

## 2. Musicology and Positivism: the Postwar Years

What is the impetus behind musicology? Why do we study the history of music? This was a question posed by Arthur Mendel at the beginning of his well-known paper 'Evidence and Explanation', which became a sort of musicological credo for many in the 1960s.\* His answer was really an evasion:

Our primary reason for studying history . . . is, I hope, the same as the primary reason why the best minds study anything: because we have a passion for understanding things, for being puzzled and solving our puzzles; because we are curious and will not be satisfied until our curiosity rests. 'Man, who desires to know everything, desires to know himself' (p. 4).

This dictum of R. G. Collingwood's, or something like it, is often invoked in order to supply an ideal impetus for musicology as a kind of abstract investigation, a pure working of the mind among the multiple mysteries of music's past and present. It is invoked especially by those who without understanding science very well would like to attach the term 'scientific' to thought about music.

Mendel knew better. The puzzles to which he had turned his presumably free-floating curiosity during the essential span of his career as a musicologist were puzzles about Bach, the com-

\* For notes marked with an asterisk (rather than an arabic number), the reader should refer directly to the list of Main Works Cited, page 243. When the titles of articles or books are already present in the text, as here, the list will provide full bibliographical information. When, as sometimes happens in the course of a discussion of an author's works, articles and books are referred to in the text (and asterisked) without being actually named, the full titles can be found in the list under the name of the author.

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poser with whom more than any other he had identified in his other career, as a conductor from the 1930s to the 1950s. Even more specifically, they were puzzles about the *Passion According to St John*, a work which he had performed in a particularly memorable fashion. As he went on to say in the same paper, music historians have another type of interest in their subject matter over and above that of political and social historians. 'Apart from the fascination of establishing facts, and relations between facts, we are interested in the musical works themselves – as individual structures and as objects of delight. Our interest in Mozart's *Jupiter Symphony* is different from the political historian's interest in Napoleon or the social historian's interest in the steam engine.'<sup>1</sup> It is this second, 'different' interest in music as an object of delight, I believe, that provides the primary impetus for many, if not most musicologists, including (as I also believe) Mendel himself. It is an interest that can be called *critical*.

The interest, like the delight, may be direct or attenuated. While one musicologist studies Bach's passions, another may study the Lutheran passion as a genre and another the music of Bach's less great contemporaries. Another may work on the aesthetic theories of the age, or its social configuration for music, or on the many intricate systems of tuning or temperament that were put forward in Bach's lifetime for keyboard instruments. Even so narrow a study as this last one is predicated on the fact of the musicologist caring (or at least, once having cared) about the music of Bach and his time *as music*. Musicologists of another kind study music as a coherent element in the culture of its time in the broadest sense. Others investigate the contemporary performance conditions of Bach's choral music and put the facts to work in an actual performance, as Mendel had done in his days as director of the Cantata Singers in New York.

The naive reader may find it hard to believe, at first, that musicologists can love some of the music they study – Byzantine chant, fourteenth-century English descant, German lute music. But they can. Love is a many-clangoured thing.

Behind all this, of course, is the assumption that music of the past is of aesthetic interest – and this assumption, it should be stressed, is of relatively recent vintage. The historical sense in music is much newer than in literature, where canonic texts have been handed down for millennia, or in art, where temples and cathedrals stand for centuries and galleries have been cultivated since the Renaissance. But a musical tradition is not made up of texts and artifacts. Music is evanescent, and until recently the repertory of Western art music did not extend back more than a generation or two; in the deepest sense, music history extended back no further. (Exception must be made for Gregorian chant and some other kinds of liturgical music.) The Renaissance composer and music theorist Johannes Tinctoris announced that there was no music worth listening to that hadn't been composed in the last forty years or so. This was in 1477, when Tinctoris was himself about forty years old.

The late eighteenth-century musician no longer spoke about Handel in this way (nor Corelli, nor Palestrina). But the real change came with the first decades of the nineteenth century, when Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, and Rossini were not supplanted by the next good composers to come along – as Machaut and Dunstable had been, for Tinctoris, by Ockeghem and Regis. Instead their music was accorded a place in what turned out to be a more or less permanent canon. It was an era of basic change in the nature of musical repertories, in the social conditions under which Western art music was composed and presented, and in musical aesthetics, music theory, and musicology.<sup>2</sup>

The historical sense of music, and with it the intellectual or academic reflection of this called musicology, was in the nineteenth century closely bound up with nationalistic and religious ideology. 'And this man, the greatest musical poet and the greatest musical orator that ever existed, and probably ever will exist, was a German. Let our country be proud of him; let us be proud, but, at the same time, worthy of him!'" With these famous and fateful words J. N. Forkel, the first real German

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musicologist, ended up his Bach biography of 1802 which initiated the revival of that composer's music. Bach represented to the nineteenth century the German spirit and also the Lutheran spirit, and it is no accident that outside Germany his music made the greatest impact in a country that was neither Catholic nor resistant to German thought – a country whose prince consort, indeed, was a cultivated German musical amateur. After Forkel, the music that musicologists cared about, and that in consequence they devoted their books and their editions and their performances to, was generally the music of their own national tradition or – if sacred music was in question – of their own faith.

In the nineteenth century this was so much taken for granted, and the exceptions were so few, that probably no one would have thought of pointing it out. Nor would it have been pointed out, before the twentieth century, that musicologists were lavishing their attention almost exclusively on music identified with the upper and middle classes.

Today, when they see European musicologists studying the less important music of their homelands, Americans are sometimes bemused and start wondering about chauvinism or even propaganda. But anyone who has lived in Europe knows how deeply such native music can touch people who feel it to be part of their own tradition. This is true even when the music in question looks quite indifferent from the other side of the border, let alone the Channel, let alone the Atlantic Ocean. In Britain, nearly every musicologist does some work on British music or at least on the music of British-domiciled composers (Winton Dean on Handel, Alan Tyson on Clementi); it is a common pattern for British scholars to start out with native music with which they have a sense of shared identity and then go on to other things. In this respect the situation has not changed basically since the nineteenth century, when the Musical Antiquarian Society published the first scores of music by Byrd, Wilbye, Dowland, Purcell, and other British worthies, as early as the 1840s. The Rev. John S. Bumpus wrote *A History of English Cathedral Music 1549–1899*, the publisher William

Chappell edited *A Collection of National Airs and Popular Music of the Olden Time*, and the composer Sir John Stainer issued facsimiles and transcriptions of *Early Bodleian Music*. A major international figure such as Edward J. Dent, who wrote his first book on Alessandro Scarlatti in 1905 and went on to Mozart, Handel, and Busoni, also wrote a classic study of *The Foundations of English Opera*.

