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***Berlioz in Time: From Early Recognition to Lasting Renown*, by Peter Bloom. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2022 [review], trans. Ralph P. Locke..**

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Book Review

Berlioz in Time: From Early Recognition to Lasting Renown, by Peter Bloom. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2022.

xxii, 352 pp. ISBN 9781648250200 (paper). \$44.95.

Free online edition <https://openaccess.boydellandbrewercms.com/?id=-236719>. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, indexes.

Peter Bloom's new book, *Berlioz in Time: From Early Recognition to Lasting Renown*, consists of a prologue, thirteen chapters, and epilogue. Not surprisingly, it deals with the famous French composer to whom its author has devoted most of his long career. This American musicologist, who also holds French citizenship, is turning 80 in 2023; he announces, at the end of the prologue, just before his acknowledgments to colleagues and friends, that this book will probably be his last.¹

Peter Bloom is widely recognized as one of the great Berlioz authorities in the English-speaking world, along with David Cairns, D. Kern Holoman, Hugh Macdonald, and Julian Rushton. All five belong to a generation of musicologists born between 1926 and 1950, and all were significantly influenced by the writings of Jacques Barzun.² Bloom's notable achievements include contributions to the 26-volume *New Berlioz Edition*, as well as to the composer's *Correspondance générale* (9 vols.) and *Critique musicale* (10 vols.), to the *Dictionnaire Berlioz* (2003), and to the *Cambridge Companion to Berlioz* (2011, of which he was the sole editor), plus his recent critical edition of the *Mémoires* (2019).³

Berlioz in Time consists of articles that were previously published in English (9), French (4), or German (1) between 1980 and 2017 in various essay-collections and scholarly journals in Europe and the United States.⁴ The only unpublished sections are the prologue, the epilogue, and chapter 5. (The substance of the latter was presented at the 2001 annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, in Atlanta, Georgia.) The articles originally published in French and German are here given in English for the first time. All of the articles have been reworked by the author in view of their becoming book chapters. The

1. Peter Bloom, *Berlioz in Time: From Early Recognition to Lasting Renown* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2022), xxii.

2. Bloom, 278–84.

3. Bloom, xiii–xiv.

4. Bloom, xxi.

chapters are all around the same length, averaging approximately twenty pages each. They are arranged in roughly chronological order, based on the main works or events explored in them, from the *Symphonie fantastique* (first performed in 1830: chapter 1) to the composer's *Mémoires*, published posthumously in 1870 (chapter 13). All of which helps explain the book's title: *Berlioz in Time*.⁵

Bloom's original intention was to demonstrate, in this book, the breadth of his scholarly scope: he considered including chapters that dealt with Schumann, Wagner, Richard Strauss, and Debussy and had little or nothing to do with Berlioz. But he eventually decided against this.⁶ His desire to create a unified book likewise led him to create some forty cross-references between the various chapters. In spite of this, there are some repetitions of material, as is inevitable in a work whose individual chapters were not originally written with a larger whole in mind.

Similarly, a reader may notice, along the way, shifts between quoted passages and paraphrase, the inconsistent use of the authorial first person, and, more generally, the shifts between academic and less formal discourse. Not least, from time to time a tone of self-satisfaction on the part of a professor who has arrived at the end of his career pops through in the body of the text and may bring forth a smile. But this feeling on the author's part is utterly understandable in context.

Five chapters are expressly concerned with musical works: the *Symphonie fantastique* (chap. 1), the *Symphonie militaire* (i.e., *Grande symphonie funèbre et triomphale*, chap. 5), *Les Nuits d'été* (chap. 6), *Les Troyens* (chap. 10), and *Béatrice et Bénédict* (chap. 12). Chapter 13 treats the complicated genesis of one of the composer's major literary works: the *Mémoires*. Three chapters study Berlioz's relationships with leading figures in the arts: the composers Liszt (chap. 3) and Richard Wagner (chap. 9) and the painter Eugène Delacroix (chap. 7).

