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Book Reviews: "The Use of the International Phonetic Alphabet in the Choral Rehearsal," edited by Duane Richard Karna

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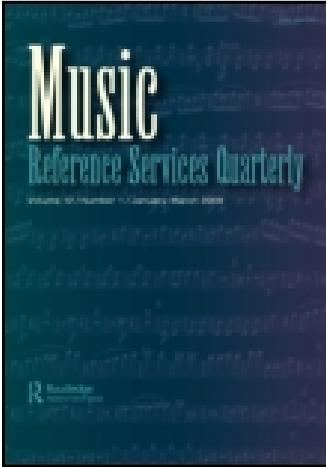
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The Use of the International Phonetic Alphabet in the Choral Rehearsal edited by Duane Richard Karna

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contemporary ensemble music. The book is also a “must have” for university libraries and larger community libraries.

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Duane Richard Karna, ed. (2012). *THE USE OF THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET IN THE CHORAL REHEARSAL*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press. xv, 342 pp., \$65.00. ISBN 978-0-8108-8169-3 (hardcover).

This very useful volume brings together information in one place regarding choral pronunciation, imparted via the International Phonetic Alphabet (hereafter IPA), of 25 different languages. Each language has a separate chapter (Latin has two, one for “ecclesiastical Latin,” one for Germanic Latin as found in the *Carmina Burana* of Orff). Thus the choral director will find assistance with teaching diction for English, Latin, Italian, German, French, Spanish, Hebrew, Romanian, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Brazilian Portuguese, Swahili, Basque, Hawaiian, Hungarian, Baltic (Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian), Dutch, Georgian, Russian, Swedish, Finnish, Greek, Norwegian, and Polish (in that order). An initial criticism might be: Why these particular languages? And why are they not presented in more systematic ordering? Even given the languages chosen, why not group them, following English and Latin, into Romance (Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian), Germanic (German, Dutch), Scandinavian (Norwegian, Swedish), Slavic (Russian, Polish), Baltic, Greek, Georgian, Finno-Ugrian (Finnish, Hungarian), etc.? In so doing, one can note some conspicuous gaps in coverage—no Catalan (Catalonia has a strong choral tradition), no European Portuguese, no Danish, no Czech (a particular loss), and no Serbian, Croatian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Church Slavonic. And I wonder how much use Swahili, Basque, and Hawaiian get in American choral life.

The volume begins with an IPA chart, a chapter on the use of the IPA in rehearsal (giving the somewhat inappropriate title to the book as a whole, whose chapters have more to do with details of language diction than rehearsal technique), and a chapter with useful observations on vowel modification needed due to vocal technique (a soprano at the top of her range will not be producing the same vowel as an alto around middle C). At this point the book moves to the individual languages, mapping the orthography of each language to the standard IPA orthography.

I find it hard to imagine a single choir that would perform repertoire in all 25 languages presented here, so it is to be expected that choral directors

will pick and choose as needed given their programming. I will not look at the assets and liabilities of each chapter, but will note some of the potential pitfalls as exemplified in particular languages.

Both Spanish and Portuguese have made the transition from regional languages spoken by relatively small populations in Europe to transnational languages used by hundreds of millions of native speakers (more than 400 million for Spanish, second worldwide, and 210 million for Portuguese). The article on Spanish makes a basic distinction between European and American pronunciation (with examples given for each), and further notes that there are so many national and regional pronunciations for the language that space precludes going into detail. In contrast, the article on Portuguese contrasts the rather different pronunciations in Portugal (about 10 million speakers) and Brazil (almost 200 million speakers), but goes on to deal only with Brazilian pronunciation. Unfortunately, the authors, after noting that Brazil, like the United States, has many distinct regional accents, goes on to present a “non-regional” pronunciation of Brazilian Portuguese, one that is “recognizably national without showing preference for any specific region.” In practice, this means producing a pronunciation that rather than being something positive (belonging to a particular cultural setting) is based on what it is not—that is (although this is not articulated), does not reflect the pronunciation of the cultural capital for Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, in spite of the fact that the musical example chosen is a folksong collected by Heitor Villa-Lobos, born and active in Rio. Thus, producing an IPA transcription of the Brazilian text presented is already a political act (as is pronouncing the written text, but *not* writing the text, which can be pronounced differently according to the region of the reader), and singing the IPA transcription gives a deracinated result. Given the regionalism present in most countries, this is likely to be an issue not only with Brazilian Portuguese, but elsewhere as well.

A more fundamental question that was not problematized by the volume, but which would be interesting to consider, is whether indeed IPA is the best or most efficient means of conveying foreign language pronunciation to choristers who may have little or no familiarity with the language they are being asked to sing in. (A further question might be, “Why sing in a language that you cannot communicate in?”) The use of IPA in the choral rehearsal does not seem to be widespread (I have not been exposed to it in 40 years of choral singing), and one might ask whether the “sound” of a particular language can really be conveyed by IPA alone, or whether it is more efficient to listen to the desired pronunciation. A sense of the success, or lack of it, in teaching foreign language diction to choirs can only really be gained when hearing choruses performing in one’s own native tongue or tongues. Can a French choir really sing Purcell without betraying their origins? Can an American choir sing Debussy?

Ultimately I think this volume will be most useful to the choral conductor in providing perspective on diction issues for a broad range of languages, whether or not the IPA orthography makes its way to the choral folder or not.

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Scott L. Balthazar (2013). *HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF OPERA*. (Historical Dictionaries of Literature and the Arts). Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press. xxiii, 536 pp., \$115.21. ISBN 978-0-8108-6768-0 (hardcover).

The history of opera would be challenging to convey in a single volume, even when written as a dictionary. The author of the *Historical Dictionary of Opera* faced many challenges in presenting his work in this format, the most insurmountable of which must have been competing with the authoritative and comprehensive *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. In the preface, the author discusses how his work differs from the four-volume *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* and trade opera dictionaries. The target audience of this single-volume work comprises students and opera aficionados, and the author assumes “basic knowledge of European music history . . . terms and techniques” (p. xi). Unlike the *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, the *Historical Dictionary of Opera* is conceived as a “textbook in alphabetical format” (p. xi) and not necessarily a reference source.

The dictionary is divided into four sections: a chronology, an introduction, a dictionary, and a bibliography. The 10-page chronology begins in 1550 and ends in 2011. The birthdate of a composer or performer or the premier of a given opera is provided after select years. The inclusion of a chronology is a fun touch and reiterates that this work is not meant to be used for serious scholarship. The 19-page introduction does read like a textbook; it provides a chronological summary of the dictionary entries included in the following section. The dictionary includes entries in five categories: composers, other individuals (librettists, singers, and conductors), individual operas, cities, and terms.

The 105-page bibliography is organized chronologically and is prefaced with a seven-page essay that reveals the author’s familiarity with opera reference and source material. The references for each century are further divided into sections on composers and librettists, locations (by country), and comparative and other topics. If an undergraduate student needed to identify sources for a paper on opera in 18th-century England or the operatic output of Alban Berg, the well-organized bibliography in the *Historical Dictionary of Opera* would empower and not overwhelm him or her.