(Availability of source materials, it must be admitted, can sometimes set musicologists off as well as national feeling. The music in Stainer's *Dufay and his Contemporaries*, a pioneer work on the secular song of fifteenth-century France, was taken from a continental codex that had found its way to Oxford, where Stainer was Heather Professor of Music. Tyson's work on Beethoven began with the contemporary English editions of his music, neglected by continental Beethoven scholars. American research in European music began as a major activity only in the age of microfilm, jet travel, and Fulbright fellowships.)

Earlier generations of American musicologists worked on American music, just as Britons worked on British, Germans on German, and so on. Oscar G. Sonneck, who as music librarian of the Library of Congress in 1901–17 built up the great music collection there, is credited with initiating serious American music studies and has given his name to a Sonneck Society which fosters them today. Theodore Baker, best known for his *Biographical Dictionary* of Western musicians, still in print, published the first study of American Indian music as early as 1882. An even earlier and greater scholar, Alexander Wheelock Thayer, is best known (to most people, indeed, exclusively known) for his formidable biography of Beethoven. But in the 1840s Thayer did extensive research into the origins of American hymnody, which was his first love, and in the 1850s he flooded *Dwight's Music Journal* with contributions on every aspect of American music from folksong and Indian children's songs to Benjamin Franklin's musical instruments and George Bristow's opera *Rip Van Winkle* of 1855.<sup>4</sup>

Musicology – the point has been sufficiently hashed over in the Introduction – is now almost always understood to mean the

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study of the history of Western art music. The cases just mentioned show that musicologists of the past sometimes studied not only art but also folk music and music of non-Western cultures – especially if this was close to home and therefore close to their hearts. To the names of Chappell, Baker, and Thayer others could of course be added from among twentieth-century musicologists. Nonetheless musicologists work predominantly, overwhelmingly with art music, and the reasons for this seem obvious enough. Like most scholars, they come from the middle class; they are indeed likely to be moving up within its spectrum. It is middle-class values that they project and seek to protect, and Western art music since the nineteenth century has been the province of the middle class. (We can call this if we wish ‘elite’ music, though the term seems more appropriate to the seventeenth century than to the nineteenth, let alone to the twentieth with its wide dissemination of music of all kinds by radio and records.) Behind scholarship, and behind what I have called the ‘critical’ interest which drives most musicologists, there is nearly always the impetus to nurture traditions with which the scholar can associate or identify, or which have at least contributed to such traditions historically. These traditions, as has already been suggested, are likely to be controlled by class as well as national and religious ideologies.

Hence it is to East European musicologists that we owe the richest studies of European folk music, to the Germans our knowledge of the chorale and the chorale prelude, to the English our appreciation of Taverner, Tye, and Tallis, and (at least initially) to the Benedictine monks of Solesmes our knowledge of the earliest ritual music of the Catholic Church. And it is to musicologists of the greater Western intellectual community – Germans like Nottebohm, Frimmel, and Brandenburg, Frenchmen like Prod’homme and Rolland, Britons like Tovey, Anderson, and Tyson, Russians like Lenz and Fishman, Americans like Thayer, Sonneck, and Solomon – that we owe our understanding of Beethoven, who more than any other figure seems to epitomize the music of that shared community.

Is it the case, then, that musicologists deal only with music of the past – with music, indeed, of the rather distant past? Certainly this does not follow from our working definition of musicology as the study of the history of Western art music. History runs up to the present. Only in cant usage does ‘history’ mean ‘the past’. For someone driven by a passion for understanding things, or by a passion for musical objects of delight, there is no logical distinction between today’s music and yesterday’s, or between the day before yesterday’s and that of a century or a millennium ago.

This point has been urged by, among others, Frank Ll. Harrison, in a widely read essay on ‘American Musicology and the European Tradition’.\* ‘Traditionally the function of musicology has been in the first place to contribute to the fostering of composition and performance by adding to the sum of knowledge about music,’ wrote Harrison, and he went on to interpret the history of European musicology in this light, laying special emphasis on the Bach revival and the Gregorian chant movement as sources for musical composition in the nineteenth century. (Theodore Baker’s dissertation, incidentally, was the source of melodies used by Edward MacDowell in his ‘Indian’ Suite.) Musicology in the twentieth century should also ally itself closely to contemporary musical life, which for Harrison is manifested most intensely by popular music, music that has to be understood first and foremost in terms of social use and value. ‘Looked at in this way, it is the function of all musicology to be in fact ethnomusicology, that is, to take its range of research to include material that is termed “sociological”.’<sup>5</sup>

Harrison’s polemic motive here is transparent, however, as is also his tactic of turning from a descriptive to a hortatory mode as he turns from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Musicologists today are mostly musical conservatives, and everybody knows it. It was the crisis of modernism that made the difference: even though there was a magical moment in prewar Vienna when private composition students of Alexander von

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Zemlinsky, Schoenberg's teacher, and of Schoenberg himself were simultaneously members of Guido Adler's musicological seminar at the university. Webern, Egon Wellesz, and less well-known figures such as Karl Weigl and Paul Pisk were all Adler PhDs. Wellesz and Pisk went on to dual careers as musicologists and composers.

There were other exceptional figures, outside of Vienna: for example Dent, a founding member and first president of the International Society for Contemporary-Music in 1923, and the author of a book on Busoni. Charles Seeger was at the centre of the New York contemporary-music scene of the 1920s and early 1930s. But by and large the response of musicologists to the first phase of modernism was retrenchment. Like many composers and other musicians in the years before and after the First World War, they found themselves reacting strongly against the music of Romanticism; yet they were reluctant (or frankly unable) to follow the modernists on their path. In this reluctance they were joined by most music theorists, incidentally, who tended to assume even more dogmatically antimodernist stances.

