

Danish Yearbook of Musicology

43 • 2019

© 2019 by the authors

Danish Yearbook of Musicology · Volume 43 · 2019

Dansk Årbog for Musikforskning

Editors

Michael Fjeldsøe · fjeldsoe@hum.ku.dk

Peter Hauge · ph@kb.dk

Guest co-editor of the special section

Peter Schweinhardt · peschw1@gmx.de

Editorial Board

Lars Ole Bonde, *University of Aalborg*; Peter Woetmann Christoffersen, *University of Copenhagen*; Bengt Edlund, *Lund University*; Daniel M. Grimley, *University of Oxford*; Lars Lilliestam, *Göteborg University*; Morten Michelsen, *University of Copenhagen*; Steen Kaargaard Nielsen, *University of Aarhus*; Siegfried Oechsle, *Christian-Albrechts-Universität, Kiel*; Nils Holger Petersen, *University of Copenhagen*; Søren Møller Sørensen, *University of Copenhagen*

Production

Hans Mathiasen

Address

c/o Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, Section of Musicology,
University of Copenhagen, Karen Blixens Vej 1, DK-2300 København S

Each volume of *Danish Yearbook of Musicology* is published continuously in sections:

- 1 · Articles
- 2 · Special section, *Neue Sachlichkeit, Political Music, or Vernacular Avant-Garde?*
- 3 · Reviews
- 4 · Bibliography
- 5 · Reports · Editorial

This volume is published with support from CEMES (Center for Modern European Studies), University of Copenhagen.

ISBN 978-87-88328-34-9 (volume 43); ISSN 2245-4969 (online edition)

Danish Yearbook of Musicology is a peer-reviewed journal published by the Danish Musicological Society on <http://www.dym.dk/>

Neue Sachlichkeit, Political Music, or Vernacular Avant-Garde?

Introduction

17–19 September, 2015, an international conference was organized in Copenhagen by the Internationale Hanns Eisler Gesellschaft, Berlin, the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies at the University of Copenhagen and The Royal Library in Copenhagen. The full title of the conference, *Neue Sachlichkeit, Political Music, or Vernacular Avant-Garde? Hanns Eisler and his Contemporaries*, points to the difficulties still at hand when one wants to address music that deliberately aims at being of social relevance and to have political impact; concepts and terms are disputed and the implications using specific terms and concepts are manifold. The idea was to revisit methodological questions while at the same time to present and discuss specific cases. In order to open the field of discussion we had asked our two key note speakers, Prof. Stephen Hinton (Stanford University) and Univ.-Prof. Dr. Nils Grosch (Universität Salzburg) to reconsider their seminal works on the matter, *The Idea of Gebrauchsmusik* (1989) and *Die Musik der Neuen Sachlichkeit* (1999), respectively. The call for papers gave this account of the matter up for discussion:

The idea that modern art should be useful in society instead of being confined to small circles of connoisseurs and that artists, composers and musicians should act as highly skilled artisans instead of considering themselves bohemians or geniuses had a powerful renaissance in the decades following World War I. Hanns Eisler (1898–1962) and German contemporaries such as Kurt Weill and Paul Hindemith as well as Danish composers such as Jørgen Bentzon, Otto Mortensen and Bernhard Christensen embodied this trend. They had all experienced what Eisler called ‘the terrible isolation of modern music’, by which he meant the institutionalized seclusion of modernist music from a wider audience. In order to have social relevance, music should appeal to an audience with a need for music that serves a specific purpose. This meant breaking down barriers between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, ‘serious’ and ‘light’ music, and between genres considered as ‘art’ and those merely as ‘craft’. Strategies involved composing music for amateurs, children and for music education, for films, plays and operas, as well as songs for political rallies, demonstrations, cabarets and choirs.

No doubt a political agenda was at stake in the attempt to provide socially relevant, useful and progressive music. The desire to have an impact on social reality made

it essential to communicate with a specific audience. Even so, labelling these efforts 'political' music limits the focus to openly political genres or only to certain aspects of the works in mind. On the other hand, terms such as *Gebrauchsmusik* or applied music (*angewandte Musik*) remain embroiled in earlier disputes. In order to rethink these issues the conference aims to consider the mind-set of these composers and artists as an embodiment of a large-scale attempt to reformulate basic assumptions concerning the relationship between art and its audience, between notions of artistic value and function, and between modernity and accessibility. Broader concepts such as *Neue Sachlichkeit* (in the Nordic countries also referred to as *kulturradikalisme* [cultural radicalism]) or vernacular avant-garde may be more adequate to the task, if one wishes to grasp the depth of attempts to transform hierarchies of value and genre perceptions and, at the same time, the diverse ways in which these efforts manifest themselves in stylistic terms.

Along with the conference, which was funded by the Hanns and Steffi Eisler Stiftung, the Sonning Foundation and the Center for Modern European Studies (CEMES) at the University of Copenhagen, there were two public concerts as part of the Golden Days Festival. One was a political cabaret programme at the theatre Riddersalen, where Bertolt Brecht's and Hanns Eisler's *Round Heads and Pointed Heads* had its first performance in 1936, and the other at the Queens Hall at the Royal Library presented the music for that play in the original scoring which was not played in 1936, along with the first live performance of the music by Bernhard Christensen for Poul Henningsen's documentary *Danmark* (1935) and the presentation song of the communist workers' theatre called R.T. written 1933 for their participation in the international workers' theatre festival in Moscow. An additional grant from CEMES has provided the funding that makes it possible to publish a number of papers from the conference as a special section of *Danish Yearbook of Musicology*, co-edited by Peter Schweinhardt, Potsdam.

Michael Fjeldsøe and Peter Schweinhardt