

***Transcendent Mastery: Studies in the Music of Beethoven*, by Bathia Churgin. New York: Pendragon Press, 2008; corrected reprint, 2011 (with a page of Corrigenda).\***

Books on Beethoven's music take a variety of approaches, including studies of the composer's creative process or performance practice, analyses of single works or pieces in a specific genre, and surveys of many compositions in a variety of genres. Bathia Churgin's outstanding *Transcendent Mastery: Studies in the Music of Beethoven* is novel in that it consists of four lengthy chapters devoted to four works in different genres: Piano Sonata in D Major, Op. 10, No. 3 (early period); Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 61; Violin Sonata in G Major, Op. 96 (middle period); and the String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132 (late period). Each work is discussed from several points of view: historical background, critical reception, genre, performance practice, sketches and autograph manuscripts, and musical analysis.

As Prof. Churgin indicates in the Preface (p. IX), her analytical approach derives from Jan LaRue's *Guidelines for Style Analysis* (1970; 1992) and Leonard Ratner's *Classic Music: Expression, Form, Style* (1980). She explains that her focus "is on Beethoven's treatment of the various musical elements: growth (formal aspects), sound (including texture, dynamics, and timbre), harmony, melody, rhythm, and expression." *Transcendent Mastery* uses analytical symbols and outlines of form, called "timelines," of a type introduced by Jan LaRue. The compositions studied are often compared with other works by Beethoven and other composers. Thus, *Transcendent Mastery* is far more than a study of four works; it is actually a profound examination of Beethoven's music in relation to the classical style. The following observations briefly survey Professor Churgin's discussions of the above-mentioned works.

### **Piano Sonata in D Major, Op. 10, No. 3**

Prof. Churgin emphasizes the "sharp expressive contrasts of movements" in this sonata. She considers the third movement (Menuetto) to have a bridging function because its lyricism and rich harmony connects with the preceding Largo, and its Trio section anticipates the humor of the following Rondo finale. Churgin points out that extended and important codas conclude the first, second, and fourth movements of Op. 10, No. 3. "Even in his early works," she writes, "Beethoven assigns such structural significance to the conclusion of the movement that he often sketches this segment before the movement is fully blocked out" (p. 171).

The second-movement development section of Op. 10, No. 3 opens with a new contrasting theme (mm. 30ff.). Churgin indicates that a long history exists of the use of new material in the development “from the early classical period onward and it was a device favored by Mozart” (p. 130). Like Mozart, Beethoven frequently used this procedure.

### **Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 61**

Prof. Churgin points out that the first movement of this concerto is the only opening concerto movement by Beethoven “without an overt march-like rhythm—so common in the Classic concerto—somewhere in the movement, though the association of the tapping motive with the tympani and brass instruments may suggest the march” (p. 14). She considers the ways in which this tapping motive functions within the movement, and compares the opening movement of this concerto with the existing fragment of the first movement of Beethoven’s early Violin Concerto in C Major, WoO5.

The Rondo finale of Op. 61 includes a new, lyrical theme in G minor (mm. 117-148) in its second episode. Prof. Churgin indicates that the key of G minor establishes a strong connection with a new G-minor theme in the development of the first movement (m. 331 ff.). She points out that the G-minor finale theme is similar in form (rounded binary) to the A flat major theme (mm. 182 ff.) in the second episode of the Rondo finale of Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 3. Churgin believes that “Beethoven’s model for the introduction of such a theme in the second episode may have been the beautiful N [new theme] in the second episode of Mozart’s C-Major Piano Concerto, K. 503 (1786) *finale*, a work that Beethoven knew” (see mm. 163-93).

### **Violin Sonata in G Major, Op. 96**

Prof. Churgin points out some pastoral associations in Op. 96, but observes that “the sonata is somewhat distant from the literal pastoral style as described by theorists” and illustrated by such works as the Pastoral Symphony. Her discussion of major revisions in the first movement autograph is highly informative. It shows that several important features of the coda resulted from revisions at the autograph stage. For example, mm. 247-259, which include a dialogue between the violin and the bass line of the piano, were inserted to expand and dramatize the progression from the IV of mm. 239-242 to the cadential 6/4 of mm. 260-261.

### **String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132**

One of the remarkable aspects of this quartet is the unique form of its opening movement. Prof. Churgin lists the different formal interpretations of nine analysts, from A.B. Marx

(1859) to Chua (1995). At issue is the function of mm.103-192, which functions thematically as a varied recapitulation. Rather than appearing in the tonic key of A minor, however, it is placed in E minor and C major, a fifth higher than in the exposition. Churgin therefore designates this section as a “recurrence,” reserving the term “recapitulation” for mm. 193-231, which is a highly abridged and varied return of the exposition in the tonic.

The third movement is a theme and variations on two themes, the first is described in the score as “Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit in der lydischen Tonart” (“Holy Song of Thanks of a Convalescent to the Godhead in the Lydian Mode”); the second is described as “Neue Kraft fühlend” (Feeling New Strength”). Prof. Churgin gives a context for this movement by listing twelve programmatic works and movements (excluding overtures to dramatic works). She convincingly demonstrates that the “Heiliger Dankgesang” served as a model for the A section of the second movement of Bartok’s Third Piano Concerto.

In summary, *Transcendent Mastery* is a magnificent achievement, and belongs in the personal library of every serious musician involved with music of the classical period.

ROGER KAMIEN

\* We would like to thank Prof. Bathia Churgin for sending us the following list of further corrections to be included in her revised edition, 2011:

p. 82, Ex. I:22: add P for Piano

p. 137, Ex. 2.9: the missing chords are: m. 67, d: flat ii<sup>6</sup>; m. 68, E-flat:#ii-6/5; m. 69, F.

p. 200, Table 3.4, line 1: the opening should be: 1Po, followed by a double bar and repeat marks. Delete the vertical line after x.

p. 246, Ex. 3,23: m. 2, note 1 is a<sup>1</sup>; no sf on beat 3.

p. 342, fn. 90, line 2: 124 (Op. 124).

p. 414, Index. Johansen, p. 270.