

Discussing his transcriptions, Motl describes Bert Turetzky giving him the task of making pizzicato arrangements of early musical works. I am reminded of Turetzky's lament that 'little or no heed'<sup>5</sup> was paid to Berlioz's proclamation: 'The study of the violin is incomplete. Pupils are not taught pizzicato.'<sup>6</sup> In a clear demonstration of pedagogy in action, this is no longer the case. Motl invents exercises to work on the balance between plucked open strings, stopped strings and harmonics, which presents string players with subtle physical-intuitive challenges; indeed, the disparity between relative and actual dynamics in the case of pizzicato is large, and composers' use of prescribed or described notation is still often unclear. Motl also uses harmonics as a means of working on diverse aspects of technique – for example, polyrhythms using two-handed 'harp' harmonics, or just intonation in sequences of the 4th, 5th and 6th artificial harmonics over chromatically ascending stopped fundamentals ('more fun'). In this sense, the aim he sets out in the introduction of improving 'expressivity, musicianship, listening... and technique' is met. I have discussed inhibitory terminology and overly personalised technique books hampering technical progress.<sup>7</sup> Motl seems to share these concerns, arguing convincingly that 'extended technique' is an 'othering' term, and taking seriously his intention to appeal to double bassists from diverse backgrounds: providing material for improvisation, describing just intonation in cents, including many exercises in modal scales or triadic patterns and assimilating jazz, free improvisation and early music into his études.

In one of Motl's études, he differentiates between 'subtle' and 'clear' multiphonics. I recognise this distinction and was excited to see it notated, but in this case I missed the clear explanations that I had become used to. The tips for right-hand playing in multiphonics are useful, but descriptions of the pitch content, or a reference to where one might find such information<sup>8</sup>

were lacking. While most of the language is both precise and informal, some aspects could have been cleaned up with a final edit – for example, the confusion generated when discussing bow weight and weighting (relative loudness) of a partial within a sound could easily have been resolved by referring to bow pressure, as is more conventional. Finally, short videos to demonstrate each of the examples could be a real asset to this textbook.

In summary, Motl has created a book that is technically challenging, physically accurate, pedagogically sound and musically non-partisan, an achievement indeed, and a model for future work.

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Kerry O'Brien and William Robin, eds, *On Minimalism: Documenting a Musical Movement*, University of California Press, 2023, 470pp. £49.25.

In many ways this is a marvellous book: it presents a documentary history not just of minimalist music but also of many other sorts of musical production that might be thought to relate to minimalism. There are 21 chapters, each opening with a brief introduction – usually no more than a paragraph or two – by the book's editors, Kerry O'Brien and Will Robin, before we are presented with a series of extended passages from existing sources. Chapter Ten, for example, is about 'The New Downtown', and the editors' introductory paragraphs usher us into an exchange of views between Rhys Chatham and Peter Gordon from the November 1978 issue of *Ear Magazine*; later we can read Lee Ranaldo's memories of his first encounter with Chatham's *Guitar Trio*, from an article published in *The Wire* in 2000.

The chapters move, more or less chronologically, from 'Improvisation and Experimentation' around 1960 – accounts of minimalism's various origin myths – to a retrospective survey of 'Futures', running from 2006 to 2021. There is a further division of the book into three parts: the eight chapters of Part One go from the beginnings to Reich and Glass's consolidation of their versions of minimalism in the first half of the 1970s; the ten chapters of Part Two cover minimalism's ascendancy after 1976 and its offshoots; Part Three consists of three more reflective, speculative chapters.

<sup>5</sup> Turetzky, *The Contemporary Contrabass*, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Hector Berlioz and Hugh Macdonald, *Berlioz's Orchestration Treatise: A Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Ellen Fallowfield, 'Rethinking Instrumental Technique: A Case Study in String Multiphonics', in *Rethinking the Musical Instrument*, ed. M. Dogantan-Dack (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022), pp. 45–69.

<sup>8</sup> Dresser, 'Double Bass Multiphonics', pp. 72–75; Guettler and Thelin, 'Bowed-String Multiphonics', pp. 766–72; C. J. Walter, 'Multiphonics on Vibrating Strings', *Tempo*, 74, no. 291 (2020), pp. 7–23; Ellen Fallowfield, 'Cello Multiphonics: Technical and Musical Parameters', *Tempo*, 74, no. 291 (2020), pp. 51–69.