By coincidence, an internal dynamic within the discipline of musicology was then leading scholars to the rich, largely unstudied field of medieval polyphonic music. So musicologists gravitated towards the esoteric remote past just as modernist composers hurtled into what seemed to many like an equally esoteric future. With the second phase of modernism, after the Second World War, lines were drawn even more sharply, though with this difference: by now the anti-Romantic reaction has passed and musicologists, as we shall see, have moved back with confidence to the study of nineteenth-century music.

In their attitudes towards nineteenth- and twentieth-century music there is a broad similarity, I believe, among modern musicologists in the United States, Britain, and other lands. (A large exception should be made for the extensive studies of twentieth-century music conducted since the 1960s by the group of musicologists around Carl Dahlhaus in Berlin.) Where the Americans today appear to differ is in their lack of involvement with their own music. Mendel was entirely typical in devoting



his energies to such distant (but powerfully attractive) figures as Bach and Josquin Desprez. This, as we have just seen, was not the case in the nineteenth century, and the current state of affairs is one to which Harrison and others have reacted with surprise and even some indignation. At this point we will not need to look far for an explanation. The ideology of twentieth-century musicology is antimodernist and 'elite', and in America a substantial native tradition of art music did not come into being until the age of modernism. Bristow and MacDowell could hardly sustain a scholarly movement of this character in the way that Josquin and Sweelinck could, or Bach and Beethoven, or Glinka and Mussorgsky. It is to be doubted that British musicology could sustain itself for very long on Stainer and his contemporaries.

To the extent that Americans practise traditional musicology, then, they do so on a genuinely international basis, out of their sense of America's sharing in the Western tradition of art music. This is a perfectly tenable position, in spite of complaints about it sometimes heard from Americanists; indeed, this international orientation has been extolled as one of American musicology's special strengths. It is sometimes also complained that the German musicologists who emigrated to the United States in the 1930s and 1940s influenced students to concentrate their attention on European (though often not German!) music. They did, of course – even those of them who also turned to the study of American music, such as Hans T. David and Hans Nathan – but their influence was a secondary consideration, as well as a passing one. Students were already committed to Western art music anyway. The main reason American musicologists do not work more with American music is because there is so brief a tradition of art music that can be taken seriously.

One should not, in any case, overstate the isolation of American musicology from American music. The line from Sonneck to today's Americanists was never broken. There were important figures in the 1950s, and new ones emerged in the 1960s – scholars who, in an ironic reversal of a common pattern we have mentioned in Britain, started out with Dufay, Marc-

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Antoine Charpentier, and Debussy before turning to popular music, Ives, and Stephen Foster. Harrison was right to this extent: work on the American 'vernacular' tradition in music, as H. Wiley Hitchcock has called it, is best understood not as traditional musicology but as a special outgrowth of ethnomusicology.

### 3

The rapid development of musicology in America and Britain after the war is something I have sketched out in the Introduction. On the world scene, it soon became clear that the postwar generation of musical scholars – scholars of all kinds – would no longer be dominated by Germans, as earlier generations had been. This may have been a reason or at least a pretext for the decision of the International Musicological Society to move out of continental Europe for the first time and hold their triennial congresses in Oxford and New York.

Some differences between the two occasions light up some differences between the two erstwhile *Länder ohne Musikwissenschaft*. The Oxford meeting in 1955 is now remembered largely for an idyllic summer evening when the delegates floated up and down the Thames to the sounds of ancient music in a grand old Victorian barge – one of a fleet which has, alas, to a large extent been mothballed or worse since those times. Not much of that congress remains save memories because the proceedings were never published. Professor Westrup simply stuck the papers in the room behind his office and made no discernible move to get them printed. In the summer of 1961, on the other hand, New York was so far from idyllic that certain delegates shut themselves up in their air-conditioned hotel rooms and reputedly never ventured down to the meetings. But the first fat volume of proceedings, containing more than forty round-table and symposium papers, was actually published before the congress – a bit of post-Sputnik efficiency which has never been repeated (and which no one in his right mind today would even contemplate repeating).

By 1961 the international colloquy included a cautious number of official participants drawn from the postwar generation; among them were about a dozen Americans and four or five Englishmen. It seems a convenient time to take stock. And indeed a formal inventory was drawn up at exactly that time.

In typical institutional fashion – typical for America, that is, if not for Britain – an entity named the Council of the Humanities at Princeton University determined to commission a series of over a dozen books on ‘Humanistic Scholarship in America’ and secured the requisite foundation support. The book on *Musicology*, which came out in 1963, was the work of three authors who had established their scholarly careers since the war. The central essay, on ‘American Scholarship in Western Music’, was written by Claude V. Palisca,\* a Gombosi student who had come to Yale after the departure of Schrade. It is a revealing document. Equally revealing, though perhaps more surprising, the other two essays draw up preliminary battle lines in a shadow war between musicology and ethnomusicology which has been waged sporadically ever since. We have already quoted from the one by Frank Harrison, and will return to both of them later.

What would an interested reader of the time have learned from Palisca’s inventory? Under ‘Areas of Research’, that American musicology was concerned mainly with music of the Renaissance, followed by the Middle Ages and then the Baroque era. On the other hand, the Classical and Romantic periods were ‘comparatively neglected’. These are the periods encompassing nearly all the music in the concert repertory, from Haydn and Mozart to Richard Strauss and Debussy. ‘Practically no attention’ was being paid to music of the twentieth century. As for American music, ‘this is a subject that has only a negligible role in graduate study and is treated as a serious research specialty by only a handful of American scholars, few of them in teaching positions’.<sup>6</sup>

Palisca had some explanations for this imbalance. Whether he was right to link the popularity of Renaissance studies to a

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general surge of interest in sixteenth-century choral music, which he attributed to Archibald T. Davison and the Harvard Glee Club, I cannot say. But he was certainly right to observe that the émigré scholars were carrying over the model ‘problem areas’ of prewar European musicology when they laid stress on the Renaissance and Middle Ages. Although Palisca did not say so, the neglect of twentieth-century music followed from the basic ideological orientation of musicology, and the neglect of nineteenth-century music could plausibly be attributed to the great ‘distaste for romanticism during the last quarter-century’. Yet it should be said that while this distaste may indeed have been intense among the German refugees of the 1930s, by 1963, in the wake of triumphant Wagner and Verdi revivals and the new popularity of nineteenth-century composers such as Berlioz and Mahler, it had pretty well evaporated.

