Spitzer, John and Neal Zaslaw. 2004. *The Birth of the Orchestra: History of an Institution, 1650–1815*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Musicological books by more than one author are (with the obvious exception of anthologies) relatively rare. So it is natural to be curious both about the individual contributions that John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw made to this monumental book and about the nature of their collaboration. In their preface, they explain that "Neal Zaslaw wrote the first drafts of Chapters 3 and 6 ['Lully's Orchestra' and 'The Orchestra in France']; the remaining chapters were drafted by John Spitzer. The two of us edited, rewrote, and reedited the entire book together" (v). Their combined labors have resulted in the most comprehensive, accurate, and insightful account ever written of the orchestra's early history. I need to make this absolutely clear at the outset because my review points to what I feel are some flaws in the book. These observations must be considered in the context of the authors' overall achievement in so expertly and indefatigably covering such a vast and complex field.

The book falls into two large parts. The first part (chapters 1–9) consists largely of a series of chronologically-arranged surveys tracing the development of the orchestra in France, Italy, Germany (by which the authors mean the German-speaking part of Europe), and Britain and its North American colonies (all treated in a chapter inaccurately called "The Orchestra in England"). The second part of the book (chapters 10–14) explores various topics throughout the period indicated by the book's title, from performance practices, rehearsals, seating, acoustics, and orchestration, to the conductor, the economic status of orchestral musicians, and (in conclusion) "The Meaning of the Orchestra."

Most of the book is based on secondary literature; it presents a thorough, well-organized, and authoritative synthesis of decades of scholarly research. Chapters 4 and 14 are among the exceptions. Chapter 4, "Corelli's Orchestra," is based in large part on new archival research and includes several documents that have not, apparently, been published before, while Chapter 14, "The Meaning of the Orchestra," is largely woven from research in computerized databases. Whether presenting new material or synthesizing the work of other scholars, Spitzer and Zaslaw always write with admirable clarity and without a trace of academic jargon.

The final chapter of the first part, entitled "The Classical Orchestra,"

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discusses orchestras active between 1750 and 1815. In keeping with the internationalization of music in the second half of the eighteenth century (facilitated by the frequent travel of composers and orchestral musicians), this chapter breaks away from the geographical specialization of earlier chapters and covers all of Europe. Though the chapter's scope is appropriate, its title gives pause. The term "Classical" has been subject to incisive criticism in recent years by scholars such as James Webster (1991) and pointedly avoided by others, such as Daniel Heartz (1995). So it is surprising that the authors use it, and the even more old-fashioned term "Viennese Classical style," without justification or explanation.

Spitzer and Zaslaw devote substantial attention to two musicians in particular who played crucial roles in the development of the orchestra in the second half of the seventeenth century: Lully and Corelli. Their chapters, the only ones devoted to individual musicians and the orchestras they led, add significantly to our knowledge and understanding of the period. Among the many important issues they cover here is the problem of whether or not Corelli's orchestra sometimes played without keyboard instruments in the continuo group. The authors argue that although "organs and harpsichords were indeed present at many of Corelli's performances," the keyboard instruments "were associated conceptually and practically with the vocal rather than the instrumental aspects of performance" (125).

The detail with which Spitzer and Zaslaw discuss Lully and Corelli may raise expectations for the treatment of later orchestras that the book does not fully meet. I was disappointed at the relatively little said about Johann Stamitz and the celebrated Mannheim orchestra, about the London orchestras for which Haydn wrote his late symphonies, and about the orchestras in Vienna for which Mozart wrote most of his late operas and concertos and Beethoven his first eight symphonies.[1]

The book's final chapter presents a close analysis, influenced by the work of the linguist George Lakoff and others, of various metaphors by which eighteenth-century writers revealed their understanding of the orchestra. There is much food for thought here. The comparison of the orchestra to clockwork (519), for example, brings to mind the chronological proximity of the first orchestras to the invention of the balance spring around 1665.[2]

The authors' awareness of how metaphor expresses meaning encourages readers to take notice of the book's most pervasive metaphor, that of birth. The use of this metaphor in the title is by no means accidental or casual; it appears several times in the book. Yet the authors do not seem to have treated their metaphor with complete consistency, or with clear awareness of its implications. Near the end of the book, they call the birth of the orchestra "not an event but a process—a long process that began in the

early seventeenth century and completed itself, more or less, in the early decades of the nineteenth century" (530). But earlier they write: "When it was born in the late seventeenth century the orchestra was a novelty" (507). The use of scare quotes in another passage suggests some discomfort with the metaphor: "The orchestra was 'born' in England between about 1685 and 1715" (272).

