

*Rancière and Music*. Ed. by João Pedro Cachopo, Patrick Nickleson, and Chris Stover. Pp. 416. (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2020, ISBN 978-1-4744-4022-6, £85.)

For those interested in the work of Jacques Rancière, its musical and musicological possibilities, and how these collectively might provoke a range of questions regarding repertoires and practices, this is a timely volume. The book contains fourteen substantial essays by an array of international scholars; these are preceded by an introduction and are rounded off with an engaging afterword from Rancière himself, who responds productively to his interpreters. While acknowledging that Rancière rarely focuses directly on music in his writings, the contributors are united in the conviction that an interest in music nevertheless pervades his work tacitly. The book is divided into four sections: 'Music and Noise'; 'Politics of History'; 'Politics of Interaction'; and 'Encounters and Challenges'. The introduction, which is co-written by the three editors, is a substantial piece in itself. It sets the tone for the volume, offering a number of helpful pointers in reading Rancière and his musical respondents, while also providing an excellent summary of the territory that lies ahead.

While not taking the reader systematically through Rancière's aesthetic philosophy, the volume presents a number of his most important aesthetic ideas and concepts within a wide panoply of contexts. Of greatest importance are Rancière's conceptualizing of the relationship between politics and aesthetics; his encapsulation of all art and politics as comprising various 'distributions of the sensible'; his three regimes of art, which critique and replace habitual conceptualizations of modernity and postmodernity; the replacement of consensual politics (and aesthetics) with dissensus; the opposition of the idiosyncratic concepts of 'politics' and 'police'; and the idea of mute speech and of 'a thought that does not think' (p. 33). While Rancière's three regimes of art, reinterpreted in various ways, feature prominently throughout the collection, the editors remind us that this is a 'relatively recent' aspect of his thought and, cautioning against its overdetermination, they suggest that the relationship between aesthetics and politics is of greater importance (p. 3). For the music scholar working with Rancière's texts, it is often a question of drawing implications from work that addresses subject matters other than music. In this respect, the volume's contributors serve us well: they show how Rancière can help us to

reconceptualize significant aspects of music theory and practice, and how both might look when redistributed along Rancièrian lines.

Rancière's concepts and ideas are considered in relation to a wide range of musics, historical periods, and repertoires, which collectively span nineteenth-century Romanticism, European musical modernity, *musique concrète*, music and noise, rock music, Cuban music, jazz and improvisation more generally, and operatic performance in South Africa. A variety of perspectives is considered, including music as composition, improvisation, performance, theoretical construct, recorded representation, object of reception, and cultural nexus. Rancière's work is also related productively to writings by a wide range of literary figures and significant philosophers, including Theodor Adorno, Alain Badiou, Gilles Deleuze, and Lydia Goehr. What is most striking about many chapters is how elements of the musical past and present are rearticulated carefully in relation to Rancière's conceptual universe; the contributors often proceed in the spirit of the diverse vignettes elaborated in Rancière's book *Aisthesis* (2011).

For Loïc Bertrand, Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète* operates within Rancière's aesthetic regime, forming a unique distribution of the sensible both in its retreat from prescribed notions of music to the materiality of sound and in its redistribution of the functions of vision and audition in the production of 'a new sound sensibility' (p. 37). Drawing out the political dimension of Schaeffer's 'new sensorium' (p. 38) Bertrand provides a generous context for understanding *musique concrète*, more accommodating than accounts that are focused primarily on the development of Western 'music'. Daniel Frappier identifies the practice of letting objects speak for themselves as key to the aesthetic regime (p. 48), and he traces from the nineteenth century to today some key 'reconfigurations of the audible under the new [aesthetic] regime' whereby what can be classed as 'music' is increasingly 'blurred' with the growing acceptance and integration of 'noise' (p. 48). Music's 'abstract quality' and 'semantic imprecision', which would be deemed deficiencies in Rancière's representative regime, make music under the aesthetic dispensation 'superior to all other forms of expression' (p. 51). While rock music is privileged in Frappier's genealogy on the basis that it comprises 'an ecstatic practice through which the subject evades ordinary existence' (p. 56), Frappier does not identify this phenomenon in various non-Western musics that were familiar to ethnomusicological specialists earlier in the twentieth century. At the same

time, the detailed discussion of various negotiations with noise in the rock domain is interesting and nuanced. Patrick Nickleson concludes this first section of the book with an interesting exploration of the term ‘low music’ (‘la musique bas’), which he distils from a potpourri of Rancière’s texts. It’s a fascinating discussion of how Rancière and his one-time mentor Louis Althusser use sonic metaphors, focusing in particular on how silence and noise stand equally in opposition to logos (p. 76). Noise is marked out as ‘an always dissensual term’ (p. 77) and ‘politically noisy’ is identified as an aspect of the aesthetic regime (p. 79) countering the imposition of ‘an orderly, rational structure in place of the “real” noise of events, speech or sound’ (p. 80). This emerges as a theme that recurs in several essays that follow.