Under ‘Notable Achievements’ the reader of *Musicology* would have found one or two pages on biographies and general histories, a few more on dictionaries and monographs, and a great many more on ‘Critical Texts’. He could hardly have been blamed for concluding that the main work of musicology consisted of bringing out editions – mostly of Renaissance music. To be sure, Palisca also listed ‘Periodical Literature’ as a major outlet for musicological work, without offering to survey this in the detail accorded to critical texts, problem by problem and field by field; and perhaps he was only running true to the form of his generation in not venturing an analysis of the periodical literature in terms of the *type* of work it represented, in terms of idea. The emphasis was heavily on fact. New manuscripts were discovered and described, archives were reported on, dates were established, *cantus firmi* traced from one work and one composer to another. Musicologists dealt mainly in the verifiable, the objective, the uncontroversial, and the positive.

The presentation of the texts of early music and of facts and figures about it, not their interpretation, was seen as musicology’s most notable achievement. It is not only that a virtual blackout was imposed on critical interpretation – that is, the attempt to put the data that were collected to use for aesthe-

tic appraisal or hermeneutics. Even historical interpretation was scanted. In this area, most of the activity consisted of arranging the events of music history, considered as an autonomous phenomenon, into simplistic evolutionary patterns – an activity which soon came under sharp criticism, as we shall see in Chapter 4. Much less attention was paid to the interaction of music history with political, social, and intellectual history. And less attention yet was devoted to the attempt to understand music as an aspect of and in relation to culture in the large.

‘The musicologist is first and foremost a historian,’ wrote Palisca, but he should really have added: a historian in his role as a chronicler or archaeologist, rather than as a philosopher or an interpreter of cultures of the past. In such a situation, needless to say, there was a dearth of interest in philosophizing or theorizing about what musicologists were doing. The most significant effort along these lines, Mendel’s ‘Evidence and Explanation’ paper of 1961 which was cited at the beginning of this chapter, is not even mentioned in the *Musicology* volume.

To read about musicology in the 1950s is to experience an intellectual time-warp. It is remarkable how closely words written by R. G. Collingwood about German positivistic historiography in the nineteenth century fit the musical situation seventy-five years later, both as to the dominant strain of work and the dissatisfactions that were beginning to be voiced:

Historians set to work to ascertain all the facts they could. The result was a vast increase of detailed historical knowledge, based to an unprecedented degree on accurate and critical examination of evidence. This was the age which enriched history by the compilation of vast masses of carefully sifted material, like the calendars of close and patent rolls, the corpus of Latin inscriptions, new editions of historical texts. . . . But all through this period there was a certain uneasiness about the ultimate purpose of this detailed research. It had been undertaken in obedience to the spirit of positivism according to which the ascertaining of facts was only the first stage of a process whose second stage was the discovery of

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laws. The historians themselves were for the most part quite happy going on ascertaining new facts; the field for discovery was inexhaustible and they asked nothing better than to explore it. But philosophers who understood the positivist programme looked on at this enthusiasm with misgiving. When, they asked, were the historians going to embark on the second stage?<sup>7</sup>

The emphasis on critical editions, once again, was symptomatic. Palisca reported the symptom accurately but failed to mention the epidemic it reflected, a widespread phobia as regards historical interpretation. Not much real history was part of the daily work of the discipline Palisca was surveying.

Thus many – though not all – of the landmarks of musicology produced by the older generation were conspicuously long on ‘hard’ information and short on interpretation. Most impressive, perhaps, were the historical surveys of *Music in the Middle Ages* and *Music in the Renaissance* by Gustave Reese. A scholar who produced no more than a dozen specialized articles in a lifetime, half of them after the age of sixty, Reese had an enviable talent for digesting and directing the work of others. His books are vast compilations of historical information with an absolute minimum of interpretation or indeed selection. It was mainly from the Reese books, I believe, that we obtained our image of music history as an unbroken patchwork quilt extending back evenly into the dim reaches of the past. One worked on one’s own patch. Each was as good – as important, as necessary for the continuity and integrity of the quilt – as any other.

Some, though, were certainly more difficult to work. Willi Apel and Leo Schrade devoted major efforts to the editing of fourteenth-century French polyphony, at that time a largely unworked patch and one of the most difficult. Oliver Strunk, who for the last forty years of his life turned to the study of the millennium-long history of Byzantine chant, is a particularly pure case. Editing his pathbreaking studies on this topic in 1977, his student (and my fellow-student) Kenneth J. Levy evidently felt some comment was necessary on such devotion to a seemingly

recondite area at the expense of others to which Strunk had previously made contributions, areas ranging from medieval polyphony to Palestrina and Haydn. 'There are, at bottom, just two tests for the worthiness of a musicological undertaking,' wrote Levy, '(1) that it be concerned with first-class music; and (2) that it be concerned with a first-class problem.'<sup>8</sup> But in Strunk's own preface and the essays that follow, one gets very little sense that the first of these tests has been passed, or even set – only the second.

(The one book Strunk published in his lifetime was a landmark of another kind: *Source Readings in Music History*, an invaluable anthology of excerpts in translation from canonic works of music theory, philosophy, and criticism drawn approximately evenly from the ancient and medieval periods, the Renaissance, the Baroque, the Classical, and the Romantic. The quilt admitted of no foreshortening.)

There is certainly something of a puzzle here, for in fact most of these older scholars pursued interests considerably broader than the problem-oriented investigation represented most clearly by the work of Strunk. They were trying in some cases, possibly, to ascend to the second stage of the positivists' programme, referred to by Collingwood in the citation above. Otto Gombosi was obsessed by an overarching theory of rhythm, Manfred Bukofzer had a remarkably clear head for historical generalization, Curt Sachs, Paul Henry Lang, and Edward E. Lowinsky worked in their different ways at cultural history, and Schrade ranged from *Rezeptionsgeschichte* to biography and beyond. Lang was chief music critic of the *New York Herald Tribune* for nine years. Why did so little of this rub off on to the students of the 1950s?

