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REVIEW ESSAY

Recalibrating Beethoven Reception through the Domestic Sphere

Nancy November, *Beethoven's Symphonies Arranged for the Chamber: Sociability, Reception, and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). xx + 258 pp. £78.00 hardback; £23.99 paperback; $31.99 eBook.

Nancy November, ed. *Chamber Arrangements of Beethoven's Symphonies: Part 1, Symphonies Nos. 1, 3, and 5 Arranged for Quartet Ensembles*, Recent Researches in the Music of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, vol. 75 (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2019), xxiv + 302 pp. $400.00.

Part 2, Wellington's Victory and Symphonies Nos. 7 and 8 Arranged for String Quintet, Recent Researches in the Music of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, vol. 77 (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2019), xvii + 250 pp. $340.00.

Part 3, Symphonies Nos. 2, 4, and 6 Arranged for Large Ensembles, Recent Researches in the Music of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, vol. 79 (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2020), xvi + 413 pp. $480.00

For many, if not most, musicologists, the words 'Beethoven', 'symphony' and 'arrangement' will evoke the four-hand piano transcriptions that were a prominent feature of middle-class music-making in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century European home. It is a world well captured in the memoir of Henry Holiday, acclaimed painter and the owner of a London glassworks firm:

> When I left work, at 6 or soon after, my wife and I have nearly always played duets. We have, I fancy, the most complete library possible of four-hand arrangements: all the orchestral and chamber-music of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms … The intimacy this gave us with the subject-matter of all these compositions greatly enhanced our enjoyment of them when we heard them at concerts.[1]

And yet, this mode of relating to Beethoven's symphonic music, as Nancy November's book *Beethoven's Symphonies Arranged for the Chamber* and her critical editions of arrangements of the symphonies for chamber ensembles reveal, was only part of the story – especially in

[1] Henry Holiday, *Reminiscences of My Life* (London: William Heinemann, [1914]): 364–5.

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the years 1800–1830, when publishers released such arrangements for piano quartet, string quintet, septet, and more, on a significant scale.

By its very existence, November's new body of scholarship challenges the long-held negativity about arrangements of Beethoven's music: works written off as a disservice to what Beethoven created, or, as November represents the attitude, 'hastily produced, low-quality "spin-offs" for a popular market, which do not largely respect or fully represent their originals' (book, p. 7).[2] In building her corrective, the author pursues a multi-faceted argument around matters of reception, canon formation and music's social function in the cultural and ideological milieu in which such arrangements were created and experienced. She insists on the importance of *not* assessing them in terms of how closely they represent the composer's sanctioned orchestral texts, but of using alternative parameters to consider their value (following commentators at the time). As a result, arrangements emerge as crucial vectors of the changing meanings that Beethoven's symphonies took on during the nineteenth century, and the forgotten communities who played and listened to the symphonies in these formats are brought firmly into the reception picture. Further, November's research provides a welcome counterpoint to the emphasis on the public sphere and concert performances in Beethoven reception more generally, adding to a growing body of work on the nineteenth-century private sphere. Implicit in her findings is an invitation to consider how public and private music-making were intertwined, and to remember that the audience for Beethoven's music was almost always limited by socio-economic class.

Editions and book are closely related, with the arrangements selected for the former playing a central part in the monograph. Organized by performing forces in three volumes, the edition covers symphonies arranged for quartet (two piano quartets and one string quartet [symphonies 1, 3 and 5] in Part 1); for string quintet with two violas (symphonies 7 and 8 and *Wellington's Victory* Op. 91 in Part 2); and for larger ensembles (sextet, septet, nonet; two including wind as well as strings [symphonies 2, 4 and 6] in Part 3). In each volume, a General Preface depicting the historical popularity of chamber arrangements gives way to bespoke Introductions that combine essays on the arrangers and arrangements in question with discussion of the editorial-performance issues that November encountered and how she resolved them. Critical Reports at the end of each volume amplify her editorial decisions and methods, and meticulous documentation of where textual readings depart from the original sources reveal the basis for changes made in the editions.

For November, herself a string player, the process of editing the arrangements for publication surely generated 'insider' familiarity with how the arrangements are put together – a point worth highlighting because, in the book, much of her argument about the arrangements' value hinges on close observation of arrangers' choices for texture, timbre, articulations, dynamic markings and idiomatic string-writing. The editions' introductions provide valuable discussions of the historical context and the arrangements in question and will be especially useful to instrumentalists who have a serious interest in performing the works and seek reliable information about them. Inevitably, the book's narrative overlaps with the information in the edition volumes, but the former expands intellectually on the latter to a considerable degree. Besides, even though select passages from the editions' scores are reproduced in the book's music examples, anyone reading the book will find it a boon to have the editions at hand.

[2] For discussion of the issue, she points to Christopher Hogwood, 'In Praise of Arrangements: The "Symphony Quintetto"', *Studies in Music History Presented to H. C. Robbins Landon on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Otto Biba and David Wyn Jones (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996): 82–104, at 83.

