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Review

Beethoven-Geflechte. A Beethoven Tapestry. Networks and Cultures of Memory, ed. Birgit Lodes und Melanie Unseld

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Andrea Lindmayr-Brandl
Paris Lodron Universität Salzburg
andrea.lindmayr-brandl@plus.ac.at
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4438-7158

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Abstract: This book is based on contributions to an interdisciplinary conference held during the Beethoven anniversary year of 2020. Echoing the idea of a "web" in its title, the review traces the connections between the individual chapters, which span several thematic sections. With its focus on aristocratic figures such as Prince Lichnowsky, as well as the salons and dances of the nobility, the book reinforces the image of Beethoven as a composer rooted in the ancien régime. Only a few chapters address his role in the social transformations that followed the Congress of Vienna.

In the course of academic research into eminent masters and their music, individuals from outside the field frequently pose the question of whether all the relevant research and discussion have already been conducted. The responses to this query primarily align with the perspectives articulated by the two editors in their Introduction, albeit expressed in a considerably more refined and sophisticated manner. In the case of Beethoven, however, this question is particularly salient, given that he is arguably the most intensely researched composer since the inception of the discipline (except perhaps

Mozart), and is subject to more popular clichés in his reception than any other composer (except perhaps Schubert).

The profound impact of Beethoven during his lifetime, and even more so in the centuries that followed, has resulted in an entrenched image of genius that has remained largely unchallenged, even by recent critical attempts at revision. Klinger's monumental Beethoven sculpture—with its naked body in glistening white marble, clenched fist, golden fleece over his legs, alabaster throne, and the black eagle at his feet—epitomises this image. The sculpture portrays Beethoven as the hero of his own oeuvre, a figure of genius, solitary and iconic, a revolutionary not of flesh and blood, but of mythic stature, a god of music.

Figure 1: Leipzig, Museum of Fine Arts, Max Klinger, sculpture of Beethoven

Birgit Lodes and Melanie Unseld took up the challenge of offering new perspectives on Beethoven, without further reinforcing his established image, during the interdisciplinary conference they organized in the Beethoven Year 2020. Their contributions are now available in printed form.[1] The two editors pursued two major research goals: first, to address the problem of historical manifestations of memory, that is, to reflect critically on the act of commemoration itself; and second, to address the gaps that have emerged as a result of dominant narratives.

The objective is to decenter Beethoven's eminent status in music history and reintegrate him into the broader context of Viennese cultural and social life. In the past, such an approach would have been referred to as contextualization; more recently, the method of network research has been used to depict the manifold relationships between actors, artefacts, and institutions. Lodes and Unseld have opted for an alternative, even more nuanced approach by employing the concept of a tapestry. Used figuratively and metaphorically, this concept is meant to conceptualize a more closely woven, less hierarchical network of relationships, one in which neither foreground and background, nor text and context, stand sharply apart.

According to this model, Beethoven was 'interwoven' into the fabric of Vienna in his time, a beautiful linguistic image that encapsulates the idea of a tapestry itself. It becomes imperative to consider Beethoven as a historical figure beyond entrenched prejudices: an artist intimately acquainted with the Viennese aristocracy, a frequent guest in salons, and a pursuer of success. At the same time, he was a contemporary witness to a period of profound political and social transformations. The close-knit network of relationships among friends, patrons, and other individuals from diverse social classes who shaped Viennese cultural life interweaves to create a dynamic fabric, one that is not static but transforms over time, repeatedly unveiling new perspectives.

The image of a tapestry can also be applied to the content-related connections among the nearly twenty contributions, whose division into four thematic blocks runs counter to the diverse interrelations between the individual texts. Within the initial thematic category, titled "Beethoven in His Time," the opening chapters—Axel Körner's exploration of the historical narrative preceding the emergence of the nation-state, and David Wyn Jones's analysis of the signatories of the 1824 petition—align closely with the overarching theme. However, already in the third chapter, Karen Hagemann's investiga-

tion into the literary memories of the Napoleonic Wars by the salonnière Caroline Pichler raises the question of whether this text might have been more appropriately placed in the third block, ”Appropriations and Memory Culture”. Furthermore, it would seem more consistent to combine the fourth chapter of the first block—Martin Scheutz's contribution on spa towns and aristocratic dedications—with texts that also focus on dedications. These include Birgit Lodes’s examination of piano variations in the aristocratic salon and Gundela Bobeth’s study of the piano song in Beethoven's time, both of which are situated in Block 2, ”Musical Sociability amongst Nobles and Higher Bougeoisie.”

