

Ears, Hands, and Throats

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Daub, Adrian. *Four-Handed Monsters: Four-Hand Piano Playing and Nineteenth-Century Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. viii, 246 pp.

Davies, James Q. *Romantic Anatomies of Performance*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014. xiii, 265 pp.

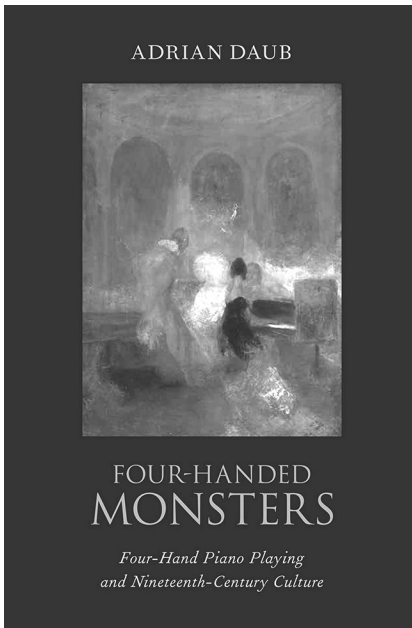
THE BEST AND MOST INTERESTING writing about music within the last fifteen years or so—at least for this reader—has been increasingly concerned not with scores but with the other stuff that constellates around them and brings them to life: the ears, hands, and throats of listeners, instrumentalists, and vocalists. There are yet more peripheries to the score that have received critical attention. Ever since José Bowen's justly famous 1999 article in *Rethinking Music* we have had the rise of phonomusicology, or the study of recordings.¹ Andrew Dell'Antonio's 2004 collection has inaugurated a new perspective on the role of the listener.² The operatic scores that sit in our complete editions and are classified as M2 by the Library of Congress ("Monuments and historical sets") aren't representative of a definitive *Fassung letzter Hand* at all, as we have learnt, but instead freeze, as in a photograph, a lively and fluid sense of operatic production that until only relatively recently was in a state of constant flux.³ In new music written by living people, Reductionism, with its emphasis on "quiet noise" and improvisation, has flourished in the wake of the notation-obsessed New Complexity of the 1990s, whose scores often took nine months of dedicated study to learn.⁴ In composition, in historically informed performance, and in musicology we are all drifting away from the notes on the page. Clearly, a

¹ José A. Bowen, "Finding the Music in Musicology: Performance History and Musical Works," in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 424–51.

² Andrew Dell'Antonio, ed., *Beyond Structural Listening?: Postmodern Modes of Hearing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

³ Hilary Poriss, *Changing the Score: Arias, Prima Donnas, and the Authority of Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁴ Steven Schick, "Developing an Interpretive Context: Learning Brian Ferneyhough's Bone Alphabet," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1 (1994): 132–53.



study of or concentration on the score or notation alone, unmoored from its historical specificity, won't do anymore.

In this respect two brilliant—indeed virtuosic—books on the stuff around scores have appeared this year. Adrian Daub is not a musicologist but rather Associate Professor of German Studies at Stanford University, and yet, informed by a deep and abiding knowledge of European literature, he shows as keen an understanding of music's place in culture as anyone. James Davies is currently Associate Professor at the University of California at Berkeley and has a splendidly eclectic research profile that explores

ways in which musicology might intersect with historical understandings of physiology, neurology, and physiognomy. Talk about drifting away from scores: Daub's book contains not one musical example; Davies's has only eleven.

Daub contextualizes the absence of musical examples in his introduction. In "scholarly studies of four-hand music and related phenomena" the "primary guides are notes on a page, as is playing them" (p. 9). But this kind of approach "tells us nothing about the praxis." In order to "fill gaps, to let stand hypotheses without finding evidence for them right away, and to risk fiction judiciously" (p. 8) Daub engages in an imaginative legerdemain that turns to literature in an exploration of what kind of cultural work four-hand piano music *did*. Less concerned with the phenomenology of the hands at the keyboard, Daub instead examines literature of the period, which "picked up on things that everyday praxis allowed to slide out of view, to speak about that which goes without saying" (p. 7). His weakest sections are in fact those in which he attempts to discuss the effects of those "notes on the page." Daub himself admits that these discussions were aided by those "professionally occupied with the topic" (p. viii). It should be noted that this analytical weakness in no way detracts from the overall conception of the book.