Birth carries with it connotations of organic development, beginning with the weakness and imperfection of infancy, continuing with the immaturity of childhood, and ultimately resulting in the maturity and strength of adulthood. (To half of humanity, the idea of birth is inseparable from the idea of extraordinary physical pain.) Taking the metaphor of birth seriously, we cannot escape the implication that orchestras of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were babies or children compared to the adult orchestras of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although Spitzer and Zaslaw never acknowledge such implications, they seem to have allowed them to shape parts of their narrative. They write in their conclusion: "The development of the practice and theory of orchestration drew orchestral music closer to works of art" (530). That suggests that the earliest orchestral music, perhaps because the orchestra itself was in its infancy, does not qualify as art.

The authors define the early nineteenth-century orchestra in their preface as "the institution that, with changes, still exists in concert halls and opera houses in many parts of the world" (v); in other words, the late-Romantic symphony orchestra that caters largely to urban-dwelling, upper-middle-class music lovers over the age of fifty. This, some readers might conclude, is the mature organism resulting from the birth and subsequent development of the orchestra. Yet music lovers of the early twenty-first century are able to enjoy a wide variety of orchestras, some of which do not descend directly from the early nineteenth-century prototype.

We enjoy Il Giardino Armonico, for example, because the Baroque orchestra that inspired it was no newborn child. We can speak of its birth only in the sense that we can speak of the birth of Venus: it rose fully formed from the seventeenth-century musical sea, as mature and as perfect as Botticelli's goddess. The compositions that Lully and Corelli wrote for their orchestras are just as much works of art as the music that Tchaikovsky wrote for a very different kind of ensemble two hundred years later. I don't think that Spitzer and Zaslaw would disagree with me. I only wish they had made this point more explicitly.

Early on, the authors clearly acknowledge that no single set of definitional criteria apply to every orchestra. In chapter 1 they list the following as features that, in various combinations, allow us to define an instrumental

ensemble as an orchestra: a violin-based ensemble with part doubling, standardized instrumentation and repertory, 16-foot bass, keyboard continuo, unity and discipline, and particular kinds of administrative structures. The authors stress that an ensemble does not need to have all these features in order to be an orchestra, encouraging a flexible approach to the often vexing problem of what is and is not an orchestra. Yet lurking, not fully acknowledged, somewhere in their minds is the sound and appearance of what they call "a real orchestra" (243). Thus the ensemble taking part in the performance of Molière's *Le malade imaginaire* in 1674 "looks, and perhaps it sounded, a lot like an orchestra" (86). They write of the Dresden Kapelle: "By 1709 something very much like an orchestra had emerged" (225). And of Johann Sebastian Bach: "Only in Leipzig can he be said to have had anything like an orchestra at his disposal" (245). Statements like these make me uneasy. What is the difference between an orchestra and something "like an orchestra"?

In the case of Bach, Spitzer and Zaslaw are reluctant to consider the ensembles for which he wrote before he came to Leipzig as orchestras because the strings apparently consisted of one player on a part. Here the authors seem to retreat from their complex and subtle demonstration in chapter 1 of how various combinations of characteristics can define an orchestra, and instead reduce their analysis to a single criterion: the size of the string band. Reporting that Bach's four *Ouvertüre* are transmitted without duplicate string parts, they conclude that these works were probably played by one musician on a part.[3] They write: "Overtures 3 and 4 sound particularly grand and 'orchestral' [scare quotes again], but Bach achieves this by multiplying parts rather than multiplying players and by writing orchestral effects into the music, so that his one-on-a-part ensemble sounds more orchestral than it actually is" (249).

This explanation—this dichotomy between what *is* orchestral and what *sounds* orchestral—appears to be at odds with much of the excellent content of chapter 13, "The Birth of Orchestration." There Spitzer and Zaslaw make the crucial point that part of what makes an ensemble into an orchestra is how a composer writes for it. They illustrate the orchestral unison (one of several "effects of unity and grandeur" characteristic of eighteenth-century orchestral writing) by quoting the beginning of Bach's Keyboard Concerto in D minor, BWV 1052 (448). They are absolutely right to call the ensemble for which Bach wrote this concerto an orchestra, whether it was originally played one on a part or by a larger ensemble.

The problem of whether an ensemble with one-on-a-part strings can be called an orchestra comes up several times in the book. It is never completely resolved, and probably never will be. The authors state that "large

ensembles and part doubling do not seem to have been defining features of the Lullist movement in Germany. Style was more important than size to the German Lullists" (220). In other words, German musicians, including Bach, created orchestras simply by writing in a particular style and demanding a level of ensemble discipline (uniform bowing and so forth) characteristic of Lully's orchestra.