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The Where, What, When, and Why

The lion's share of *Beethoven's Symphonies Arranged for the Chamber* focuses on the 1800–1830 period in Vienna, a decision that the author justifies in several ways. These include the city's importance at that time as a centre for music publishing, especially of arrangements of large works for chamber genres; Vienna's vibrant culture of domestic high-serious chamber music-making that generated a fecund consumer base; and the early nineteenth century era as a crucial one for the canonization of Beethoven's music. Time and place are confirmed by the cover image. Cropped from a hand-coloured engraving of c. 1800, it depicts the lively street on which the shop of music publisher Sigmund Anton Steiner – whose business strategy for issuing arrangements of Beethoven's music is unpacked in one of the central chapters – was situated. The final chapter, which reaches into the late nineteenth century to consider the burgeoning four-hand piano transcription industry was, for this reviewer, an unexpected bonus. Relatedly, if Vienna was an important national centre for the manufacture, sale and distribution of printed music in the early 1800s, its music-publishing economy was simultaneously becoming ever more interconnected with firms in other European countries. In consequence, the book peeps occasionally at hubs beyond Austria, most notably German cities and London, and the narrative sometimes hits a pan-national tone. Since my own familiarity is with the socio-cultural history of music, especially in nineteenth-century Britain, this essay places emphasis on such aspects and introduces complementary cameos from the British historical perspective to broaden the picture further.

November's opening chapter is a scene-setting discussion about the mania for arrangements in the early nineteenth century, from which we apprehend that arranging skills were considered part of a composer's apprenticeship. They were also, November argues, a way of learning how to compose chamber music and score a musical argument for small forces (presumably an intensification of what the apprenticeship approach of copying out exemplars delivered).[3] In Vienna, where musicians were increasingly becoming less reliant on traditional forms of patronage and working in freelance capacities, arranging music was an important source of income. This chapter also lays down a fundamental premise that runs through the book: that a good chamber arrangement was understood by its maker as an interpretative act, akin to the (then) growing views of literary translation as a transformative process that brought new meanings to a prose text. To wit, in musical 'translation', the job went further than matter-of-fact transcription. Craft and skill were involved, and imaginative solutions not only compensated for differences of texture, timbre, instrumentation and idiom between the originating and destination genres but introduced new compositional elements and effects as well. (Difference was expected: in 1830s London, for example, chamber music aficionado John Ella complained in his diary, having played through an arrangement for violin and piano of one of Joseph Mayseder's string quartets, that the arranger had transcribed the string lines too literally onto the piano, noting that good arrangers adjust them with discretion to the 'Genius of the particular instrument substituted').[4] Beethoven, it turns out, blew hot and cold about arrangements, railing against unauthorized arrangements of his music, yet sometimes approving third-party versions. He even reworked some of his own chamber works for different mediums in his early career, in

[3] On the tradition, see Matthew Joseph Hall, 'Copying Bach: Compositional Emulation and Originality in Apprenticeships with J. S. Bach, 1720–1750' (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2019). Beethoven himself copied out Mozart's quartets K387 and K464 as preparation for writing his own first set, Op. 18; see Edward Klorman, 'Mozart's Influence on Nineteenth-Century Composers', *Mozart in Context*, ed. Simon P. Keefe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 273–82, at 275.

[4] John Ella, diary entry for 1 Jan 1836, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, Ella Collection, MS Ella 106. Ella levelled the criticism at all six arrangements of Mayseder's quartets in the published set he was using.

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what were meaningful opportunities for him to 'rethink' his compositions (p. 11). November selects his arrangement of the Wind Octet Op. 103 as the String Quintet Op. 4 to validate how such changes do more than 'make up for missing voices', showing how he exploits the capabilities of two violins, two violas, and cello (p. 15).

The three subsequent chapters position case-studies of early-century arrangements of the symphonies within topically angled discussions – 'Arrangers and Authority' (Chapter 2); 'Selling Arrangements, Constructing the Canon' (Chapter 3); 'Beethoven and Steiner's Plan' (Chapter 4) – all of them interweaving the book's core themes of reception and canon formation in relation to significant contextual factors about the environment in which the pieces were consumed. Chapter 5 rounds out this coverage with a broader, ontological discussion of how such arrangements of Beethoven's symphonies were understood in their own era, exploring the roles of arranger, performer, and listener. Most of the works analyzed in the central chapters are in the A-R volumes and were produced by arrangers whom November chose as 'a cross-section of the finest ... of the era' (book, p. 2). They were people who had professional connections with Vienna, Beethoven, or both, and include Carl Zulehner, Michael Gotthard Fischer, Ferdinand Ries, William Watts, Johann Nepomuk Hummel and the mostly uncredited musicians whose arrangements were published by Steiner's firm.

