

Canadian University Music Review

Revue de musique des universités canadiennes

Rita Steblin. *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft. Franz Schubert, Leopold Kupelwieser und ihr Freundeskreis*. Wien: Böhlau, 1998. xiv, 490 pp. ISBN 3-205-98820-5 (hardcover)

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Volume 21, numéro 2, 2001

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1014491ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014491ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités canadiennes

ISSN

0710-0353 (imprimé)

2291-2436 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Reul, B. (2001). Compte rendu de [Rita Steblin. *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft. Franz Schubert, Leopold Kupelwieser und ihr Freundeskreis*. Wien: Böhlau, 1998. xiv, 490 pp. ISBN 3-205-98820-5 (hardcover)]. *Canadian University Music Review / Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, 21(2), 131–134.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1014491ar>

presents no extended engagement with the problematic influence of Heidegger. One result is that, throughout, the work strikes an uneasy balance between phenomenological, transcendental, and historicist perspectives; an acrobatic feat both exciting and impressive, but which may or may not form a viable method. Similarly, Monelle describes his own work as “dialogic” (p. 13), but offers no extended treatment of Bakhtin, and expressly avoids questions of the situated and politicized enunciation which a dialogic approach entails. In a similar vein, Foucault is evoked on several occasions but the essential intertwining of power and discourse is avoided. And finally, there are prominent postmodern thinkers who are not mentioned at all: especially Deleuze. It would have been interesting to see how Monelle’s conception of theory would have negotiated with Deleuze and Guattari’s view of philosophy as the construction of concepts and the laying out of a plane of immanence.

Lidov is more circumspect in his treatment of sources, partly because he set himself a less ambitious task. He certainly succeeds in updating the structuralist approach, and on that level has achieved what he set out to do. However, the book abandons one of the central aspects of the structuralist spirit, in that it does not link all of its components into an overarching total model. On this level, Lidov’s work is also postmodern, or at least it represents a rationalism which has become humble in response to the postmodern challenge.

In summary, both of these books are important contributions to musical semiotics, and are to be recommended highly. For specialists in the field they are essential position statements, and will be influential. For those seeking an introduction to the field, they will serve as well as anything, and will do so even more effectively if read side by side, since they tend to correct each others’ oversights in many instances. The ultimate questions of whether the options they suggest are truly divergent, and whether semiotics in the future will follow one path or the other, must wait for the time being.

William Echard

Rita Steblin. *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft. Franz Schubert, Leopold Kupelwieser und ihr Freundeskreis*. Wien: Böhlau, 1998. xiv, 490 pp. ISBN 3-205-98820-5 (hardcover).

Musicology belongs to those fields in the humanities that require a knowledge of foreign languages. Many of us opt to research the lives and works of composers who were active in non-English speaking countries, struggling more or less successfully with relevant primary sources and secondary literature. Difficulties tend to arise when scholars attempt to comprehend primary sources which date from earlier centuries. In the case of Rita Steblin’s book *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft. Franz Schubert, Leopold Kupelwieser und ihr Freundeskreis*, readers should be comfortable with early nineteenth-century Viennese or at least have at hand a German-English dictionary published in Austria.

In April 1994, Steblin, a Canadian musicologist based in Vienna, discovered twenty-nine hitherto-unknown, handwritten weekly issues of the magazine "Archiv des menschlichen Unsinnns" ("Archive of Human Nonsense"). They were compiled by the "Unsinnsgesellschaft" ("Nonsense Society") and date from 1817 and 1818.¹ Steblin's impeccable, obviously near-native knowledge of Viennese German enabled her to transcribe and examine in detail this important primary source held at the Vienna *Stadt- und Landesbibliothek*. The surviving twenty-nine booklets—less than one-third of the original production—draw attention to some of Franz Schubert's more lighthearted activities and shed light on his interesting, if not unusual, circle of friends. Readers will find detailed biographies of twenty-two members in good standing, based on new research in Vienna's archives, as well as transcriptions of the literary accounts written to commemorate two private celebrations ("Feste") which offer further insights into the Society's membership and projects (p. 14).² Additional visual stimuli include excellent reproductions of portraits in black and white and in colour, revealing each member's respective disguise and nickname.

