I can wish for (except a better way of earning a living) I must not be unfair to myself, my experiences could have completely broken me” (64–5). The sense of survivor’s guilt and other emotions arising from his memories of the war crop up throughout the book, in many cases revealing a deep regret that he had been given a chance at survival but had somehow, regardless, squandered his life (and musical talent).

Though Tintner eventually became the toast of musical Auckland and had successes on subsequent moves to Australia, South Africa, England, and Canada, he was really never fully at home in any of these places and was often regarded as an eccentric. In addition to his cultural and musical alien status (his own words), his eccentricities made him even more of an outsider—his nearly religious vegetarianism (and, eventually, veganism) is particularly fascinating in this regard.<sup>2</sup> His Australian experiences again emphasized his status as an outsider, which affected how his compositions were received: “I tried so hard,” he wrote. “If you were an Australian they might play it once a week ... Even here I count as an outsider. The world is a funny place” (127).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, his Viennese mannerisms were received in Australia not as

<sup>2</sup> Many people regarded his extreme veganism as very eccentric. Buchdahl recalls, “For Georg there was no halfway position—on anything” (119). Most fascinating, however, is how this position changed him—as he explained it, “There’s no doubt that I’m physically a completely different person ... But the main change is with the soul—yes, the main change is there ... It is the one thing in my life where I can say ‘I did the right thing. I did well.’ And that of course does give one a feeling of rest, or repose, or something” (119–20).

<sup>3</sup> Buchdahl suggests that Tintner’s sense of homelessness and his inability to find a place in the musical world might also be attributed to the compositional reality of the mid-century—that is, that “the very language of music was in upheaval and, like so many mid-century composers, he found himself with nowhere to go” (258). Tintner notes other refugees who experienced a similar silencing of their compositional activities for so many reasons—in his words, “I think all creative people in our dreadful age are in a sort of no man’s land, in limbo” (259). He mentioned, in fact, that he believed himself to have been “born too late” (261).

politeness, but as pompous and standoffish. As Buchdahl recounts, “He never went to the pub for a beer, an all-important ritual of male bonding. He had no interest in sport in a country that worshipped it. He was incapable of small talk,” etc. (151). Even his failure in England to fully “make it” as a musician was attributed in part to his eccentricities and his outsider status—as music critic Norman Lebrecht recalls, “The English, as you probably know, love a good eccentric—as long as the eccentric is an eleventh earl. If he is an immigrant his eccentricity is merely dismissed as foreignness and he is shunted to one side or put in a bottom drawer, and that was really the case with Tintner” (196).

Georg was first invited to Canada as a guest conductor of the National Youth Orchestra in 1971—a position that he filled on many occasions throughout the following decades. He made the official move to Canada in 1987 when he was offered the position of principle conductor of Symphony Nova Scotia, a position he filled from 1987 to 1993. Frustratingly, the section of the book that treats his life in Canada says very little about the conductor’s interactions with or ideas about Canadian music. As a conductor, it seems that Tintner was not much of an advocate for Canadian composers, though his discography would suggest that he did believe in including them, occasionally, alongside the more traditional repertoire. He was convinced, according to Buchdahl, that one should “perform music based on its quality, not the composer’s nationality, and he found little that pleased him. Works he did like he prepared meticulously; composers (among them Oskar Morawetz and Bruce Mather) were gratefully surprised at the time and attention he gave to them. About works he didn’t like, he could be brutally frank” (302).

The fact that Tintner’s first and foremost desire was to become a composer, and that he conceived of himself as such is fascinating, given that much of the book tells of his musical life as a conductor.<sup>4</sup> He is, of course, best known for his powerful interpretations of the complete Bruckner symphonies for Naxos in the 1990s, which feature the conductor at the end of his illustrious career. The stories of him finding Bruckner are fascinating: his description of himself as a boy watching his ruthless and cynical conductor of the Vienna Boys Choir break down during a rehearsal of Bruckner’s Mass in F Minor at the Salzburg Festival in 1929 is touching and probably telling of his future love for this music (22). Buchdahl’s approach throughout the book avoids musical analysis and technical language, and as a result, the reader is left with many questions about the details of Tintner’s compositions. She also omits details about the ways in which his conducting style differed from that of others—his famously slow tempi and his stately style, key to his “monumental approach ... whose critical acceptance would seem to reflect the style’s triumph” is not mentioned (see Williamson 2004, 238).