The range of chamber music genres that this early-century generation of arrangers worked with is discussed in depth early on (pp. 21–32), a treatment I appreciated for how well it underlines two important elements of classical music culture at the time: first, that the very idea of chamber music was understood loosely (the hierarchy of genres that would later place the string quartet at its apex had not fully coalesced) and second, that socio-economic contexts, including geographic locations and transnational linkages, were determinants of production and consumption. Referencing the results of her statistical survey of genres used for first-edition arrangements of Beethoven's symphonies published from 1800 to 1830 (pie chart, p. 22), November reveals that arrangements for string quartets and quintets claimed an almost-similar share of the market (8 per cent and 10 per cent respectively). The slightly greater popularity of the string quintet shines helpful light on Beethoven's choice for his Op. 4, not forgetting his *echt* quintet (Op. 29), with both genres marginally outranked by arrangements for instrumental septet (12 per cent) and piano quartet (14 per cent). Moreover, arrangements with piano (cast in multiple genres) add up to almost two-thirds of the editions tallied, with those for piano solo, piano duo or four-hand piano occupying 45 per cent of the market. Dwarfing all others including the string quartet, these proportions speak to the dominance of domestic (largely female) piano culture in Vienna, even at this early period and – since women were all but barred from playing stringed instruments until much later in the century – help to explain why piano quartet arrangements of Beethoven outnumber those for string quartet. November's finding also counters the much-repeated idealization of the string quartet as the preferred genre for private music-making in Vienna in the early part of the nineteenth-century (p. 22; citing Eduard Hanslick's later commentary on this topic).[5] Even so, the string quartet held considerable appeal for arrangers, not least for the convenient canvas provided by its four-voice texture, but also because of the string quartet's growing musical status as the chamber genre *sans pareil.* Yet here's the rub: the string quintet was just as popular too in the arrangement arena. The quintet, as an 1810 *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* article suggests, was already considered of comparable stature to the quartet – a useful period judgement that evinces genre hierarchies being under negotiation during the early 1800s (cited pp. 27–28).[6] Notably, where arrangements of orchestral music were concerned, the quintet's extra viola held strong possibilities for thickening texture and varying timbre.

[5] Eduard Hanslick, *Geschichte des Concertwesens in Wien*, vol. 1 (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1869): 202.

[6] Johann Conrad Wilhelm Petiscus, 'Ueber Quartettmusik', *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 12/33 (1810): col. 517.

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Like the string quartet, string quintets were understood as chamber music for men, but when the piano was combined with strings (usually piano trio or quartet), women had opportunities to enter the male ambit. And with the arrival of arrangements, women found a means to participate in playing a type of music (orchestral works) that societal norms dictated was a men-only activity. This advance, notes November, permitted them some leadership in musical decision-making ('setting the tempo, giving other timing cues, and delivering crucial melodic and harmonic material') (p. 136). Some arrangers headed towards still larger chamber ensembles (typically mixes of winds and strings), picking genres that were becoming hot favourites for recreational male music-making in German-speaking regions and capitalizing on what she calls the 'pragmatics and sociability' (p. 34) that was bound up with pieces that involved a larger number of players. Indeed, in Vienna, this 'rage' for large ensembles benefitted from the ready supply of skilled wind players from military bands. Already by 1817, five Beethoven symphonies had been published as arrangements for nonet.

Time after time in the central chapters, the value of a skilful chamber arrangement emerges as residing in its role in generating altered or new meanings for the symphony from which it derives. There is also suggestion that types of meaning appear to have been conditioned in part by each chosen genre, inviting us to recognize that the same symphony was understood differently depending on (for instance) whether it is presented as a piano trio or a septet for winds and strings.

We understand, too, that arrangements worked to reinforce the ongoing processes that were establishing Beethoven's symphonies as masterworks. This was no overnight process. As is well known, especially in the early nineteenth century, Beethoven's symphonies presented considerable challenges of comprehension to both players and listeners, and those challenges increased as the composer added to the numbered sequence. Besides, it quickly became a commonplace that Beethoven's symphonic music demanded the familiarity of repeated hearings if it were to win listener acceptance. Arrangements could serve that need for domestic consumers, but critics were probably also helped in coming to grips with the stylistic innovations of the orchestral original by playing arrangements (especially those for piano) or by listening to them.

The final chapter, titled "'Completely Absorbed by the Piano'", focuses on the popularity of arrangements made solely for piano(s), with an emphasis on four-hand versions. Here the author tackles the later nineteenth century, fleshing out the musical and social actualities of a second wave of new editions of Beethoven's symphony arrangements that she has identified in Chapter 4 as arising between 1870 and 1900, and reminding readers that the popularity of piano culture in this period was not new. A key topic is how arranging technique found in late-century repertoire compares with what is manifest in the earlier arrangements by Czerny and Hummel. Beyond continuing to analyze canonization dynamics, November deepens her discussion of players' roles in creating their own readings of Beethoven's symphonies in the home.

New Thinking for Beethoven Reception

Beethoven's Symphonies Arranged for the Chamber breaks new ground in several ways, but especially for what it offers Beethoven reception studies. When we think about the early nineteenth-century reception of Beethoven's orchestral music as heard in performance, whether it be through the ears of the critic or as an assessment of how audiences responded to it, the imagined location is usually the European concert hall. November's book stands such thinking on its head by inviting readers to consider that the embodied aural memory of each of Beethoven's symphonies was, for far more people than those who attended orchestral concerts, located *only* in the chamber arrangements that domestic music-makers

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repeatedly played and/or heard. If the extent to which arrangements for the home captured the sense of the orchestral 'massivity' (November's word) that Beethoven originally encapsulated in his symphonic scores varied, the most accomplished arrangers clearly found myriad ways of 'translating' them into chamber genres and creating new 'meanings', while retaining respect for the composer's original conception.