As Steblin points out in her lengthy and highly informative introduction, each of the "Archive of Human Nonsense" booklets consists of at least eight pages of text with humorous essays on a variety of topics such as politics, fine literature, science, and advertisements. The articles were prepared by members using their nicknames only, with paintings and caricature drawings interspersed, many by famous painter Leopold Kupelwieser. Once a week members met at the *Gasthaus* "Zum roten Hahn," including one female, Therese Fellner, the restaurant's proprietress. The finished booklets were then circulated among members.

At this point allow me to comment briefly on Schubert's and the other "Nonsense Society" members' humorous nicknames. Evidently, the "Archiv des menschlichen Unsinnns" provided these young Viennese artists with a written forum in which to examine contemporary nineteenth-century events and simultaneously poke fun at themselves and others. The nicknames "Schnautze, Redacteur" ("snout, editor," Eduard Anschütz) and "Sebastian Haarpuder" ("Sebastian Hairpowder," Gustav Anschütz), were clearly conceived to make the reader chuckle, while the rhyming nicknames of the three Kupelwieser brothers exude typical Viennese charm. Josef ("Blasius Lecks"), for example, would later prepare the textbook for Schubert's opera *Fierrabras*

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this review are mine (see Steblin, 7). The twenty-nine booklets had been written, dated and numbered consecutively by Eduard Anschütz; nine date from 1817, twenty from 1818. Each of the booklets has appended to it a watercolour painting by either Leopold Kupelwieser, Carl Smirsch, Franz Goldhann or others.

² Other activities of the "Nonsense Society" included visits to dance halls and restaurants, an inauguration ceremony for the *Burgtheater* actor "Primo Amoroso" (Georg Kettel), and penalizing the two lazy "von Buh" ("of boo") brothers. Steblin considers these activities evidence for "... the sociable, still unimpaired way of life among young artists in Vienna at the beginning of the *Biedermeier* years." ("... die gesellige, noch unbehinderte Lebensart unter jungen Künstlern in Wien zu Beginn der *Biedermeierzeit*.")

in 1823, and Leopold (“Damian Klex”), the famous painter, was a close friend of Schubert. When trying to grasp the meaning of the nicknames English readers—and for that matter native Germans—are strongly urged to consult Steblin’s explanations at the end of each biographical section (p. 51 ff). One is bound to translate the nickname of the third Kupelwieser brother, Johann—“Chrisostomus Schmecks”—as “Goldmouth Delicious” without knowledge of early nineteenth-century Viennese dialect. According to a contemporary source from 1824, however, “Schmecks” is a vulgar expression with an insulting, sometimes humorous connotation (p. 106).

The most time-consuming and challenging aspect of this commendable research project must have been the decoding of hidden references to contemporary social, historical, and cultural issues, inserted cleverly by contributing members of the “Nonsense Society.” This leads us to the role which Franz Schubert played in the *Unsinnsgesellschaft*—his name is conspicuously absent from the members’ list published in booklet no. 1 from 1817. According to Heinrich Anschütz, however, Schubert was “. . . one of the most active members of the former, cheerful Nonsense Society,” and Steblin is quick to provide us with Schubert’s hitherto-unknown society nickname—“Ritter Cimbal” (p. 17 ff).³ She quotes from several articles in the “Archiv” booklets that include references to Schubert and draws attention to two hitherto-unknown group portraits that unmistakably confirm Schubert’s involvement in the Society (“Zur Unsinnade 5^{ter} Gesang” and “Das Kaleidoskop und die Draisine”) (p. 186).⁴ A third portrait, “Scene from *Der Feuergeist*” had been painted by Franz Goldhann on 18 April 1818, commemorating the anniversary of the founding of the “Nonsense Society.” Noting from the depicted scene several similarities to the plot of Schubert’s *Die Zauberharfe*, Steblin suggests that Schubert had set *Der Feuergeist*, a drama in four acts with “choruses, machinery and flying objects” to music for the “Nonsense Society” in 1817 and reused material in *Die Zauberharfe*.⁵ Schubert’s operatic work was therefore most likely set to music much earlier than suggested by the date of its official premiere in July 1820.