No doubt part of the explanation can be expressed by some such formula as 'there were giants in those days'. I believe another part can be found in the adherence of those giants to European patterns of education which they failed to see would go only so far in a different setting. What they did not fail to see was the distressing lack of 'background' in students who did not have the advantages of *Gymnasium* training, and this seems to

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have made some of them obsessive about academic rigour. They insisted less on strictly musical credentials than on multiple language examinations, massive factual surveys, hierarchies of seminars leading to the Doctoral Seminar, and the completion of great crippling projects of a mechanical kind to convince the teacher that the student was ready to move on to the next stage. (As a parenthesis, it may be added that the lynchpin of the curriculum in those days was the seminar in the notation of medieval and Renaissance music. While such courses were supposed to provide an *entrée* to the music itself – were said, indeed, to provide the best possible *entrée* – they in fact focused not on music but on rather low-level problem-solving. Since young musicologists were so insistently taught to transcribe the archaic notation of early music into modern dress, it is hardly surprising they tended to become editors of critical editions and, in many cases, not much else. Dropping the notation course from the required list, some of us felt, was a first step in the liberation of musicology.) In any case, when in 1949 Sachs ended up a public plea for a wider view of musicology with this half-ironic salute to what he called ‘the nothing-but-specialists’ –

However, let us be grateful to the nothing-but-specialists. They are indispensable as spadeworkers and stone-breakers. . . . We need detail work, patient, careful, faithful, done for the sake of knowledge and for nothing else; and students, above all, should keep to this kind of neat and devoted research’

– it may be suspected he voiced attitudes held by most of the émigré teachers. How will students who have been programmed to be ‘nothing-but-specialists’ turn into scholars with broad, original, humane horizons? Sachs does not say. In the event, the metamorphosis was not often witnessed. Perhaps American students never grasped what was supposed to happen to them. Perhaps, in class, they were never even told.

One important teacher was not a German and did not follow the hieratic, paternalistic system he had observed in Europe.



Strunk had a dislike for all the paraphernalia of academia – he himself held no college degrees at all, not even a BA. Anyone walked into any of his seminars, and in these he never offered or appeared to instruct; an immensely reserved and austere figure, he simply worked alongside the students. It would be invidious to say that he produced the best musicologists of the 1950s and 1960s, but it will probably be agreed that he produced the most diverse and independent-minded: perhaps also the most grateful and devoted.<sup>10</sup>

A crotchet of Strunk's that earned particular gratitude from me was his distaste for PhD dissertations. Dissertations had to be written, that was evident; but he left them strictly alone. Once he had helped a student formulate the relevant historical problem – and he had a genius for this – it was easy enough to get at the solution. In my case, as best I recall, it was impossible, once he had pointed out the right direction, not to run into thickets of evidence showing how smoothly the English madrigal of the late Elizabethan period had been taken over from one strand of the contemporary Italian madrigal tradition. (Like so many dissertations at the time, mine was on a Renaissance topic.\*) The takeover, it developed, was encouraged by prominent men of letters who were themselves busy imitating Italian models at the time, and masterminded largely by one man, the politically and commercially astute composer Thomas Morley. It was facilitated by widespread copying and plagiarizing of translated Italian madrigals that were actually published in London.

Characteristically, Strunk advised me to limit the dissertation to a presentation of these and other such facts. Just as characteristically, he said nothing when I disregarded this advice and went on to a miniature critical study of the main madrigal repertory, the music of Morley and his younger followers Thomas Weelkes and John Wilbye. As Strunk viewed the situation, the factual findings were new and interesting, but that Weelkes and Wilbye were the best of the English madrigal composers was an old story which my critical exegesis was not likely to embroider to any appreciable extent. He was right; the criticism in that dissertation does not add up to much. It is just

that I would have found it impossible to conduct the factual investigation without conceiving of it as an aid to richer engagement with the best music that came within its range.

One should not, however, minimize the potential for intellectual stimulation in factual investigations of the kind Strunk inspired. The joys of problem-solving are savoured by humanist scholars as much or almost as much as by scientists. 'We have a passion for understanding things, for being puzzled and solving our puzzles' – Mendel was not just making this up. It was fascinating to discover, for example, that the famous anthology of madrigals for Queen Elizabeth, *The Triumphes of Oriana*, probably was conceived of with specific preferment in view – Morley needed to get his music-printing monopoly from the Crown renewed; fascinating to discover that his own main contribution to the book, the six-voiced madrigal 'Hard by a Crystal Fountain', certainly was produced by rewriting a madrigal by the then-popular Venetian composer Giovanni Croce, phrase by phrase and practically bar by bar. Fascinating to me, that is: how far can such matters ever engage those who are not themselves caught up in the excitement of discovery? However this may be, in the 1940s and 1950s there was indeed a great deal of basic research that had not yet been undertaken. I have written slightly above about the making of editions, because I think there is something wrong with a discipline that spends (or spent) so much more of its time establishing texts than thinking about the texts thus established. But the fact remains that absolutely central texts were still unavailable in those years. Readers who are acquainted with other fields of research – in literature or art, history or science – may find it difficult to appreciate the primitive state of musical documentation in the 1950s (and remember that one could not just go and look at the original manuscript or publication, as one could with a poem or a play, because pieces of music are generally transmitted in separate instrumental or vocal performance parts which have to be put together as a score before the whole can be comprehended). Dozens of Haydn symphonies were published in score for the first time in this period, as well as minor works by Beethoven,

major works by Dufay and Josquin, and *practically the whole corpus of music* by important secondary figures of the Renaissance and Baroque eras such as Giaches Wert and Louis Couperin. To hazard a comparison from literature, it is as though the 1950s saw the first publication of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, the second half of the *Orlando furioso*, seven volumes of Goethe including juvenilia, ephemera and the *Ur-Faust*, and the complete works of Lovelace and Herrick.