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<sup>4</sup> The entry on Tintner in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* suggests the same: “Tintner regarded himself primarily as a composer, though his output was small and his compositional life had effectively ended by the early 1960s. His failure to compose thereafter was not of his choice, but was due to a combination of cultural dislocation and personal tragedies (Carr-Boyd and Blyth 2003).

Buchdahl achieves her greatest successes in the moments where intense details such as this get to the essence—so well concealed, it seems—of Georg Tintner's relationship with music. Touching details such as the story of how he would attend the opera as a teenager at least once a week with his friend Franz, arrive at the last minute eating an orange for his dinner, and conduct along with the performance from the third balcony "orange pips in his hand" are charming and insightful (29). There are also many passages, however, that contain elements accessible only to the seasoned musician—Buchdahl mentions, for example, particular passages from operas (two words from Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, "*gar nichts*" for example), which, for those familiar with the opera, carry great meaning but might be puzzling to those unfamiliar with this repertoire.

Tintner's interaction with some of the most significant musical figures of the twentieth century, including Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Toscanini, Klemperer, Weingartner, Webern, and Walter, was nothing short of amazing. Tintner witnessed the premiere of Berg's *Lyric Suite*, met Alma Mahler (whom he found reprehensible), and describes being transfixed by hearing Bruno Walter sing and play Mahler at the piano (Tintner referred to it as "one of my great musical experiences"). His descriptions of the techniques of the great conductors, in particular, are worth mentioning—his discussion, for example, of Toscanini's relationship with the cello and its effect on his sound are fascinating. His account of working with Richard Bonyngue upon the latter's arrival in New Zealand in 1965 is particularly interesting. On this occasion, a perhaps unknowing Bonyngue demoted Tintner from conductor to prompter, and Tintner's confidence faltered expectably, his resulting account of his depression giving a sense of the trauma that these events caused in his musical life of uncertainty: "Forgive me for making the personal observation that I see the years slip by (I was forty-seven in May) and I am being *de-* instead of *promoted*. Hitler cost me fifteen years of my life and I see less talented and younger people leaving me behind. I don't think many people who have conducted seventeen different operas from memory (not to speak of many symphonies, etc.) have been used as prompters. Nevertheless, the Hindus say: We are where we deserve to be—perhaps they are right" (167).

Throughout the book, there is a sense of injustice, of a legacy left untended, or a genius unrecognized in Tintner. I found myself constantly disappointed that Tintner lived much of his life at the periphery of the musical circles with which he came into contact. Part of this seclusion was due to his eccentricities, as noted above, but part of it also seems to be a part of the way in which his displaced status dictated much of his life's trajectory. To what extent, I wonder, did this narrative suggest itself subconsciously to Tintner, and did he simply, ultimately, capitulate to it? The tension, the striving for belonging is absolutely central to all of the chapters of Tintner's life, and thus, his central role in *this* story seems wonderfully paradoxical. The investment that the reader makes in Tintner's life story as a result of Buchdahl's engaging style is remarkable indeed—one is led to believe, ultimately, that he should have been more central

to the broader historiographical narrative of twentieth-century music. Perhaps this vibrant contribution to his memorialization will make it so.

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David Schroeder. 2013. *Experiencing Mozart: A Listener's Companion*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow. 236 pp. ISBN 9780810884281.

David Schroeder's *Experiencing Mozart: A Listener's Companion* is the first of two instalments in the Listener's Companion series by Scarecrow Press released this year, along with Robin Maconie's *Experiencing Stravinsky* (2013). This series, aimed at non-specialists, addresses the basic yet ever-complex issue of listening to music meaningfully. Using accessible and engaging language, the series seeks to help readers with a variety of musical backgrounds to achieve a deeper understanding of music's social significance by tracing a history of listening. In his foreword to this volume series, editor Gregg Akkerman writes that this task is "accomplished in an inclusive manner that does not necessitate extensive musical training or elitist shoulder rubbing" (ix). Schroeder's book is extremely easy and indeed delightful to read, presenting some of Mozart's greatest works in a manner that is original, accessible, and without hint that the author has "dumbed things down" for a non-specialist audience. By far the most interesting aspect of this series, and Schroeder's contribution in particular, is the focus on the listener's experience, both current and historical, and the creativity that this inspires in a non-academic context: "By positioning readers in imagined listening environments that inform and explain this music's genesis and performance, authors can teach readers—who are also listeners—how to enjoy and appreciate much more deeply the genius behind the art" (ix). Schroeder's intended audience is broad and inclusive. As an introduction to the works of Mozart, this volume is equally appropriate as a