None of this is out of the ordinary; these days we know how this history unfolds and we have even become used to the idea that it is a history into which we need to add the more marginal figures who were excluded by the dominance of the Reich–Glass hegemony. But it is nevertheless marvellous to have such a wide-ranging collection of documentary sources – polemics, reviews, programme notes, interviews – to demonstrate how music can delight, annoy and confuse people. In this mix of contemporary and retrospective responses it is, as ever, instructive to see how the most perceptive critics tend to be those who report what it is they're hearing without letting their prejudices get in the way. Tom Johnson's writing is represented by two *Village Voice* articles of which the first, from 1973, about Éliane Radigue, is a study in thoughtful objectivity: in just a few hundred words Johnson explains what Radigue's music is like, how it differs from much of the then new music and why this means that it 'will probably be overlooked' (p. 77).

In contrast there's an interview between Wim Mertens and John Cage. Cage had just heard Glenn Branca's music at the 1982 New Music America festival but in a little over four pages we discover nothing about Branca's music except that Cage thought that 'if it was something political, it would resemble fascism' (p. 199). I don't much like Branca's music myself but I think it deserves more than this. Somewhere between these two extremes is a curious 1997 interview with David Lang in which he explains why, as an 18-year-old, Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* had made him 'angry because it was really nice to listen to'; after the 'really obnoxious... really harsh' *Four Organs*, this felt like a denial of the teenage Lang's sense that 'interesting things in music happened when music was ugly' (p. 293).

The book is not without its flaws, however, the principal one being that the history on offer is almost exclusively centred on American musicians. Coverage of music from beyond the borders of the US is restricted to a 1976 interview with Louis Andriessen, Reinbert de Leeuw and Misha Mengelberg in a chapter on 'Politics, Identity, and Expression', a chapter on the 'Spiritual Minimalism' of Górecki and Pärt, and a chapter on 'Silences' that is mostly about the Wandelweiser collective. This exclusive focus would have been less problematic if the editors had acknowledged the book's American focus in its title and in their introduction, but they don't, so all those students who make *On Minimalism* their main resource for minimalist assignments will probably conclude that this music was just an American phenomenon.

Perhaps the most significant absences are composers from the first generation of European minimalists. The two main figures in English minimalism, Michael Nyman and Gavin Bryars, get no more than a handful of brief mentions: it's as if *Jesus' Blood* really had failed and *The Draughtsman's Contract* had never been drawn up. There's also only a brief footnote mention of Henning Christiansen, whose *Springen* is often credited as being the first acknowledged piece of 'minimal-music', the term that Nyman used to describe it in a *Spectator* review in October 1968.<sup>1</sup> Nyman's music journalism was as perceptive in its reporting of the London scene as Tom Johnson's was of New York, but *On Minimalism* includes just one Nyman article, from 1971, and it's a disappointingly unrevealing survey of 'British composers on discipline and process'.

Nor is there any recognition of Walter Zimmermann's crucial role in the development of an understanding of minimalist music in Germany, not only through his groundbreaking collection of interviews with American composers, *Desert Plants*, but also through his Beginner Studio concert series in Cologne and, above all, through his own music, especially in works like *Beginner's Mind* and *Lokale Musik*. I think this matters because, crucially, the music of composers like Bryars, Nyman and Zimmermann offers a more extended ancestry for minimalism, suggesting family trees that go back to Satie-influenced 1940s Cage (Zimmermann), to Satie himself (Bryars) and, perhaps more playfully, to Purcell, Mozart and Schumann (Nyman).

Any book that attempts to broaden our understanding of a musical tendency is always going to invite the criticism that it could have been broader still: minimalism in film music, eastern European minimalism, minimalist music and contemporary dance? I could go on. I could also argue that very little of the music to which this music refers is really 'minimalist' in any useful sense of that term, but it's a bit late for that. Best, then, to finish where I began and welcome a book that is not only meticulous in its scholarship but also a richly stimulating addition to the literature on music after 1960.

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10.1017/S0040298223000578

<sup>1</sup> The same footnote references Nyman's article to its original *Spectator* publication; 'Minimal Music' also appears in *Michael Nyman: Collected Writings*, ed. Pwyll ap Siôn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 41–43.