Those who like editing also like to discuss methods of editing. The most predictable sections of the learned journals are those devoted to the worrying of certain perennial bones of contention in the editing of old music: barlines, editorial accidentals, note-reduction, the format of critical apparatus, and the rest. Certain editions have become notorious whipping-boys in the process. Reading about them over the years, one can get the impression that much scholarly editing of music was and is done in a mindless fashion. Yet almost any edition is better than none, and no edition can meet every legitimate need of the specialist, who sooner or later has always to go back to the original documents themselves.

In any case, new standards of textual criticism and editorial rigour were established for music by the complete edition of Bach's works which was started in 1954 at Göttingen and Tübingen, to replace the famous old Bach-Gesellschaft Edition of 1850–1900. This was true in a literal sense, for *Richtlinien* derived from the New Bach Edition have repeatedly been drawn up in Germany for later projects – including some for which they are poorly suited.

Perhaps the most brilliant achievement of positivistic musicology after the war was attendant on this New Bach Edition. The fresh scrutiny of documents surrounding Bach's work resulted in an astonishing revision of their chronology, and with that a whole congeries of ideas about Bach's pattern of activity as a composer. This was a German product *par excellence*, with only a few American and British collaborators. It is nonetheless worth a brief discussion here as an outstanding example of what positivistic musicology could do – and what it has chosen not to do further.<sup>11</sup>

The new Bach research in fact dramatizes the relation between postwar neopositivism in musicology and the original nineteenth-century movement. For what was involved was a wholesale extension of the already impressive accomplishments of scholars who had been active some seventy-five years earlier, Wilhelm Rust and especially Philipp Spitta. The work of Spitta, a crusading positivist,<sup>12</sup> had long been regarded as a paragon of musicological method, and its authority had scarcely been challenged in the interim. The philological methods employed by the new Bach scholars, principally Alfred Dürr and Georg von Dadelsen, will be familiar enough in concept to those acquainted with similar work in art history and literary studies.\* The details may have a certain interest, however, as unquestionably the outcome has.

As sophisticated editorial work got under way, some very unexpected things began to turn up about the accepted chronology of Bach's music. This was particularly true of his cantatas, a corpus of over two hundred large-scale works comprising the greater part of his surviving output. Since the Lutheran church cantata is typically linked by its words to a specific day in the church year, cantatas were typically used again and again in different years. They have come down to us in scores and/or sets of performance parts, which may or may not be complete and may or may not match the score, if any; some of these sources are autographs, others copies. Some can be traced to a performance in one year, some to a performance in another year – when the cantata might have been revised – and some can be seen to have been used on more than one occasion. Liturgical and local performing practices changed from town to town and from church to church. All of this could be investigated and the results brought to bear on the problem of dating the musical sources. A further complication arises from the circumstance that several different levels of pitch were in use for the organs which played in the cantatas, so that certain instrumental parts had sometimes to be recopied in different keys to make them fit with a newly pitched organ.

Spitta had successfully grouped the thousands of manuscript pages of cantata sources according to their watermarks. But watermarks in this period cannot be dated independently, only by inferences drawn from what is written on the papers. For writings by Bach himself, Spitta attempted to chart the state of the composer's handwriting as he grew older; unfortunately this remained pretty constant. So special attention was now devoted to other copyists, some of whom changed their orthography more than Bach did – and some of whom came to write so much like the master that it took refined methods to distinguish their writings at all. The idiosyncrasies of the composers of Shakespeare's plays have not been studied more minutely than the handwritings of Bach's wife, his oldest sons, his main pupils, and various scribal anonimi. As an example of the intricacies of the problems encountered, twenty-one hands had to be unscrambled in the surviving materials for a single large work, the Passion According to St John, which Bach revived with modifications on several occasions.

When the results were in, it was discovered, first and foremost, that Spitta had committed one truly monumental error. A substantial and particularly famous group of cantatas, the 'chorale cantatas' based closely on traditional hymns, or chorales, is transmitted largely on a single type of paper which Spitta assigned to the 1730s and 1740s. But that paper and the handwritings on it now pointed inevitably to the single *Jahrgang* 1724–5. This was only Bach's second year as Cantor in Leipzig. He had, in short, written twice as much in the two-year period as Spitta thought (twice as much, probably, as anyone thought he could have written in so short a time, though now it is easy to see that plenty of other cantors wrote just as fast and just as copiously). What is more, already in 1725–6 Bach can be seen to have produced many fewer cantatas than in the previous years.

The traditional assumption had been that Bach devoted his major energies as Leipzig Cantor to church music from 1723 to around 1744, with something of a dropping off in the later period. Now it developed that the bulk of the church music – nearly all the cantatas – predated 1730. The sheer amount Bach

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produced makes it clear that borrowing from earlier music must have been much more widespread than was assumed before, though of course the procedure had been well documented by the time of Spitta. Secular cantatas such as birthday odes were provided with sacred words; concertos and other instrumental pieces were pressed into service, sometimes receiving words and even added contrapuntal voices to carry them. 'Chronology' in these circumstances began to take on a very ambivalent meaning.

But the new Bach scholars could say with some justice that their science was brushing away superstition, for when one looked more closely at Spitta's dating it became clear that more was behind it than a simple miscalculation. The idea of having the cycle of chorale cantatas come late in Bach's lifetime fitted only too well with the orthodox nineteenth-century view of the composer. According to this view, a career dedicated essentially to the music of the Lutheran liturgy reached its climax in that form of cantata which depended most deeply on the music of Luther, the chorale, itself.

Now, to put it brutally, it began to look as though Bach's attitude towards Lutheran church music had cooled appreciably quite early in his Leipzig years. It was an agonizing prospect for many West German musicians, if an eminently satisfactory one for their colleagues in the East. A Bach myth was shattered, and remains shattered, even though as the result of later research Bach's withdrawal from church music is now seen in a less decisive and less brutal light.