What those changed meanings amounted to is elaborated in November's discussions of her chosen arrangements, where she furnishes the performer as well as the listener with significant agency in the work's reception and frames both roles as contributing to the 'completion' of the symphony in a domestic setting. This contention has much in common with Christopher Small's still relevant concept of 'musicking', the definition for which he proposed in 1998 as a framework for studying music as an activity as opposed to 'a thing', whether material or abstract: 'To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing'.[7]

Albeit that one might want to adjust the parenthesis to read 'composing *or arranging*', since November rightly accords agency also to the arranger in the music's reception journey. Emphasizing that textures and timbres of the original orchestral version were often inventively handled by arrangers, she notes that such alterations met with the approval of knowledgeable reviewers (pp. 164–5). She also supplies examples. For instance, the unidentified arranger of the Seventh Symphony for string quintet (issued by Steiner, 1816) thoughtfully exploited opportunities offered by the extra viola to transmit the essence of the textural complexities of the opening movement (pp. 126–8). Zulehner, in his arrangement of Beethoven's First Symphony for string quartet (1828), conspicuously altered dynamic markings to convey a dramatic effect that Beethoven had conjured through a change in orchestration in the second movement (pp. 52–3). And Ries, at the end of the exposition in the first movement of his version of the *Eroica* for piano quartet (1857), added two bars to the work by repeating the preceding motif and thickening the texture through a viola-doubling. The edit elongates the decrescendo and dominant preparation before the first-time bar, all to emphasize the return to the top of the movement (see pp. 182–4). Perhaps Ries, in making this change, thought he might help listeners understand 'where they were' linearly in this unprecedentedly long first movement?

Of course, what was supplied in the parts was just a beginning, since the arrangement had to be brought to life by players. Further, in November's reading of the process, instrumentalists 'completed' the work in performing it, thus giving the symphony new meaning. Moreover, they expected to have that agency. The most suggestive illustration of this concept resides in her discussion of the musicians' role in the string quintet arrangement of *Wellington's Victory*, a.k.a. the 'Battle Symphony', the piece that Beethoven armed with a battery of percussion and theatrical suggestion. Performance indications in the orchestral version for simulated cannon fire along with cued English and French trumpet and drum calls are carried over into the quintet parts and presented in a manner that suggests they were intended to be realized. String players stamping their feet is one possibility for the cannon effects, says November, but by drawing in research by Sam Girling to show that percussion instruments were 'surprisingly common in domestic music-making, especially in Britain' in the early 1800s, she speculates that the sounds of each side's cannons could have been rendered by additional players sounding cymbals or a toy drum (p. 144).[8] She

[7] Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998): 2, 9.

[8] Sam Girling, 'Curious Virtuosity: The Emergence and Decline of Unconventional Repertory for Timpani and Percussion in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries' (PhD diss., University of Auckland, 2018): 135–40.

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also imagines how the two armies' trumpet and drum incipits might have been performed by paired upper strings, perhaps organizing the ensemble spatially to dramatize the battle visually (pp. 144–7).

Elsewhere, the author applies the 'completion' thesis to more standard markings, arguing that in certain passages, players would have expected to match articulations or dynamics that are inconsistently presented in the printed parts (the 'sporadic application of staccato dots' was apparently especially rampant) (p. 185). Discussing Fischer's arrangement of the Sixth Symphony for string sextet (second movement), for instance, she states that '[c]hamber musicians would have been expected to listen carefully to one another, and render like passages in a like manner where appropriate' (p. 69).[9] Matching of bow strokes is, of course, a touchstone skill among competently trained quartet players today; indeed, with such performers in mind, November rectifies many such missing instructions in her editions, often by reference to parallel passages, the musical context, or even the original orchestral parts. Performers with a scholarly interest in these decisions will want to read the editions' Introductions, which provide further examples and discussion, and to consult the Critical Reports. Still, the 'matching' thesis raises questions in relation to performance standards of the time, given that November's book suggests that most of the people playing the arrangements were amateurs, and by implication (since the prevailing context is Austro-Germany) good ones. Since logic tells us that, regardless of the national location, musicians' accomplishment levels varied, one might ask: how well, if at all, would the matching of staccatos have been attained, or even attempted, by amateur musicians with limited competence or training, especially when their attention was focused on challenges of rhythm or fingering? Further, in what situations were matched articulations deemed appropriate or, more important, inappropriate? Chamber music was, after all, an inherently conversational genre at this period, and in passages where horizontal dialog is to the fore in the arrangements, there is a case for allowing the voices to say the same or similar things in different, not uniform, ways.[10] November eventually acknowledges this last point on p. 185, where she goes on to flesh out an example of non-matching articulations in Hummel's arrangement of the Fifth Symphony for piano quartet (1827), framing them as his deliberate attempt to bring out different orchestral colours within the chamber texture simultaneously.