Of an engraving entitled "Concerto a Cembalo obligato con Stromenti" and dated 1777, the authors write:

> Compared with the theater orchestras above, this little ensemble of eight instruments [two violins, two flutes, two horns, cello, and harpsichord or piano] hardly looks like much of an orchestra. The caption insists, however, that they are playing a 'keyboard concerto with instrumental accompaniment,' and indeed one-on-a-part performances of concertos were common in Germany throughout the eighteenth century. (356)

Behind this rather cloudy reasoning are two questionable and contradictory assumptions: 1) that to look "like much of an orchestra," an ensemble needs significantly more than eight players; and 2) that any ensemble involved in the performance of a concerto is *ipso facto* an orchestra.

Spitzer and Zaslaw have assembled a vast amount of information about the size and instrumental content of eighteenth-century orchestras, much of which is presented in a series of tables and appendices that constitute one of their book's major assets. These tables, however, have to be used with caution. Some information is given in square brackets, and it is not immediately obvious what these brackets signify. Do they enclose data that is not documented in the column headed "Source"? If so, what is the source for the data enclosed in the brackets? In a few cases information in one table is contradicted by information in another. For example, the Covent Garden orchestra of 1818 listed in Table 8.2 (with eight violins and no double basses) is quite different from the Covent Garden orchestra of 1818 in Appendix D (with twelve violins and two double basses).

The orchestras listed in the tables occasionally appear to be ensembles gathered for special occasions, and probably do not reflect the normal practice of a particular institution. For example, in Table 5.1 ("Representative Italian opera orchestras, 1707–99") an orchestra assembled in the Teatro Comunale of Bologna in 1778 consisted of forty-two strings, two flutes, two oboes, one English horn, two bassoons, four horns, four trumpets, four trombones, and timpani. That massive ensemble was surely not representative of the opera orchestra at the Teatro Comunale, or of Italian opera in general.[4]

Another reason to use the tables with caution is that in some cases they

present information about orchestras, and in other cases they report the personnel of *Kapellen*. Spitzer and Zaslaw explain that the term *Kapelle* was often used for a court's entire musical establishment, and that the relation between the size and composition of a *Kapelle* and the orchestra (or orchestras) drawing from that *Kapelle* for its (or their) members is problematic—and an occasional source of inconsistency in this book. As the authors say in reference to data about the Mannheim Kapelle: "These numbers and these proportions represent instrumentalists available in the Kapelle, not the orchestra as it appeared at any actual performance" (259). Yet on the previous page they say that these same figures show "the development of the Mannheim *orchestra*" (258; emphasis added). The distinction between *Kapelle* and orchestra is further blurred in Appendix B, which, despite its title ("Sample orchestras, 1773–1778"), contains several *Kapellen*. As Spitzer and Zaslaw themselves state: "Tables that compare all kinds of ensembles playing all manner of music in all sorts of venues are impossible to interpret" (28).

The nature of keyboard instruments used in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century orchestras is also a source of some inconsistency. Table 7.4 ("Instrumentalists in the Mannheim Kapelle, 1723–78") makes no reference to stringed keyboard instruments; the only keyboard instruments mentioned are a pair of organs. Yet in Appendix B the Mannheim Kapelle in 1773 is said to have included two harpsichords. This inconsistency is reflected in the text as well: "Some symphonies composed at Mannheim in the 1760s have figures under the bass line in the manuscript parts, suggesting that a harpsichord might have been a regular member of the orchestra for symphonies at that time" (313). From all this data, we might conclude that the Mannheim Kapelle employed two keyboard players who sometimes played organ and sometimes stringed keyboard instruments, and that one of these players might have participated in the performance of symphonies.[5]

The book's use of the term "harpsichord" is itself somewhat problematic. Spitzer and Zaslaw often translate the word *cembalo* as "harpsichord," despite strong evidence that in eighteenth-century Italy *cembalo* was used indiscriminately in reference to any keyboard instrument with strings. Instead, I wish they had followed their admirable policy of not translating the word *basso* when used to designate the bass line of orchestral music. *Cembalo* is just as ambiguous and complicated in its meanings as *basso*.

The authors' rendering of *cembalo* as "harpsichord" reflects their tendency, perceivable in several parts of the book, to minimize the importance of the piano vis-à-vis the harpsichord during most of the eighteenth century. Although they admit that "by the 1770s pianos (what today are called

'fortepianos') had begun to replace harpsichords, first in German orchestras, then elsewhere" (24), they do not sufficiently emphasize the importance of the role that the piano played in music making even before 1770, disposing of uncertainty in this area with an undocumented declaration that, "The keyboard instrument most widely used in the classical orchestra was the harpsichord" (312). According to Table 8.2, in 1818 the Covent Garden orchestra still included a harpsichord (although the instrument's name is enclosed in square brackets).