Rancière’s aesthetic regime prompts Martin Kaltenecker to think of ‘the opposition of structure and sound as a *confrontation* rather than a historical evolution’ (p. 103) and, after discussing the burgeoning presence of indications of sound and noise in literature, he considers various sonic ‘epiphanies’ in Western music from Beethoven to Ives, moments in which ‘a special timbre emerges’ (p. 106). After Fausto Romitelli, Kaltenecker suggests that ‘the modernist persona of music, ever in conflict with the world, has been substituted by a persona walking through a soundscape, on the lookout for sounds, echoes and traces, and reacting to them’ (p. 110). An interesting aspect of Rancière’s own exploration of the aesthetic regime is his eschewal of the most oft-cited modernist art works in favour of much less celebrated pieces from the nineteenth century onwards, in which moments of the aesthetic regime are located within a recognizably representational landscape. In this spirit, João Pedro Cachopo contemplates music’s entry into the aesthetic regime: in his fascinating study, he considers ‘two wrong notes’ from the second movement of Berlioz’s *Harold en Italie* that are intended to evoke ‘the sound of a “slow tolling of bells”’ (p. 121), and which he presents to us as an example of ‘sonic dissensus’ (p. 125).

Katharina Clausius teases out the relationship between Rancière’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* and François Fenélon’s novel *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1699), the latter portraying music as a ‘corrupting influence’ (p. 139). Probing the tangled Rancière–Fénélon–Jacotot triangle to lay bare its various distributions of the sensible, Rancière’s text is deemed as inhabiting a ‘conflicted stance between voice and silence, between music and non-music’ (p. 150) in which ‘the equality of all voices (ignorant and learned)’

is asserted in such a way that no one is ‘rendered silent’ (p. 151). While politics is never far from view in the volume, the more explicit linking of politics to aesthetics is explored in several other chapters. William Fourie and Carina Venter, while addressing decolonial scholar Walter Mignolo’s criticism of Rancière’s Eurocentric focus, nevertheless turn to the French philosopher to study the Eoan group, the first grassroots company to perform full-scale operas in apartheid South Africa (p. 156). Here, as throughout this volume, beyond the intense interest afforded by discussion of Rancière’s concepts, the musical repertoires that are considered are of great interest in themselves as is the breadth of theoretical approaches undertaken. Kjetil Klette Bøhler, for example, examines ‘how Cuban popular dance music nurtures and contests revolutionary values in today’s Cuba’ (p. 177) through a textual and musical analysis of a live performance of the song ‘Cubanos por el mundo’ by the Cuban band Interactivo. Focusing on improvisatory elements, Bøhler identifies the existence of ‘a “Cuban police order” structured around a shared notion of the revolutionary’ (p. 177), and shows ‘how the experience of the song dialogues musically with that order’ (ibid.).

Improvisation is the shared topic of contributions by Dan DiPiero and Chris Stover. DiPiero draws attention both to the growing number of ‘political interpretations of improvised music’ and to how ‘improvisation can raise productive questions’ relating to the rupturing of the sensible (p. 207). Positing that improvisation is always singular (p. 208) and drawing on the track ‘Waves, Linens, and White Light’ by the Norwegian band Mr. K (2015), DiPiero argues convincingly in relation to Rancière’s concept of dissensus that musical consensus among improvising musicians implies ‘no politics at all’ (p. 215). Singularity is equally central to Chris Stover’s essay, for which politics unfolds ‘only in the enactment of an individual act, the staging of a singular scene’ (p. 231). Identifying how police logic then operates to recapture, reconfigure, and neutralize every political eruption within art, Stover goes on to explore musical practices that are highly effective in producing dissensus. Selecting three well-chosen dissensual ‘musical utterances’, the intensification in the shift from Stover’s first moment (Thelonious Monk) to his second (Pharoah Sanders) left this reader wondering where the author could possibly go for a third moment that would continue the inflationary trajectory. The author’s choice is both surprising and effective.