Of course, it was the listener who, when the music triggered their imagination, played the final part in the 'completion' process, an idea that is helpfully underscored by contemporary press commentary. An 1829 reviewer of the 1807 piano quartet arrangement of the *Eroica* felt the reduction had considerable benefits and was ultimately unbothered by the loss of sonic grandeur, writing 'One is readily satisfied ... with a half-accurate silhouette ... Then fantasy begins its sweet play, and all the world certainly knows the beneficial effect of the powers of imagination and recollection' (p. 168). Quite possibly this critic had previously heard the piece in its orchestral garb, but for many players who attempted these arrangements and the people who listened in, particularly those who lived far from the cities where orchestral concerts took place, such reference points for recollection did not yet exist. For them, the arrangement *was* the symphony. November's work, an object lesson

[9] Similarly, see pp.111–12, 182–5 regarding Ries's arrangements of the Second and Third symphonies.

[10] Non-uniformity of ensemble might have included intentional temporal non-togetherness, a topic that scholars of nineteenth-century historically informed performance practice have begun to explore. See Claire Holden's essay on 'expressive asynchrony' in orchestral string sections, '"The Liberty to 'Sing' to Their Heart's Content": Principles and Practices of Ensemble in Nineteenth-Century Orchestral String Sections', in *Practice in Context: Historically Informed Practices in Nineteenth-Century Instrumental Music*, ed. Claire Holden, Eric F. Clarke and Cayenna Ponchione-Bailey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2025): 195–226.

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in Hans Robert Jauss's 'horizon of expectation', thus invites us to ponder how such music-makers might have responded if they ever subsequently had the opportunity to hear the works in their original orchestral formats.[11]

Relatedly, those who played arrangements got to know Beethoven's symphonic music viscerally, through their fingers – a way of knowing that the author develops compellingly in Chapter Six as 'embodied listening', a term that derives from literary theorist Roland Barthes, whose essay 'Musica Practica' (1970) reflected on his experiences playing four-hand piano transcriptions and spoke of 'creative, embodied *listening*'.[12] November dwells on Barthes at length, highlighting his view that in playing an arrangement the performer becomes a creator of new meaning who writes the work afresh 'as though the body was hearing', and in a footnote she makes the connection with Barthes' celebrated essay 'The Death of the Author' (1967), which privileges readers' responses over authorial intention (p. 208).[13]

The processes of canon formation, rarely far from the surface in Beethoven reception studies, are a signal part of the book's revisionist tack. These processes were already in motion during Beethoven's lifetime and stretched well beyond Vienna. For example, in London, the idea of the canonic composer – 'great Beethoven', as Polish violinist Felix Yaniewicz described him to the Philharmonic Society in 1818 – conditioned willingness to attribute masterwork status to individual works, even when the music confounded understanding.[14] To the existing picture of how Beethoven's works became so venerated in Europe, November adds the important discovery that the canonization of the symphonies owed a great deal to their proliferation as domestic arrangements and subsequent rebirth in the private sphere.

Driving the domestication trend was commerce, especially the activities of music publishers, whose modes of packaging and marketing, November suggests, were apt to play subtly with consumers' thinking by underscoring the already circulating notion of the pre-eminence of Beethoven's works. One effective tool was title-page design, which could instantly telegraph notions of the music's monumentality and timelessness, and was thus primed to stoke consumer desire. Another significant practice, she argues, was the issuing of sets of arrangements of the symphonies, because it encouraged consumers to apprehend the symphonies as a 'monumental whole' (p. 101). London publishers were evidently ahead of the game here, with the firms of Tebaldo Monzani and Lewis Lavenu both issuing sets before Vienna did (c. 1807 and c. 1810; Beethoven was keen to see them). Most arrangements, however, were published singly and priced relatively low, thus increasing consumption, widening accessibility and 'helping with canon formation' – albeit in a different register (p. 77). Moreover, Steiner's publishing house in Vienna both knew the local market well and developed impressive international networks, becoming 'important … for the dissemination and canonization of [Beethoven's] music' (p. 119).

Canonization was, of course, about more than asserting the pre-eminence of a composer, work or repertoire: it was an ideology that came to frame the musical work as an inviolable

[11] Horizon of expectation is discussed in Hans Robert Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1982): 3–45. For an example of its application to Beethoven reception, see Robert Adelson, 'Beethoven's String Quartet in E flat Op.127: A Study of the First Performances', *Music & Letters* 79/2 (1998): 219–43.

[12] In Roland Barthes, *Image – Music – Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Noonday Press, 1977): 149–54.

[13] In Barthes, *Image*, 142–8.

[14] Letter cited in Cyril Ehrlich, *First Philharmonic: A History of the Royal Philharmonic Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995): 25; this tendency is discussed in relation to Beethoven's late-period string quartets in Christina Bashford, 'The Late Beethoven Quartets and the London Press, 1836–ca. 1850', *Musical Quarterly* 84/1 (2000): 84–122, at 104–5.