Four chapters are linked to Berlioz's deep admiration for Shakespeare and to the thorny problem of how to translate and adapt the latter's theatrical works (chaps. 2, 7, 11, and 12). Two chapters are devoted to matters involving administrative matters or musical politics: Berlioz's unsuccessful application to become director of the Théâtre-Italien in 1838 (chap. 4) and the composer's report on musical life in Germany, dated Paris, 23 December 1843, and written to the Minister of the Interior (chap. 8).

The epilogue compares and contrasts the two main Berlioz biographies written in the early-to-mid twentieth century: Adolphe Boschot's *L'Histoire d'un romantique* (three vols., 1906-1913) and Jacques Barzun's *Berlioz and the Romantic Century* (two vols., 1950), before praising their two-volume successor by David Cairns (1999), which carries the more sober main title *Berlioz*. The chapter goes on to summarize the current state of research on the composer and to envision some paths for future exploration.

5. Bloom, xii.

6. Bloom, xiv-xv.

One of this book's strong points is the sense that one gets of Bloom's deep knowledge of sources. His long familiarity with Berlioz's entire musical and literary output allows him to come at matters from multiple angles and to consider quite varied points of view on a topic. His mastery of French and English permits him to get into matters of detail in regard to the process of translation (whether literary or theatrical), especially in regard to Shakespeare's plays. He calculates that Berlioz knew and quoted in his writings at least 23 of Shakespeare's 38 plays.⁷

More surprisingly, but always interestingly and in a closely argued manner, Bloom does not shy from offering speculation: for example, he discusses some of the topics of conversation that may have arisen when Berlioz and Wagner met one evening in London (1855),⁸ the composer's modesty in regard to discussing his private life (including sexual matters),⁹ the logic behind his translation choices,¹⁰ the question of how disdainful he was about the commercial aspect of getting his works published,¹¹ the authenticity (sometimes challenged) of a letter from Berlioz to Delacroix,¹² the question of whether Harriet Smithson was Delacroix's model for a painting of Ophelia,¹³ the specifics of Berlioz's conducting technique and his many interactions with instrumentalists,¹⁴ the obscure corners of his genealogy,¹⁵ and so on.

Bloom offers pertinent observations about the extramarital and, in time, marital relationship between Berlioz and Marie Recio, and about why none of this was mentioned in the *Mémoires*.¹⁶ "That so little is known about Marie Recio, that 'devoted and intelligent woman' who, though ungraciously excluded from the *Mémoires*, shared over twenty years of the composer's life, 'never for a day ceasing to lavish upon her husband the most tender and delicate attentions,' has been one of the real lacunae of modern Berlioz scholarship."¹⁷

An important theme that Barzun largely left unaddressed¹⁸ and that recurs in Bloom's book is Berlioz's political views, his admiration for Napoleon Bonaparte, monarchy, authoritarianism, and absolutism, and his aversion toward republican government, especially after 1848.¹⁹

7. Bloom, 213.

8. Bloom, 178–81.

9. Bloom, 58–59 and 247–48.

10. Bloom, 33–34.

11. Bloom, 111.

12. Bloom, 132–33.

13. Bloom, 148.

14. Bloom, 285.

15. Bloom, 286.

16. Bloom, xiii, 58, 112–15, 248, 257–58, 278, and 286–87.

17. Bloom, 112.

18. Bloom, 190.

19. Bloom, xvi–xvii, 21, 85, 91–94, 95, 130, 138, 195–99, 201, 203–4, and 259–60.

In short, this collection of articles is the product of four decades of scholarly work about the composer of the *Symphonie fantastique*; it provides useful and interesting enrichments to present-day Berlioz research; and it caps, in sure-handed fashion, the academic career of one of that field's great specialists.

But my verb “caps” is perhaps a bit misleading because Peter Bloom has not left the field of scholarly research. He continues to publish articles and reviews, and he is deeply involved, since 2021, in a project of putting online all of Berlioz's letters—a project financially supported by the city of Paris.

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