Davies, on the other hand, is very much "professionally occupied with the topic" of performance. His is a glittering discourse of the "stuff of materiality itself": "I have introduced concert or operatic or pedagogical scenes—manifesta-

tions of hands and voices—not as static objects of study but as active sites where the matter of corporeality itself was contested and realized” (p. 183). Unlike Daub, Davies does undertake “old-school” analyses of the notes on the page, but like Daub, Davies also abjures a focus on music “written and read” (or *theoria*) to instead look at music “performed and heard” (or *praxis*) (p. 2). Davies also wishes to take the work of “my drastic-carnal interlocutors”⁵ (p. 186) a step further: “I want to assume an avowedly *realist* stance and ask how bodies are acquired as they are heard, trained, and performed. How does music act in the cultivation of bodies?” (emphasis his, p. 2). Davies’s weakness is in perhaps stretching this notion too far. Reading too “thickly” he occasionally threatens to be “absorbed by context,” as Jim Samson puts it in a discussion on the challenges of relativistic analysis.⁶ But as with Daub, this approach will detract only the most positivistic of readers. I was as enthralled and inspired by Davies as much as I was by Daub.

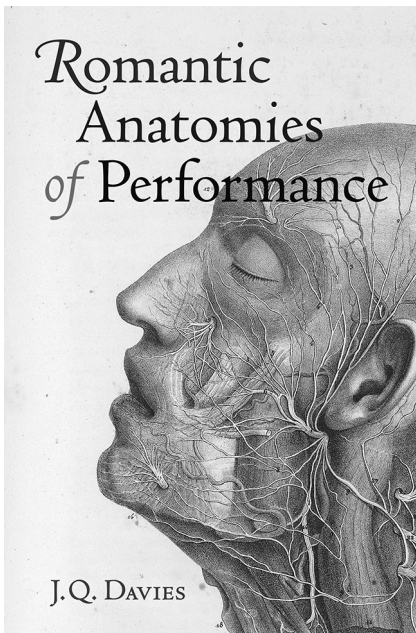
Davies focuses his research on singers and pianists on the London-Paris musical circuit in the nineteenth century. One of his main claims is that bodies come from music as much as music comes from bodies. This kind of sentiment finds an echo in Andrew Bowie’s radical assertion that music might be usefully used to “interrogate” the practices of analytical philosophy to the mutual benefit of both disciplines.⁷ To paraphrase Schlegel: mathematics and science have long been used to understand music, why not try the opposite? Similarly, Davies asks: conceptions of the body have been used to understand music, why not try the opposite? He posits that, “when one is making music, one is also indexing a body, or rather [...] one’s body is being indexed. The challenge is to show that when one is playing or singing, there are no stable essences, because what counts as ‘materiality’ is constantly being negotiated” (p. 183).

Davies explores his thesis through five case studies of nineteenth-century vocalists and pianists. One of the last operatic castrati, Giovanni Velluti, is the subject of Davies’s first test of how bodies are created by music. Contemporaneous theories of vocal physiologies are brought to bear upon the cruel reception Velluti received in the press. Davies uses the younger Manuel García’s exquisitely detailed annotations of Velluti’s embellishments (1847–51) as evidence for

⁵ Carolyn Abbate, “Music: Drastic or Gnostic?,” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 505–36 and Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini’s Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

⁶ Jim Samson, “The Practice of Early-Nineteenth-Century Pianism,” in *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?*, ed. Michael Talbot (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 113.

⁷ Andrew Bowie, *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).



Velluti's hopelessly out-of-date *canto di maniera*—or mannered-style singing: “soft moaning, the snivelling half breaths, the fussy silences, the supple movements in the throat, the audible exhalations, the thrilling ‘jerking inhalations’ of air, the echo effects, glottal sounds, sustained consonants, sobs of passion, snuffed finishes, constant diminuendos, mooching swells, the lack of brio—the refined whining, sighing, and panting” (p. 38). Through this dazzling list of descriptive words, Davies shows himself a virtuoso of the *stilo di maniera* too. For nineteenth-century commentators the image of Velluti's castrated body—depicted in a contemporary print with a suggestive vagina-like slit at the groin (p.

26)—“emitted” or “secreted” music; it did not express it (p. 38).