Indeed, it was perhaps only after this demythification that two of the most interesting newer lines of Bach research could have developed – lines which both start at the gap which seems to have opened up in Bach's activity in the 1730s, and which both lead outside of Lutheran Leipzig. One was due to a student of the older Bach scholar and theologian Friedrich Smend, Christoph Wolff, who emigrated first to Canada and then to the United States. Wolff in 1968 drew attention to a small but important group of late Bach compositions based on the *stile antico*, a conservative style still maintained in the Catholic Mass

and motet in direct line from Palestrina.\* Not only did Bach employ this style in part of his own B-minor Mass and other works, he orchestrated a Palestrina Mass first published in 1590 and transcribed or made additions to such staunchly Catholic contemporary works as a Mass by the Bolognese composer G. B. Bassani and the famous *Stabat Mater* of Pergolesi. Though strictly (perhaps too strictly) delimited in scope, Wolff's is one of the very few major Bach studies of recent decades to concentrate on the matter of musical style. And it is a pity he has not pursued this kind of work.

A student of Arthur Mendel, Robert L. Marshall did his first work with sketches and other evidence of the compositional process that can be discerned in Bach's autograph manuscripts. More recently Marshall has been emphasizing not the antique but the modern elements in Bach's later music.\* In 1730, as is well known, Bach angled for a position at Dresden – Catholic Dresden, seat of the Saxon court, where he often travelled to give organ recitals. Under the Italianate composer J. A. Hasse ('Il Sassone') and his wife the *prima donna assoluta* Faustina Bordoni, Dresden was just then becoming the German centre for modern Italian opera. Marshall finds evidence of operatic style in the magnificent Gloria Bach sent to Dresden (perhaps for Faustina?), in his secular cantatas, which he now wrote in increasing numbers, and in the favourite sacred cantata for coloratura soprano and trumpet obbligato, *Jauchzet Gott in allen Länden* (No. 51). In his instrumental music he adopted features from such post-Baroque composers as Domenico Scarlatti and his own son Carl Philipp Emanuel. Some rather modest flute sonatas attributed to Johann Sebastian, which sound so rococo that people have tended to reject the attributions, Marshall sees as authentic further testimony to the composer's modernist inclinations. So along with the myth of Bach as a latter-day Luther, another myth is coming into question, that of Bach as a stubborn conservative out of sympathy with his times.

Wolff's work from the late 1960s and Marshall's from the 1970s represent promising new departures from the Bach research of the 1950s. Yet all Bach scholars – including those

younger than Wolff and Marshall – seem obsessed, even oppressed by the enormous weight of paleographical and graphological apparatus left over from that great positivistic enterprise. What they have not begun to tackle is a critique of the broadly accepted scheme of the evolution of Bach's musical style from his periods in Weimar, Cöthen, and Leipzig. This legacy of Spitta's has not proved so easy to shake as has his flawed chronology. If the chorale cantatas of 1724–5 come *before*, not *after* the Passion According to St Matthew of 1727, what are the consequences of this chronological information for our understanding of these works? And now that we know that parts of the Passion are from ten to twenty years older than the rest, how are we to experience the work as a 'unity'? Perhaps our concept of unity in musical works needs revision; the Bach scholars should be in a position to speak to this. Clearly we can no longer accept (if we ever did) that Bach's style in, say, cantatas went through a process of linear development; but the alternative cannot be a tacit model of a style that never changed at all. That would indeed offer a *reductio ad absurdum* of chronological investigation. What use are correct dates, except to the gazetteers, if they do not help us understand the music in its historical context? Bach research has for some time been poised on the brink of the classic positivistic dilemma: more and more facts, and less and less confidence in interpreting them.

The positivists' interest in musical style seems to be mainly in its possible use as a guide to chronology – and this interest may indeed be merely *pro forma*, for they are always ready to counsel caution, if not outright scepticism, about such use. Here the argument is not whether 'external evidence' is preferable to 'internal evidence' when we have it; of course it is. The argument is whether to admit the sensitive interpretation of internal evidence when external evidence is lacking or inconclusive. But distrust of interpretation is programmatic among the traditional German Bach scholars. That this attitude was shared by American Bach scholars, at least of an older generation, will appear in a moment; it also came naturally to the leading British Bach specialist, Walter Emery, who incidentally also doubled as



a text critic of Icelandic saga. 'What Bach scholarship needs today', wrote Emery in 1961, 'is not only more facts – both fresh facts, and corrections of traditional errors – but also greater caution in interpreting facts.'<sup>13</sup> He said nothing about any need to direct those facts to a new appreciation of Bach's music as music.

Some older scholars, it is interesting to note, were made a little uneasy by this situation. One was Friedrich Blume, a leading figure in both prewar and postwar German musicology, even though Blume himself assented to the demythicization of Bach almost too eagerly. 'A rather exaggerated dogmatism is prevalent at the moment,' he observed – this was in 1963 – 'the belief that only that is true which results from the close textual investigation of the original sources and that whatever does not result from it cannot be true. The climate of scholarship will change, however, and the textual scholars will not have the final word. The purely textual will be followed by a more interpretative phase.'<sup>14</sup> Brave words; but in the austere climate of Göttingen and Tübingen interpretation of a strictly musical nature remains to be undertaken. While sophisticated debates continue about the date of the St Matthew Passion, a comprehensive new critical account of it or of the whole massive corpus of the church cantatas forms no part of the positivists' programme. Only in 1982, with the appearance of an ambitious study of the Passion by a young Canadian musicologist, Eric Chafe – a study strongly influenced by Smend, incidentally, and still largely consumed by complex arguments about sources and dating – has a fresh start been made towards the aesthetic appreciation of that great work.\*

5

It seems particularly apt that the most significant presentation in English of the neopositivistic theory of music history should have emerged directly from the background of Bach research, the great postwar success story of German musicology conceived

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from this position. Gracefully enough, the presentation was given by a leading American Bach specialist at a plenary session of that 1961 New York Congress of the International Musicological Society which was mentioned some pages earlier. Arthur Mendel's title was 'Evidence and Explanation', and he contrived to turn an exploration of those topics into a tract on the theory and practice of music history in general.\*

How does the historian know what he knows, and on what basis does he say what he says? The true basis, said Mendel, is deduction, and he proceeded to expound a model for causal explanation in history due to the analytical philosopher Carl Hempel, then at Princeton. According to this model, which was much discussed at the time, an 'explanandum' is to be inferred from clearly defined 'antecedent conditions' according to a clearly formulated 'covering law'. If we see a ship on the sea and then look five minutes later and see it somewhere else, we infer from this evidence that it has occupied a series of different positions in between. We must formulate a general law according to which our observation of the ship in two positions at two moments — the antecedent conditions — allows us to deduce that it has travelled from one point to the other.