This play with content-related network formations can be taken even further: the last contribution of the first block, on the early Viennese performances of *Christus am Ölberge* by Constanze Maria Köhn, connects with contemporary reports on performances of *Fidelio* discussed by Julia Ackermann (Block 3). Meanwhile, Julia Ronge's reflections on the role of Karl Fürst Lichnowsky (Block 2) draw a line back to David Wynn Jones (Block 1), while also leading forward to Thomas Seedorf's contribution on Beethoven's relationship with Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia (Block 3) in terms of biographical and reception-historical research. This series continues with the excellent first contribution in the fourth block, titled “Anniversaries and the Changing Image of Beethoven,” in which John D. Wilson uses Beethoven and his hometown of Bonn as the basis for fundamental reflections on biography and historical analysis.

Erica Buurman's text on aristocratic dance, Melanie Unseld's examination of the phenomenon of salon music, Martin Eybl's reappraisal of Beethoven as a bourgeois artist, and Henrike Rost's contribution on musical autograph albums can also be linked to various other texts in this volume, forming a dense fabric. Only the final four chapters, which deal with the Beethoven celebrations in the anniversary years of 1870 (Barabara Boisits), 1927 (Glenn Stanley, Annegret Fauser), and 1970 (Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen), constitute a self-contained, coherent block.

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The book could well have begun with this final block, since the tradition of commemorating Beethoven is itself part of history, and this publication continues that tradition, providing material for the next generation. Glenn Stanley points in this direction in his contribution on the Beethoven celebrations in the German Reich and the ideological appropriation of the composer, when

he concludes:

> ”Ideological appropriation does continue; one important thrust of academic Beethoven imaging in 2020 is moving him somewhat to the right, emphasizing his ties to the aristocracy, his religion and his less-than-revolutionary ideology. Is this a needed corrective or a new-conservative return to the conservativism of Beethoven scholarship for most of the 20th century?” (447)

Indeed, the present volume is dominated by contributions that focus on dedications to aristocratic persons, on salons and dances of the nobility, or on prominent members of the high aristocracy. A notable example is Karl Alois Prince Lichnowsky, a distinguished patron of Beethoven, who is mentioned repeatedly—whether as a signatory of the petition discussed by Jones, as an aristocratic dedicatee in the works of Scheutz and Lodes, or in the context of Eybl's convincing exploration of the historical concept of “friendship.”[2]

Figure 2: Karl Alois Fürst Lichnowsky (1761–1814)

Several authors express particular interest in the soirée held at the Lichnowsky residence in the winter of 1805, during which the revision of *Fidelio* was discussed. Unseld conceptualises the musical gathering as an aesthetic workshop (225), while Eybl examines differing recollections of the event, preserved in three considerably divergent versions. Ackermann, who has previously published a detailed article on this subject,[3] presents a network diagram illustrating the various participants in the soirée, who, depending on the source, ranged from six to twelve individuals (359). Her primary interest, however, lies in the portrayal of Beethoven's handling of the revision proposals and the narrative of the genius creator whose work must not be questioned.

Finally, Ronge, who engages most extensively with the figure of Lichnowsky,

offers a detailed examination of the fragile bond between Beethoven and the Prince, a relationship nurtured over a long period. She highlights the *Fidelio* soirée as evidence that Beethoven's ties with the princely couple continued even after he had moved his residence outside the Lichnowskys' immediate sphere of influence to the Theater an der Wien. Ronge also draws attention to Beethoven's numerous dedications not only to the Prince and his wife Maria Christine, née Thun-Hohenstein, but also to members of their widely ramified family. The following graphic provides a visual representation of this network of relationships, illustrating the depth of Beethoven's association with the nobility through these dedications.