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whole that demanded respect, and it led to privileging authority through the 'original' version of a piece – a trend that eventually undermined the value of arrangements, as the final chapter argues. I say 'came to frame', because these ideas about the text, as November repeatedly reminds the reader, were being negotiated during the 1800–1830 era and not fully regulative by 1800, as Lydia Goehr's 1992 theorization of the 'work concept' (the inviolable artistic product) and the related idea of *Werktreue* (staying true to the composer's intended 'final' text of the work) proposed.[15]

November contends that the increased importance given to the publication of scores (vs. parts) as the nineteenth century progressed – she labels this 'score-centrism' – also fed the canonizing process for Beethoven's symphonies. She consequently identifies a landmark moment for canonization, dissemination and domestication in Steiner's decision (1816), worked out with Beethoven, to publish a slew of arrangements of the composer's newest symphonies simultaneously with both the orchestral parts and the full score, and to advertise them as authorized by the composer, thus bolstering the idea of orchestral scores as privileged originals.[16] November emphasizes how the growing availability of scores, which could be studied at home or taken to the concert room and followed during the performance, offered a new way of knowing the symphonies and one that complemented the physical experience of playing arrangements. This use of scores is typically understood as bound up with the development of the passive, silent listener that became so idealized.[17] At the same time, such scores invested the composer's original intentions with an aura of special importance, encouraging attitudes of *Werktreue*-ish respect, a point the book reiterates. An additional pillar of this argument sees the body of technically challenging piano-duet arrangements of Beethoven symphonies that emerged in the late nineteenth century as becoming 'increasingly score-like', since these versions downplay elements of texture, timbre, and register in favour of harmony and motivic development, and direct 'performers to be "true to" the score, rather than allowing them to "complete" the music in performance' (p. 194).

The author elaborates this point in her final chapter by leaning into the value of piano arrangements of Beethoven's music in preparing home pianists for hearing the real thing in the concert hall (recall Henry Holiday's testimony at top of this essay) or for 'reminding them of the [concert] experience' afterwards through a hands-on rendition (p. 225). Arrangements thus stood to develop effective listening skills for symphonically conceived works. Although she does not mention it, such habits were often complemented and strengthened, especially in England at this period, by listeners' close study (often at home) of the 'analytical' programme notes that were provided at most high-serious orchestral concerts. Equipped with music examples of key themes and motifs, often in piano score, the remarkable corpus of lengthy notes written by George Grove for the Crystal Palace Saturday Concerts in London over more than 30 years are notable for mapping linear journeys through each movement of the symphonies of Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms and others. They were also, of course, vehicles for establishing values of canon and *Werktreue*. Indeed, Grove developed his thinking on Beethoven's symphonies into widely read books

[15] Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

[16] For discussion of the extent of Beethoven's involvement in the project, see especially November's introduction to Part 3 of her edition (pp. xii–xiv).

[17] The advent of silent listening has been much discussed; for some recent perspectives, see *The Oxford Handbook of Music Listening in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Christian Thorau and Hansjakob Ziemer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

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(1884, 1896), which further serviced what November calls a 'shared discourse for canon formation' (p. 215).[18]

Entwinements with Social and Cultural History

As the commentary above has indicated, November's brand of reception history is notable for how it integrates documentation and scholarship relating to the social and cultural environments in which Beethoven arrangements were born and used, providing welcome focus on consumers, audiences and the business of music publishing. The contextualization of Austro-German socio-cultural life is also prominent, with leisure culture and societal rules spotlighted to help explain why string playing was such a popular upper middle-class recreation for men in the 1815–48 period – and hence why the market for string quartets and quintets was so lively in Germanic regions. Core reasons, she notes, can be identified in the then-current limitations on group activities in public that pushed men towards the private sphere – strongly associated with feminine music-making, of course – to avoid scrutiny by the authorities. November sees the networking and male bonding inherent in chamber music playing as feeding desires for *Bildung* (self-cultivation and purpose), a cultural mindset she further interprets as offering men chances to combat feelings of political powerlessness. If women were shut out of participating as string players, they nevertheless found opportunities in the ensemble arrangements that included a piano to make music alongside men.

With the scene thus set, sociality looms large. Having articulated the challenge of finding sources for documenting how consumers 'actually used arrangements', November provides three indicative testimonies of Viennese gatherings at which arrangements of large-ensemble works by a range of composers are mentioned or might have been played (p. 134). She then marshals evidence of publisher operations, press advertising and reviews, as well as both the Beethoven arrangements themselves and broader scholarship on the domestic sphere, to develop arguments around social function and meaning. There is emphasis on the enjoyment ('fun') that playable arrangements for small ensembles offered, as well as the inherent educational value (in the sense of getting to know the music) of playing with others. (And sidebar here: the two were not mutually exclusive.) With piano(s)-only arrangements, November finds a bifurcation of market appeal in terms of their ease or difficulty, especially at the century's end, although she points out that technically challenging arrangements were not new and (citing American critic J.S. Dwight in the 1840s) that they could provide both emotional satisfaction and musical understanding through the physical struggle involved.[19] Over time, four-hand piano-duet arrangements became open to male–female partnering, despite proximity of the performers' hands, which gave rise to socially suspect intimacies when the duettists' fingers touched. Also, difficult keyboard arrangements – hitherto associated with men – eventually provided women with opportunities to participate in ways that were both transgressive and emancipating (pp. 212–13).