This perhaps slightly curious example was taken from Collingwood's influential *The Idea of History*, where it served a somewhat different argument. The ship can also serve, I think, to lead us to the heart of Mendel's inquiry. As has already been noted, this grew out of postwar Bach research — which started him thinking seriously about historical method in the first place, says Mendel at the beginning of his paper, and which supplied him with the one specific historical question raised, however briefly, at the end. Did Bach actually part with the famous autograph manuscript of his Brandenburg Concertos (as had been assumed) on the date of the dedication written in it, March 1721 — and hence necessarily derive all later copies of the concertos from some other source? Just how much does the evidence of that dated autograph allow us to explain?

What Mendel cared about was rigorous thinking about low-level facts, facts like Collingwood's ship. To the extent that

he was echoing Hempel's well-known injunction to historians that they root out 'the assumptions buried under the gravestones "hence", "therefore", "because" and the like', his article can be read as part of a growing critique of musicological method from within the profession. And to that extent Mendel's own endemic personal scepticism had a healthy effect on more than a few Princeton students who have gone on to do serious work.

But Mendel's effort to extend Hempel's model from 'low-level' explanations in music history to 'high-level' ones – to explanations of the relation between two composers' styles, for example, or of particular musical events in particular pieces of music – was not healthy in the least. His paper argued against several familiar objections to the sweeping positivistic position. According to William Dray, history cannot be covered by laws such as those employed in science because it deals with one-of-a-kind events. But scientists have their laws without assuming the existence of 'invariable uniformities', Mendel argued, citing Bertrand Russell: 'As soon as the antecedents have been given sufficiently fully to enable the consequent to be calculated with some exactitude, the antecedents have become so complicated that it is very unlikely they will ever recur.' According to Isaiah Berlin, historical explanation needs to be 'thick' rather than 'thin', and thickness requires qualities of insight and imagination over and above the application of logical models. But *all* explanation, thick or thin, scientific or historical, is hypothetical (here Mendel cites Popper); and while Mendel cautiously grants the necessity of thick explanation in history, he argues that the processes of thick and thin explanation differ only in degree:

To establish the fact that Ockeghem died in 1495 [or to] establish the historical relations between Josquin's lament, *Nymphes des bois*, and Ockeghem's death, or between *Nymphes des bois* and the chant melody of the *Requiem aeternam*, or between polyphonic settings in general and *cantus prius facti*, or between all compositions that make some use of preexisting material and that material, or between Josquin's style and Ockeghem's, we have to use the same

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processes. But the higher we go in the scale of generality, the harder it is to make the empirical tests Hempel specifies and the more our explanation will assume the character of a hypothesis or an outline (p. 13).

A seamless continuum is posited between the process of explaining facts thick and thin, high- and low-level. Berlin's 'imagination and insight' are subsumed under a 'fictive' element said to be present even in the simplest hypothesis, and present in thick explanation merely to a greater degree.

Mendel seems to grant even more when, a little later, he agrees with Collingwood that the historian must re-enact or enter imaginatively into the material he is treating. Collingwood had developed this idea freely from Dilthey and Croce, and when Mendel transposes it freely to music history, asserting that for the musicologist aesthetic interest in his material is essential, that indeed 'in the music-historian the musician and the historian are inseparable and indispensable to each other', he comes within hailing distance of a concept of musicology oriented towards criticism. But after granting this much, Mendel makes an all but Jesuitical turn and grants nothing. The historian's aesthetic experience 'is not evidence'. Committed to an *a priori* method, the positivistic method of Hempel, Mendel was content to exclude values which he actually admitted adhere to his subject matter, music. 'The aesthetic relation to the musical work exists and is necessary to the music-historian' – but evidently Hempel's supposed rules of evidence are a higher necessity.<sup>15</sup>

The unhealthy influence of this doctrine, which puts quasi-scientific methodology first and assumes a methodological continuum in the treatment of all kinds of low- and high-level phenomena, can well be imagined. For while Mendel said that thick explanation is necessary in history, he did not say this in a very loud voice. Small wonder that musicologists impressed by his precepts tended to shy away from the relative uncertainty, difficulty ('it is harder to make the empirical tests'), and 'fictiveness' which he claimed adhered to all investigation above the lowest, Collingwood-ship levels. Mendel did the same in his

own work. He established important facts and texts: facts about the history of musical pitch and the text of the St John Passion. He coedited a book of Bach documents. He also tried and cheerfully admitted failure to develop computerized methods of musical style analysis.

Positivism is still probably the dominant mode in musicology today. At a later point I shall speak briefly of its latter-day manifestation in Britain. In the United States musicologists who have never pondered 'Evidence and Explanation' have absorbed the ideology unconsciously from the unusually stodgy shelf of the textbooks that guided their graduate study. (As was remarked in passing in Chapter 1, the publisher with a corner on 'official' musicological texts is W. W. Norton, or was until recently.) The common observation that yesterday's intellectual orthodoxy is reflected most baldly in today's textbooks certainly holds for music. Musicology stays with the old ways because they seem so simple – because even their difficulties seem conceptually so simple: though it should be said that positivism has a way of deflecting attention from even such difficulties as are implicit in its materials. This seems, in fact, to have been what was worrying Mendel. His tract can be seen most sympathetically as a warning against the kind of simplistic thinking that positivism encourages but does not, at its best, necessarily entail.

Such intellectual interest as musicology can show today emerges out of several strains of reaction to positivism, and out of attempts, either associated with them or not, to develop a new musicology. To a large extent these attempts have themselves emerged from the confrontation of musicology with theory and ethnomusicology. The coming together of these disciplines has had, so far as I can see, a more invigorating effect on musicology than on the other two. In any case we should now look at theory, and its ambivalent adjunct analysis, before coming to see how it has affected the musicology of the present day.