

*THERESA HENKEL: Carl Banck und die Musikkritik in Dresden 1846–1889. Regensburg: ConBrio Verlagsgesellschaft 2021. 313 S., Abb., Tab. (Regensburger Studien zur Musikgeschichte. Band 16.)*

Gaps in research come in many shapes and sizes: Some are large and obvious, waiting decades to be filled by a suitable monograph, whereas others, minor and inconspicuous, are dealt with swiftly by a journal article. Then there are those that fly completely under the radar, their significance first perceivable after they are addressed. The music criticism of Carl Banck (1809–1889) falls into this last category, as Theresa Henkel's 2019 dissertation will, for many readers, serve not only as a first introduction to Dresden's most prominent music feuilletonist of the nineteenth century but also as an impetus to reflect upon why they had not stumbled upon this influential voice earlier.

Indeed, even in light of musicology's notorious emphasis on 'great composers', Banck's case is exceptional. Despite a prolific career in music criticism spanning a half-century – from some of the earliest contributions to Robert Schumann's *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* to reviews of Brahms's Fourth Symphony at the end of a four-decade tenure with the *Dresdner Journal* (first *Tageblatt*) – Banck is known primarily, if at all, as a composer of lieder. His criticism has been largely reduced in the literature to a few milestones: membership in Schumann's Davidsbündler circle, an unfavourable review of Franz Liszt in 1857, and even less favourable reviews of Richard Wagner in the 1840s. Thus, as Henkel ventures into uncharted water with her study, it is hardly surprising that the roots of Banck's obscurity act as a compass. Above all, it is the author's handling of two specific issues that guide the examination: preconceptions about the aesthetic and social roles of the feuilleton in comparison to specialized music journals, and the tendency

to view music critics through the lens of the composers they write about.

These questions are first dealt with on a general theoretical level in the book's "contextualizing" chapter (3), which is preceded by a biographical sketch (2). The following, by far most substantial chapter (4) then applies the problems specifically to Banck in a series of individual studies of his reception of, among others, Clara Schumann, Beethoven, Liszt, and Wagner. Here, a selection of Banck's some 2,000 texts undergoes a "diskursanalytisch geprägte[] Betrachtung" (p. 16), which includes numerous statistical evaluations of the "Aufbau und Struktur" of his reviews. Henkel also relies heavily on comparative methods to reevaluate Banck's underestimated impact as a music feuilletonist and his largely misunderstood aesthetic views. For example, the author points to semantic parallels with A. B. Marx and Eduard Hanslick to demonstrate the feuilleton's function as a mediator between music-aesthetic discourse and the broader public. Elsewhere, Hanslick is used in juxtaposition with his 'progressive' counterpart Franz Brendel to establish a measuring stick for the argument that Banck, despite his conservative reputation, was in fact indifferent to party lines.

Thanks to Henkel's decisive departure from methods in music criticism research that accentuate the perspective of the composer – a resolve that culminates in a long overdue refutation of Helmut Kirchmeyer's dubious assessment of Banck as "der eigentliche Wagnertöter" (pp. 253ff.) – the approach certainly fulfils at least one central objective of the study: a differentiated understanding of Banck's *Musikanschauung*. However, the author also overreaches, leading to an abundance of suppositious conclusions marked by the ubiquity of modifiers such as "vermutlich", "wohl", and "vielleicht". This speaks not only to Henkel's tendency to read too far into Banck's interpretations (e.g., the elaborate explanation of why – "wahrschein-

lich" – Banck did *not* mention a certain point of discontinuity in the dramaturgy of *Zauberflöte*, p. 238), it also demonstrates the limitations of the source material consulted. While Henkel's rigorous selection process attests to the richness of Banck's own journalism as a source (pp. 16f.), the supporting material used in the examination proves largely insufficient to lend significant insight into the overriding topic of Banck in relation to "die Musikkritik in Dresden", let alone answer more specific questions, such as the extent to which the feuilleton had an "Einfluss auf die Ausgestaltung eines musikalischen Kanons und des Repertoires an den Dresdner Spielhäusern" (p. 11); or, "welche Auswirkungen konnte [Bancks] Kritik auf den Rezipienten haben?" (p. 15). The most obvious solution to this problem would be to limit the aims of the examination. On the other hand, more could certainly have been done to achieve the specified goals, especially in light of the considerable amount of space Henkel devotes to statistical evaluations of character counts that rarely address the study's hypotheses.

The shortage of complementary sources is also a weak point in Henkel's above-mentioned strategy of positioning the critic's aesthetic views opposite writers such as Marx, Hanslick, and Brendel, as the small selection of texts from such prolific authors inevitably runs the risk of oversimplifying the broader discourse. This is especially true of the complex aesthetic disputes surrounding the *Neudeutsche Schule*, which Henkel continually reduces to the "diametrale[.] Pole[.]" (p. 202) from which Brendel and Hanslick supposedly operated. Accordingly, Banck is depicted as a critic "zwischen den Stühlen" (p. 202), who promises "einen weiteren (dritten?) Weg im Fortgang des Symphonieschaffens" (p. 181), with criticism that proves itself as a "Feld, auf dem er neue Werke nicht grundsätzlich festen [...] Strukturen zuordnet, sondern sie ausschließlich nach ihrem jeweiligen künstlerischen Gehalt bewertet"

(p. 224). The objective high ground Henkel establishes for Banck here begins to wobble in an attempt to place the critic's "Prinzipien der Programmmusik" (pp. 205ff.) between Brendel and Hanslick. The ensuing argumentative muddle reaches its peak in a remark about Banck's propagation of a "klare Gestaltung der poetischen Idee" (p. 207), which Henkel sees as evidence not only of distance between Hanslick and Banck, but also of the latter's attempt to position himself "gegen den oben bereits zitierten Vorwurf Brendels, dass der Ausdruck unbestimmt sein solle"; this despite Brendel's use of reported speech in the specified quote ("Man hat gesagt, das Wesen der Tonkunst bestehe in der Unbestimmtheit des Ausdrucks", p. 206).

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated instance of the author's lack of attention when dealing with sources, Banck's texts included. Thus, the unusually high frequency of formal mishaps in the book – which range from typographical errors to incomplete sentences and footnotes – proves not just a nuisance but also a caveat to readers to double-check references themselves. This being said, it is also important not to let the shortcomings of the study obscure its significance. Looking beyond Henkel's achievement of recognizing and mitigating the imbalance between Banck's actual influence and our understanding of his role in music history, the book also provides a stimulus for researchers to look further into key issues in the history of musical criticism. These include, above all, interdependences among *Interpretations-*, *Interpreten-*, and *Kompositionskritik*; conflicts between music feuilleton and *Fachpresse*; and variations in urban centers, such as Dresden, Leipzig, and Berlin.

(Mai 2022)

Sean Reilly