Secretions are the subject of Davies's next case study, in which we learn of a “Touching New Fact about Chopin” (p. 41). According to the doctoral dissertation of Chopin's 1834 flatmate and close friend, the trainee-physician Jan Matuszyński, Chopin had trouble urinating. Apparently, “whistling or a few chords on the piano frees this obstruction in an instant” (p. 41). Davies uses this “little fact” (familiar to readers of this journal) as a hermeneutic window into a “period sense of ‘touch,’” a sense profoundly different to our own.⁸ Until physiological experiments in 1834, touch was understood to imply being in communion with the environment around the senses that apprehended it. After that time, experimentalists argued that we don't feel a table, rather “merely that part of our skin which the tables touches,” in the words of an original report (p. 51). After a brilliant discussion of Hummel and Chopin's ideas about touch, Davies's analysis reduces “a Chopin étude to a form of complex autonomic activity, a kind of physiological ‘secretion’” (p. 64). Drawing on his theories of touch from medical as well as pedagogical texts, Davies argues that the score of the etude, with its avoidance of the right

⁸ James Q. Davies, “Reflecting on Reflex, or, Another Touching New Fact about Chopin,” *Keyboard Perspectives* 2 (2009): 55–82.

hand's fourth finger, actually "educated sense." Music thus communicates with the body, and apparently helped Chopin pee.

Four more case-studies constellate equally around voice and hands. Chapter 3 deals with twinned divas in a way that nicely echoes Daub's twinned soloists. Davies discusses a two-soprano craze of the late 1820s, the performances of which stimulated commentators to organic and mercantile metaphors. Chapter 4 brings in the eyes of the audience, gazing on the hands of Thalberg, who espoused a pedagogy around the unusual image of a "boneless hand" (*main désossée*, p. 115; and Michael Turabian's essay in this volume, Ed.). Davies discusses the pedagogical habits of the influential Kalkbrenner and his promotion of the chiroplast, a famous device for correcting undisciplined hands and arms that embodied the "strange alignment of pianistic method and orthopaedic medicine in the 1820s and 1830s" (p. 109; and Tom Beghin's essay in this volume, Ed.). Chapter 5 will be of much interest to vocal historians interested in register, voice-types, and the reception history of the same. Metaphysics meets metapianism in the final chapter on Liszt, in which Davies outlines his transcendental pedagogical methods that took in the different demands of his students' hands as well as moving beyond the mechanical/industrial models of the chiroplastic past to embrace new ineffabilities like "energy" or "spirit" (p. 172). Davies describes carnival tricks including an episode in which Liszt bandaged a supposedly cut finger and managed to play with only three or four fingers, like Paganini with a broken string. Here the body masters the music, a point Davies concedes might indeed contradict the findings of the other case studies. "Rather," he emphasizes, "these closing pages reinforce my observation that piano-playing hands had become so musically eruptive by the 1830s as to require zealous ideational control" (p. 12). Davies's great strength is his ability to synthesize sweeping tracts of history with deft dexterity, even as one comes away a little stunned by a writing style that can often be a little bewildering.

Daub's great strength is his multilingual engagement with a huge body of literature that describes or refers to four-handed piano playing. This imbues Daub's book with an epic and immersive—indeed, almost cinematic—quality. I came away with a feeling of having witnessed many different types of four-handed scenarios in many different countries and locales, in excerpts from novels by authors as diverse as Oscar Wilde, Grillparzer, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Thomas Mann, Fanny zu Reventlow, Dickens, Kate Chopin, Eduard Mörike, and E. T. A. Hoffmann. Daub argues strongly, on the strength of this rich and provocative bed of primary literature, that four-hand piano playing theatricalized nineteenth-century issues of subjectivity, community, eroticism, nationalism, and consumerism.

Four-hand playing also stands in as a metonym for the deconstruction of the individual subject itself. In an 1875 novel a friend laments to another companion that “I, too, have grown so used to playing together that I’m always missing two hands when I play alone—as if I had been born with four hands!” (p. 52). Four-handed playing put on display and problematized entrenched thinking about gender and sexuality: “The moment you put a community to work on the keyboard, you sexualized it to some extent and you created a community only insofar as it had an erotic component, however sublimated,” Daub observes (p. 120). The courtship connotations of small ensembles of mixed genders, with men generally in the “accompanying” role, continued from its roots in eighteenth-century culture. What really changes in the nineteenth century is a complexification of these roles. An “impassioned amateur” once asked Eduard Hanslick a question that Daub is right to describe as almost “lewd and prying”: “Who is your four-handed person [*Vierhändiger*]?” (p. 90).