[18] George Grove, *Beethoven's Nine Symphonies: Analytical Essays* (Boston: G. H. Ellis, 1884); *Beethoven and his Nine Symphonies* (London: Novello, Ewer and Co., 1896). On Grove's notes and their dissemination, see Christina Bashford, 'Not Just "G.": Towards a History of the Programme Note', in *George Grove, Music and Victorian Culture*, ed. Michael Musgrave (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 115–42; and 'Educating England: Networks of Programme-Note Provision in the Nineteenth Century', in *Music in the British Provinces, 1690–1914*, ed. Rachel Cowgill and Peter Holman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007): 349–76; Bruno Bower, '"Applied" before Musicology?: George Grove, Programme Notes, and the *Dictionary*', *The Routledge Companion to Applied Musicology*, ed. Chris Dromey (New York: Routledge, 2023): 46–54.

[19] J.S. Dwight, 'Academy of Music – Beethoven's Symphonies', *The Pioneer* 1/1 (1843): 26–8, at 28.

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The relationship between, on the one hand, concert life (initially weaker in Germany than in Paris or London) with its potential for enabling people to hear orchestral performances of the symphonies and – on the other – the domestic consumption of arrangements, is tricky to unpack. November allows for a symbiotic relationship between the two in the 1800–1830 era in Germany, with concerts stoking rather than dampening demand for arrangements for the home, not least because orchestral performances were 'largely inaccessible' to middle-class amateur players and listeners (pp. 99, 41). This is a wise interpretation, since much turns on questions of social and geographic access to concerts, their frequency (even in concert-stuffed London, performances were predominantly seasonal until the end of the century) and the limited number of times someone might hear a Beethoven symphony in a lifetime, as an unidentified critic in Germany perfectly put it in 1865 (p. 207).[20]

Some of November's strongest revelations about arrangements are carved from knowable aspects of publisher activities, such as her quantitative analyses of first editions and her interrogation of Breitkopf & Härtel's inventory of its publications of Beethoven's music (pp. 21–5, 59–62, 140–41 and pp. 87–97). Documenting 1816 to 1842, the latter source includes valuable print-run and revenue data.[21] Both discussions are excellent examples of what socio-economic historian of British music Cyril Ehrlich (1925–2004) often informally quipped were the missed opportunities of what can be uncovered by 'doing some counting'.[22] The inventory tables and the accompanying discussion will reward close study, revealing just how popular Beethoven arrangements were (likely producing 'just over half of the firm's net profits' from Beethoven's music; p. 95) and confirming that for Breitkopf, four-hand piano arrangements were the geese that laid golden eggs. Helpfully illustrated with graphs and charts, the first-edition analyses (Chapters 1 and 4) set up a contention that the popularity of Beethoven arrangements waned after the 1820s, to be reignited c. 1870 with increased production of piano-only arrangements and a 'change of consumer base', as market demand shifted towards women (p. 151). November also sees the downturn in small-ensemble arrangements mid-century as 'probably largely due to socio-political factors', namely the disruption brought about by the German revolutions of 1848–49, which took middle-class men's 'time and energy away from their cultural and leisure activities' with attention refocusing on the arts and *Bildung* only after the foundation of the German Empire in 1871 (p. 195).

While a downturn in the production of new editions is undeniable and a fall-off in the popularity of ensemble arrangement-playing by the century's end a reasonable explanation, I nevertheless wonder if the situation was rather messier in practice, especially in relation to the transnational context: if people in London were not seeking new editions of Beethoven symphony arrangements or even buying older ones from publishers' backlists from the 1850s, factors other than revolutionary politics would surely have been at play. In addition, publishers' perceptions of drooping demand might not have translated to an immediate, full collapse of arrangement-playing in society. Possibilities worth considering are that many music-loving households already had a library of symphony arrangements for small ensembles that they were content to continue to play, and/or that sets of parts were passed down through generations of players, purchased second-hand, or loaned around in local communities. To interrogate this imagined scenario, scholars ideally need a type of data that is rarely found, especially inventories of domestic music collections

[20] *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 3/12 (1865): col. 201.

[21] The list, held in the State Archive of Saxony, was compiled from Breitkopf & Härtel's *Geschäftsbücher* and is transcribed by November in Table 3.2 (pp. 89–94).

[22] Ehrlich's methods and approaches are outlined in the Preface to *Music and British Culture, 1785–1914: Essays in Honour of Cyril Ehrlich*, ed. Christina Bashford and Leanne Langley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): v–vi.