Steblin proceeds with new textual readings of the song “Auf der Riesenkoppe” (D 611) and the celebrated male quartet “Das Dörfchen” (D 598), this latter

³ See also p. 49. Steblin listed Schubert as “zusätzlicher Teilnehmer” (“additional participant”) after providing a transcription of the 1817 members’ list.

⁴ “Der Unsinnade 5^{ter} Gesang” (“The fifth chorus in this nonsense piece”), illustration no. 46, is a “group portrait,” signed “Aaron Bleistift krizzeravit” (Carl Friedrich Zimmermann). The original colour plate is reproduced on page x (see p. 242 ff); it dates from 31 December 1817. “Das Kaleidoskop und die Draisine” (“The kaleidoscope and the dandy horse,” with the dandy horse referring to an early form of the bicycle, illustration no. 65), was included in the issue dating 16 July 1818. It was signed “Damian Klex” (Leopold Kupelwieser) and can be found on p. 355. See also *ibid.* p. 37 ff. Steblin points out that Schubert was caricatured in the second portrait as a “strenger Schullehrer” (“strict school teacher”), a reference to his activities as a primary-class instructor. She also notes the many references to Schubert in the various dramas that were prepared for publication in the “Archiv” booklets, including a ballet for children entitled “Insanius auf Erden” (“The Insane One on Earth”) by Eduard Anschütz, 15 October 1818.

⁵ “... Chören, Maschienen und Flugwerken,” (p. 27). See also *ibid.*, p. 28.

work being unequivocally composed for the “Nonsense Society.” Its title could possibly refer to a fellow *Unsinngesellschafter*, Ferdinand Dörflinger, whose nickname “Elise” may have influenced Schubert when setting “Elysium” (D 584). Steblin also provides us with “Le bon Chevalier/ Der treue Ritter,” the text to the melody on which Schubert based his Op. 10 piano variations on a French song “Acht Variationen über ein französisches Lied” (D 624). He may have been drawn to this particular song because of his “Nonsense Society” nickname, “Der Ritter Cimbäl” (pp. 31–37). Finally, in “Schubert und die Frauen” (“Schubert and women”), Steblin emphasizes the fact that Schubert opted for relationships with women outside of wedlock after not being permitted by law to marry Therese Grob.

Albeit in German and therefore much more challenging to English-speaking scholars, *Die Unsinngesellschaft. Franz Schubert, Leopold Kupelwieser und ihr Freundeskreis* is an excellent, meticulously researched and frequently highly entertaining contribution to early nineteenth-century Viennese history. Steblin’s comprehensive introduction and appendix as well as the hilarious yet essential Viennese-German glossary at the end of the book, present the most accessible parts of this publication and are worth the effort of translating. With regard to the content of the twenty-nine “Hefte” and especially the theatrical pieces, rest assured that even German native-speakers will have to consult dictionaries occasionally and reread each and every of Steblin’s explanations, commentaries and interpretations. Therefore, I propose a “Table of Contents for English Readers” to facilitate overall comprehension: introduction, appendix, and biographies. The “Archiv des menschlichen Unsinn,” and the two textbooks to “Feste” held by the “Unsinngesellschaft” require familiarity with Viennese German and a good knowledge of contemporary early nineteenth-century events in Austria and beyond.

Rita Steblin has already begun to publish on various aspects of this *Unsinngesellschaft* material in English-language articles and is committed to continue her investigation of these primary sources.⁶ May these publications be an incentive for scholars from other disciplines such as art history and literature to decipher this ingenious “nonsense” and shed light on this important facet of Austrian social history.

Barbara Reul

⁶Recent publications by Steblin include “Schubert’s Elise: Das Dörfchen and the ‘Unsinngesellschaft,’” *The Musical Times* 140 (Spring 1999): 33–43 and “Schubert’s relationship with women: An historical account” in *Schubert Studies*, ed. Brian Newbould (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 159–82. In two forthcoming articles Steblin will examine Johann Mayrhofer and his connections to the *Unsinngesellschaft* (to be published in the *Festschrift for Herbert Kellman*) and investigate Johann Nepomuk Hoechle (“Kratzeratti Klanwinzi,” *Beethoven Forum*, vol. 8, in press).