The examples of four-handed playing in nineteenth-century novels are more differentiated than descriptions of accompanied sonatas in eighteenth-century ones. No longer did women entirely give up music with their virginity, and increasingly men played the piano too; grandfathers probably remembered when this kind of playing was deemed off-limits to all but performer/composers who made music their business. And yet Daub points out that even as late as 1903, in Thomas Mann’s *Buddenbrooks*, Hanno’s improvisations upon a piano are rendered as “aesthetically suspect,” effeminate, and autoerotic. So thoroughly in control of his material, Daub is at his best as he imagines the space caused by the *absence* of four-handed playing. The character of Hanno in *Buddenbrooks* is an effeminate and clumsy daydreamer. A sudden burst of vigor at the piano is painted as highly suspicious by Mann’s narrator, as is the unhealthy friendship he has with his fellow student Kai. Speaking of this Daub asks: “What if Hanno and Kai were to have played together on that fateful afternoon? Would that scene be perceived, observed, and interpreted in the same way?” (p. 42). And on nationalism, Daub demonstrates in Chapter 8 how four-handed playing was used by novelists as a metaphor for the dual monarchy that had ruled the fading Austro-Hungarian Empire since 1867. Austrian writers Robert Musil and Joseph August Lux in their novels from around 1913 turn to the four-handed *topos* to explore a political theme that out of disparate elements one might generate a harmonious whole.

One of the most compelling arguments in *Four-Handed Monsters* is Daub’s exploration of how four-hand music had a particular and especial relationship to consumption and commodification. Certainly, as the “proto-CD of nineteenth-

century domestic culture” (p. 11), four-hand music was mass-produced and consumed eagerly, even fetishistically, as Daub argues in Chapter 2. As four-hand music represents mainly transcriptions of orchestral works, the music becomes a kind of collectible simulacrum. Collectible and commodified, it is fetishized in the Marxist sense. Being a representation or simulacrum of something that cannot be grasped “in itself,” it is also fetishized in the Freudian sense. The nineteen-year-old Friedrich Nietzsche’s Christmas wish-list in 1863 reads “(1) The *Grand Duo* by F. Schubert, arranged for four hands; (2) Düntzer’s edition of Goethe’s lyric poems.” Nietzsche does not request solo music but rather music that must be played by more than one person. The distinction here is that, much like a video-game console for today’s teenager, the piano could be played solo or in company, depending on the software—four-handed or two-handed.

A more in-depth discussion of this “software,” those troublesome notes on the page that everyone now appears to be moving away from, is the only thing missing from Daub’s rich framework. His best musicological point is the intriguing notion that we might consider the subdivision of the keyboard into regions for four busy hands as a kind of “terminal moraine of the decline of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century music’s *harmonia*, which undertook to harmonize contrapuntal lines” (p. 10). Here, the four hands of the two bodies at the keyboard might be understood as analogous to the four voices of the traditional *stilo antico* contrapuntal matrix. Also intriguing is Daub’s notion of the *primo* as “mechanical songbird.” As the *secondo* usually pedals, “[w]hen it opens its mouth, the other player determines what kind of sound emerges.”⁹ Daub asks us to imagine “a singer whose sound could be manipulated by the accompanist just by pushing down a pedal!” (p. 125). Researchers interested in musical notation might have taken this idea further and then examined four-hand duets for pedal markings. A brief exploration finds instances of pedal markings in both *primo* and *secondo* parts and also evidence that responsibility for the pedals swapped from player to player, if the markings in the respective parts are anything to go by. So entwining arms were also entwining legs. This image lends credence to Daub’s remarkable close reading of the monstrous four-handed rat-king in E. T. A. Hoffman’s *Prinzessin Brambilla* (pp. 198ff.).

Four-handed music “fulfilled wishes, unleashed fears, and set dreams into motion” (p. 212). Certainly the novelists in Daub’s account understood the perfor-

⁹ I can attest to this eerie quality: demonstrating passages of Schubert’s Fantasy in C major, op. 15 recently in a piano lesson, I found that the student consistently pedaled my examples as I stood over him at the keyboard. It was a strangely intimate gesture that struck me as over-familiar in a way I cannot rationally explain.

mative power of the medium. Close descriptions, such as that used by Davies or indeed by nineteenth- and twentieth-century novelists, are enlightening because they reveal what was culturally significant or portentous. They are also relevant in what they *don't* say, in how they “discriminate,” as Davies puts it (p. 183). The ghostly ears, hands, and throats of those from the past continue to fascinate us because they provide us with alternative ways of knowing or imagining.