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both in and beyond Germany. Unstudied material relating to the London situation in the 1860s, however, offers related insights: namely, the catalogue of a circulating library that was operated by music publisher and dealer Ewer & Co., a company described in the 1890s as 'for many years almost the only importers of foreign music in this country'.[23] Circulating music libraries are an overlooked spoke in both the wheel of music dissemination and the spread of composers' reputations, as Hans Lenneberg argued in 1982.[24] Moreover, circulating music libraries were not new or unique to London; they were well established in German cities by 1800 (Hanslick was a fan), and Vienna's first arrived in 1817, making them pertinent to this argument.[25]

The Ewer library was created in 1860, when its publishing business was sold to its manager William Witt, at which point a 'Musical Library that offered for circulation every branch of musical composition' was added.[26] The published catalogue lists 51,801 items, borrowable by people able to pay the subscription terms (three shillings a week).[27] It includes chamber arrangements of Beethoven's symphonies: nos. 1 and 2 for string quartet; nos. 1, 2, 4 and 5 for string quintet; no.6 for string sextet; nos. 1–7 for piano quartet; nos. 2, 3, 6, 7, 8 and the *Battle Symphony* for piano trio; nos. 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 for piano and violin duet; and all nine plus *Wellington's Victory* for piano solo, two performers on one piano, and two or four performers on two pianos.[28] The initiative was an attempt to grow sales, since the music-for-loan was advertised as available for purchase once tried out at home. Absent any loan (or sales) statistics for Ewer's catalogue, no firm conclusions can be reached about popular uptake, but the presence of Beethoven symphonies in the 1860 catalogue (which continued to be published after Ewer's merger with Novello in 1867) is suggestive of some continuation in the domestic performance culture for chamber ensemble arrangements of Beethoven symphonies in Britain, and possibly elsewhere, beyond 1850.[29] The topic invites further research.

Future Paths?

The contributions to Beethoven reception that November's body of work contains are important and thought-provoking. Any scholarship that breaks new ground with a topic in the ways that hers does will almost certainly invite studies that extend or deepen the frame of investigation. Complementary work is already under way in Germany and the UK through the digital musicology project 'Beethoven in the House', which is undertaking detailed, systematic comparisons of the arrangements that Steiner published of the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies, and *Wellington's Sieg*.[30]

In her book's conclusion, November suggests three ways ahead, two of which may resonate with scholars of the nineteenth century. One is a call for work on places outside Europe, including the Southern Hemisphere; the other is for studying arrangements of

[23] A.J.H[ipkins], 'Ewer & Co.', *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. George Grove, vol. 4, appendix, ed. J. A. Fuller Maitland (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895): 630.

[24] Hans Lenneberg, 'Early Circulating Libraries and the Dissemination of Music', *Library Quarterly* 52/2 (1982): 122–30.

[25] Lenneberg, 'Early Circulating Libraries', 123–6.

[26] H[ipkins], 'Ewer & Co.'.

[27] *Catalogue of Ewer & Co's Universal Circulating Musical Library* (London: Ewer & Co., [1860]).

[28] The arrangements of the *Battle Symphony* were for piano, violin and cello; the arrangement of no. 3, however, substitutes flute for violin. Arrangers' names are noted only occasionally.

[29] As *Catalogue of the Universal Circulating Music Library* (London: Novello, Ewer & Co., ?1868).

[30] See 'Beethoven in the House: Digital Studies of Domestic Music Arrangements', https://domestic-beethoven.eu/ (accessed 14 September 2025).

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extracts from larger works – slow movements, famous tunes, etc. – another mostly missing plank in Beethoven reception history. A further angle for investigation in relation to Beethoven might be detected in the correlation she sees in Johann Traeg's 1799 catalogue between the high pricing of arrangements of Haydn and Mozart symphonies for chamber ensembles (noted in relation to the cost of works originally conceived for string quartet) and the perceived high artistic value of the symphonies (p. 30). In truth, there is much yet to explore about arrangements in relation to nineteenth-century musical traditions, out of which transnational or comparative social, cultural and reception histories of all manner of music could emerge.

Future researchers will want to proceed with a sense of what Beethoven's symphonies sounded like when performed domestically, especially in those arrangements for small or large chamber ensemble, since these presented many consumers of the early century with their sole means of knowing the symphonies. Here, the A-R publications tender many possibilities. Performance parts of all November's score editions are available for purchase (prices from $35.00 for Hummel's arrangement of Beethoven's Fifth to $108.00 for Ries's Beethoven's Second), offering much more than what can usually be achieved from score study at the library desk. One hopes, too, that professional players will be minded to record them. There is some commercial precedent beyond what is currently findable on YouTube, namely Sony's 2022 release of piano trio arrangement of Symphony no.2 in Ries's arrangement (Emanuel Ax, Leonidas Kavakos and Yo-Yo Ma), and much space to explore, including for historically informed performance practitioners who are ready to drill into the editions.[31] Playing and hearing are important paths forward. For while Nancy November has made select arrangements of Beethoven symphonies 'seen' in relation to the composer's broader reception history and has made their texts available for study and performance, the music in question has yet to be widely experienced through our own hands and ears.

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[31] The Ax–Kavakos–Ma recording is in the series Beethoven for Three, issued by Sony Classical (886449484171). Some forty years earlier, Decca issued Haydn's symphonies nos. 94, 100 and 104 in the arrangements for mixed instrumental quintet by Johann Peter Salomon (443 194-2; 1982, 1985; reissued on CD by L'Oiseau-Lyre in 1994) – a published repertoire that foreshadowed the nineteenth-century ensemble adaptations of Beethoven's symphonies. The Salomon String Quartet, the Academy of Ancient Music Chamber Ensemble and Christopher Hogwood are the performers on the recording.

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