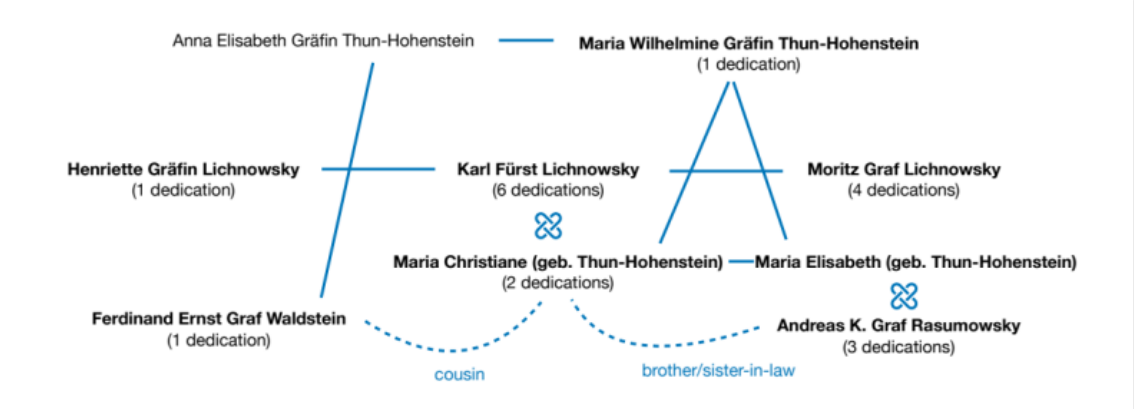

Figure 3: Family tree of Karl Fürst Lichnowsky with Beethoven's dedications

It is notable that only a limited number of contributions in this volume address the image of Beethoven as a rebellious bourgeois figure, a subject that, as Eybl notes, was already explored in Schindler's biography and more recently revived in Jan Caeyers' acclaimed book *Beethoven. Der einsame Revolutionär*.[4] Rather than oscillating between the two polar images of Beethoven—darling of the nobility and solitary revolutionary—it would be more productive to examine his evolving role in Viennese society during the last decades of his life. In this period, the city's affluent citizens increasingly assumed control of public concert life, while the aristocracy retreated from active cultural engagement. The way Beethoven navigated this period of cultural and political transformation is merely alluded to in these articles. Scheutz describes him as a "permanent border crosser between the bourgeois and aristocratic worlds" (149), while Köhn acknowledges the increasing role of personal networks in facilitating productions of the oratorio *Christus am Ölberge*, noting the declining capacity of the nobility to serve as concert organisers (168). Jones draws parallels between the proportion of aristocratic subscribers to Opus 1 of 1795

(50%) and signatories of the petition of 1824 (23%). Elsewhere, I have demonstrated how Beethoven's changing perspective is also reflected in the shifting social stratification of his dedications during the last fifteen years of his life.[5] Further research in this area could yield new insights into Beethoven's multifaceted activities during this period, contributing to the dismantling of entrenched perspectives, stereotypes, and narratives surrounding the composer.

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It is commendable that the book has been made available as an open-access PDF. However, the editors decided to include both English and German contributions, thereby accepting a more limited international reception and certain inconsistencies. The printed edition, published in parallel, is expensive and exhibits certain technical shortcomings. One of them is the substandard quality of many illustrations, which appear blurred and with a font size too small to be legible to the naked eye. This issue is particularly pronounced in the network diagrams, where the names of the individuals depicted remain illegible even when the illustrations are enlarged (pp. 349, 352, 359). The petition reproduced in Jones' contribution is presented as a double-page spread from the *Wiener Allgemeine Theaterzeitung* (p. 66), which, even with enhanced image quality, would still be challenging to decipher. A legible excerpt of the list of signatories, the essay's central focus, would have been desirable. By contrast, the included music examples are rendered with legible clarity.[6]

Another shortcoming—and a particularly frustrating one—is the adhesive binding, which prevents the nearly 500-page volume from opening fully, forcing the reader's eye to follow curved lines of text. This physical limitation makes the online version the preferable alternative. Such a choice is particularly unfortunate given ongoing concerns that online editions are increasingly displacing printed books from the market, thereby contributing to the decline of a rich tradition of bookmaking. The book's rich content would have merited a higher-quality physical presentation.[7]

Notes

1. The conference program can be found here. The contribution by Nicholas Mathew opening the conference is replaced in the publication by a thematically similar opening text by Axel Körner.

2. Axel Körner also engages with the concept of friendship, though in connection with the relationship between Archduke Rudolph and Beethoven, as reflected in the dedication of the Piano Sonata op. 81a, "Les Adieux".

3. Julia Ackermann and Melanie Unseld, "Dichtung – Wahrheit – Narrativ? Erinnerungen an die Fidelio-Soirée im Palais Lichnowsky," in *BEETHOVEN.AN.DENKEN. Das Theater an der Wien als Erinnerungsort*, Julia Ackermann and Melanie Unseld (Vienna: Böhlau, 2020), 33–46.

4. Jan Caeyers, *Beethoven. Der einsame Revolutionär. Eine Biographie* (München: C. H. Beck, 2012).

5. See also Andrea Lindmayr-Brandl, "Adelige Musikfreunde, Franz Schubert und das Wiener Musikleben im Vormärz," in *Adel im Vormärz. Begegnungen mit einer umstrittenen Sozialform*, ed. Urte Stobbe and Claude D. Conter (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2023), 147–76, here at 159. In his article, Scheutz also provides an overview of the social status of the dedicatees (134), though not in a chronological progression.

6. The publisher cannot be blamed for the mismatch between the legend and the image in Figure 2 of Birgit Lodes' contribution. The rapid scale passages in the secondo part of the second variation, which Lodes interprets as a wave movement in connection with a line from Goethe's poem "Ich denke dein," are not the one depicted in the primo part of the first variation shown. The fact that both Whiting and Hieke associate this first variation with a different line of poetry than Lodes demonstrates the arbitrariness of the close relationship between text and music that the authors merely presume. Contrary to this over-interpretation, none of the authors has emphasized a remarkable feature of the composition: namely, that the theme of the variation is actually conceived as a song: both piano players are to sing the melody (notated with text underlay!), reinforced by the *primo* part, which contributes little more than the same melody in octaves. In the context of communication in the salon, this would be the most striking example.

7. To be fair to the publisher, I would like to point out that they have also produced many beautiful books, including the new series "Vienna Schubert Studies".