The question of dissensus, now formulated as ‘art’s capacity or incapacity for resistance, or its capacity to bring newness into the world’ (p. 268) features again in Sarah Collins’s chapter on ‘the Problem of Commemorative Art’ in relation to Holocaust art and to Lydia Goehr’s concern with the possibility of the art work mirroring or replicating ‘the violence of [an] original act’ through processes of ‘displacement and distancing’ (p. 275). Goehr’s position proves a useful marker in relation to which Collins is able to engage with Rancière, and with the necessity that art retain its capacity to resist assimilation. The conjunction is productive and thought-provoking. Murray Dineen’s chapter ‘Stain’ considers Rancière’s concepts of the stain and the count in relation to Adorno’s concept of remainder and Derrida’s writings on aporia. Dineen presents us with Adorno’s figure of the ‘Mahlerian jackass’, characterizing that situation when someone projects her/his ‘own inadequacy on to the object’, in this case a musical composition. For Dineen, this produces nothing less than ‘a remaindered “sublime understanding of misunderstanding”’ (p. 296) and prompts him to consideration of ‘the notion of a substantive remainder’ (p. 298). Dineen locates a remainder of this type in the repression of reference to ‘labour in music and in music theory’, particularly in relation to Schoenberg’s account of the path to twelve-note music, which in Rancière’s terms becomes ‘the *stain* of what has been repressed’. A focus on human labour links Dineen’s chapter with Erik M. Vogt’s study of Wagner, as presented to us by Rancière and Badiou. Vogt considers Rancière’s reading of Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in the light of Alain Badiou’s critique of Rancière, and more generally through the prism of Badiou’s inaesthetics. Ultimately, by way of *Parsifal*, we are presented with Badiou’s pure Wagner, a ‘hero of a type of anti-mimetic, Platonic modernism’ (p. 324), in contrast to an impure Wagner, whose all-encompassing music dramas exemplify Rancière’s aesthetic regime (p. 320). The seemingly opposed Rancière–Badiou readings of Wagner, eventually ‘begin’, as Vogt notes, ‘to overlap’ (p. 324). The idea of equality is pervasive throughout the volume, and Danick Trottier’s concluding chapter makes the case persuasively for an ‘equal method’ for music studies in the face of the various distributions of the sensible operative in musicology. Reprising the question of what counts as music, given the existence of musical hierarchies and the value judgements they give rise to, Trottier draws together vibrant aspects of musicology, popular music, and music education studies. All are

identified as capable of forming dissensual practices and of fostering greater equality (p. 342).

As noted above, the volume closes with a delightful essay from Jacques Rancière himself, who responds generously to multiple points raised by the volume’s contributors. Countering the claim that he seldom addresses music, he provides us with a fascinating digest of musical references within his work, clarifying that these for the most part occur in unexpected places (p. 354). Rancière is also the author of a book on the filmmaker Béla Tarr, whose political metaphorization of music in the film *Werckmeister Harmonies* is very much in tune with Rancière’s own conception of music and art.

The editors are to be congratulated for having prompted Rancière to pen this short contribution, and more generally for having produced this rich collection of essays. To echo a theme explored elsewhere by Chris Stover, thinking with Rancière can help us produce music theory that is less fixated on traditional modes of explanation and is more a vehicle of cultural and social liberation.

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*The Art of Mbira: Musical Inheritance and Legacy.*  
 By Paul F. Berliner. Pp. 608. (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2020. ISBN 978-0-226-62868-4, \$45.)

*Mbira’s Restless Dance: An Archive of Improvisation.*  
 By Paul F. Berliner and Magaya Cosmas. Pp. 912. Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology. (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2020. ISBN 978-0-226-62627-7, \$80.)

The lamellophone mbira dzavadzimu of the Zimbabwean Shona is at the crux of a tradition of music-making that stands out among the many beguiling worlds of music with notable international followings. In its communities of origin, it has a collective, spiritual purpose, enduring relevance, and rich lore. Its appeal depends also on an autonomous compositional rigour-with-variety apt to the mbira’s physical construction and sonic capacity. These strike many unacculturated ears as mysterious and dazzling, suggesting that the Shona have mastered the mining of a rich vein of sonic logic, beckoning outsiders’ discovery. These features combined gird mbira music with an aesthetic allure that has consistently drawn foreigners to study it both in Zimbabwe