The book's many illustrations constitute an important part of its value. I cannot think of any other book in which pictures of so many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century orchestras have been assembled. Several of them are completely new to me. At the risk of seeming ungrateful for this wealth of visual material, I wish some of the pictures had been reproduced more clearly, and with more details of the orchestras visible. Several images (for example, Figs. 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, and 8.2) are disappointingly fuzzy. Others depict large halls or open spaces in which the orchestra appears as a small group (for example, Figs. 4.1, 5.3, 7.3, 10.6, and Plate XI). Although such pictures usefully show the orchestra's spatial context, I would have welcomed more close-ups that might have allowed readers to see the individual players and their instruments more clearly. The book does contain some details of larger illustrations, but even in the case of some of these details (for example, the illustration of a performance of Cesti's *Il pomo d'oro* in 1668, Fig. 2.3), my middle-aged eyes would have welcomed even sharper, more revealing images of instrumental ensembles.

Another aspect of this book's richness is its mutually reinforcing network of musical analyses, discussions of performance practice, and illustrations of how orchestral leaders imposed discipline on their ensembles during rehearsals and performances. Among the orchestral effects that Spitzer and Zaslaw describe as "effects of unity and grandeur" is the *tirade*, defined by Georg Muffat at the end of the seventeenth century as "several quick notes in a row, executed with great bow speed" (451). The authors explain that "the tirade is an upward or, less often, a downward scale, played quickly, with alternating bowstrokes." "Alternating bowstrokes" seems to mean that a *tirade* requires each note to be bowed separately. While Examples 13.13 (from Lully's *Atys*) and 13.14 (from a concerto by Vivaldi) seem to support this interpretation, in Example 13.15 (from an overture by Jommelli) what the authors refer to as a *tirade* is slurred, suggesting that it should be played with a single bow stroke. (This apparent inconsistency sent me back to chapter 11, "Orchestral Performance Practices," but oddly the section subtitled "Bowing and Articulation" deals almost entirely with the second half of the eighteenth century.)

Later in their chapter "The Birth of Orchestration," the authors present a fascinating and provocative analysis of the exposition of the first movement of Haydn's Symphony No. 6 (*Le Matin*), in which they identify *tirades* (again with slurs) among several effects of grandeur that Haydn deftly manipulates (494–501). This analysis proposes new ways of thinking and writing about eighteenth-century orchestral music:

> Concert symphonies were intended, as Schulze said, to "show off instrumental music in all its magnificence," and in this sense symphonies, insofar as they were about anything, were about the orchestra. By using the full range of orchestral effects to highlight the melodies, harmonies, rhythms, textures, and structures of the music, eighteenth-century symphony composers communicated the excellence of the orchestras for which they composed their symphonies and the excellence of orchestras in general. (501)

This makes good sense; but in choosing a patently programmatic symphony to make this point, Spitzer and Zaslaw are being a little coy, perhaps. Haydn's Symphony No. 6 may be "about the orchestra," but it is also about the morning. Of Haydn's slow introduction, they write in a footnote: "This opening adagio is sometimes said to depict the sun rising over the horizon." This implies either that they do not subscribe to this interpretation, or that it is unimportant or impossible to verify whether or not the music depicts a sunrise. But this Adagio, at the beginning of a symphony that Haydn himself called *Le Matin*, most definitely depicts a sunrise, and that sunrise is a crucial part of the picture painted by Haydn in this first movement. Spitzer and Zaslaw refer to the solo flute melody at the beginning of the Allegro as "a radical effect of variety and nuance." That is undoubtedly true; but to ignore the fact that the flute is playing a *tuba pastoralis* motive (much like the one Beethoven later used in the last movement of the *Pastoral* Symphony) is to ignore an important element in Haydn's depiction of the morning. The combination of the sunrise and the cowherd's call makes clear that Haydn's first movement depicts not just any morning, but a morning outdoors in the country.

The Birth of the Orchestra is an important book that belongs in every serious music library. It contains much that will be of interest to students of performance practice, church music, opera, the concerto, the symphony, and the social history of music. Orchestral musicians as well will read it with excitement and pleasure, learning from it more about the early history of their venerable institution than they can from any other single source.

Notes

1. The authors appear to have made no use of an important series of recent articles on Beethoven's orchestral musicians by Theodore Albrecht (2000a; 2000b; 2002a; 2002b; 2003; 2004).

2. See Landes (1983:123) on this crucially important advance in timekeeping technology.

3. Spitzer and Zaslaw do not consider here the possibility of two players using one part, although elsewhere they ask readers to assume "that string players played two on a part" (144).

4. The date and the number of players in this orchestra in Bologna do not agree, in any case, with the text. Spitzer and Zaslaw state: "The largest of these commercial theater orchestras in Table 5.1 is an orchestra of 58 at the opening of the Teatro Comunale in Bologna in 1763" (148). But Table 5.1 contains no entry dated 1763, and the entry dated 1778 involves an orchestra of sixty-two.

5. Some of these symphonies may have been performed in church, in which case the figures would more likely have been realized by an organ.

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