Sumner Lott, Marie. 2015. *The Social Worlds of Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

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The serious nature of nineteenth-century domestic social activity, even activity that might appear to be solely leisurely and playful at a first glance, is at the center of Marie Sumner Lott's recent book, *The Social Worlds of Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music*. Through this notion of serious leisure Sumner Lott weaves together an absorbing discussion of a multitude of composers, performers, and locales. She bases her work around the central idea that the oft-discussed retreat of the middle class into the domestic sphere in the first half of the century—a retreat mostly owing itself to active government depoliticization of salon culture across the continent—led to a situation in which bourgeois and upper-class men "needed spaces in which they could socialize together without compromising their social standing" (14). No longer able to gather under explicitly political auspices with the same ease as before, many turned to music as a reason to congregate and socialize.[1] Thus, Sumner Lott contends, sociable, leisurely activities became *serious* business.

Research on the influence of leisure on musical life in the nineteenth century has often centered on the public sphere of large music performance associations and semi-public amateur concerts by invitation. Focused on the concept of national unification through the creation of an educated middle class (or *Bildungsbürgertum*), monographs such as Ryan Minor's (2012) *Choral Fantasies: Music, Festivity, and Nationhood in 19th-Century Germany* have called attention to the importance of contemporary ideals of communality and the influence of these ideals on musical output. On the other hand, when the truly private, domestic sphere of 1800s Europe has been broached, discussion has usually centered on the piano and, quite often, on the women seated behind it. For instance, Richard Leppert's work on musical portraiture in eighteenth-century England is wide-ranging in its discussion of instruments and their uses in the home, but as he turns to the nineteenth century, particularly in the latter chapters of *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (1993), he primarily discusses the enactment of gender around the piano. Work on piano duets, particularly reinvigorated in the last two decades by Philip Brett's (1997) seminal article on four-hand piano playing and gay male sexuality, has further cemented the importance of the instrument in discussions of

nineteenth-century domesticity and of the nexus between music and social interaction.

While Sumner Lott's work owes an enormous debt to the scholars mentioned above, her strict focus on chamber music written solely for strings and the community that perpetuated its popularity throughout the nineteenth century makes *The Social Worlds of Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music* unique and compelling. She argues that chamber string music can reveal just as much about domesticity, about modes of listening, and about gender relations as issues surrounding the piano and its use in the home. Unwilling to draw hard lines between private and public spheres, Lott draws on Benedict Anderson's concept of an "imagined community" to explain the manner in which seemingly private, leisurely string playing influenced public, "serious" compositional output by creating a collective sense of identity expressed through the material objects, print media, and artworks shared among geographically and temporally dispersed groups of people. And although Lott does not use this concept to directly discuss the creation of nationhood, it is no coincidence that she borrows a term closely connected to this notion. Throughout the book she returns, again and again, to the way in which leisurely musical activities and the imagined communities they generated influenced national styles and, through the formation of such styles, influenced the creation and reception of works that we now consider central to the canon of Western music.

Lott's communities (both real and imagined) are almost exclusively male, due to the nature of nineteenth-century string playing. As such, this volume is a survey not only of the influence of the private sphere on the public one and of leisure on musical output, but also of the gendered construction of what came to be seen as musical "masterpieces." In her introduction, Lott makes a point of emphasizing that middle-class men across nineteenth-century Europe sought to paint their musical activities as cerebral and contemplative and to dissociate from the traditional view of domestic music as female-oriented. In her view, this created a sort of negatively constructed private sphere: one concerned with *not* being feminine. Thus, to write the kind of chamber music discussed in this book—from string quartet arrangements of operas through brilliant-style chamber works, to "serious" works in the footsteps of the classical quartet tradition—was to participate a larger effort to masculinize music. That the Western canon of artworks is predominantly masculine in conception and execution is, of course, no surprise. What is interesting and unique about Lott's central claim, however, is the concentration on this private musical sphere and on the way in which masculine sociability, in particular, influenced the construction of canonic musical works.

The scope of the book is broad. Although Lott restricts her focus to

chamber music for strings alone—and therefore to this specifically masculine sphere of sociability—she discusses the activity of a large number of composers, both canonic and non-canonical, throughout the century and across the continent. In some ways this breadth makes the overall message of her book more difficult to discern, but, at the same time, it is necessary in demonstrating that this masculine sociability had an influence, both implicitly and explicitly, on a wide range of musical output. This is particularly evident in her first chapter, which is centered on the material print culture necessary for interaction among dispersed musical communities. Lott's focus is on three differently sized German publishing firms—Hofmeister, Peters, and Schlesinger. Through a careful investigation of each firm's catalogs she reveals that what has traditionally been perceived as a sharp decline in string music publishing throughout the century is rather simply a shift in the market. It is not that string music became less popular. Rather, interest shifted from the new "brilliant," domestic quartets popular in the first part of the century to reprints of older works; this shift was due both to the emergence of the notion of canonic compositions and to the relatively exorbitant price of publication for new string works.[2] This chapter is an example of exactly what is compelling about Sumner Lott's book: the collection of sources that piece-by-piece demonstrate that nineteenth-century musical communities were more varied and more extensive than previously thought and that they created an ever more porous boundary between private and public spheres.

In the rest of the monograph, Lott turns to a closer exploration of particular chamber works for strings. Her analyses are brief, but careful and often very revelatory. Particularly interesting is the discussion of opera arrangements with which she opens her second chapter. Although the field of musicology has a deep familiarity with four-hand piano arrangements and the manner in which they, in Thomas Christensen's words, "made acoustically accessible a repertory to which most musicians had only occasional access in live performance" (1999, 259), the existence and function of chamber string transcriptions has not been discussed to the same degree. Sumner Lott contends that there is something of specific interest in string arrangements of operatic works, particularly since these transcriptions would have been intended for performance by an exclusively male audience. The emphasis in these works is on pleasurable, sociable, but serious play, rather than on complete fidelity to the original work; these arrangements frequently center on the most playable portions of the opera (arias and duets) and often omit, shorten, or largely rework choruses, the texture of which would be difficult to render in a small ensemble. There appears to be something more, however, to the act of arranging an operatic work for a

specifically male ensemble than Sumner Lott suggests. She discusses omissions, in such arrangements, of operatic sections that would not have been appropriate for a domestic audience—the Wolf's Glen scene from Weber's *Der Freischutz,* for example, notably absent from C.W. Henning's quartet arrangement. However, here the large number of examples presented act more as a hindrance than an asset to Sumner Lott's argument, preventing her from fully delving into the nature of each arrangement and what any alterations (or lack thereof) might imply. For instance, a very brief section is devoted to "Va, dit-elle, mon enfant," Alice's romance from Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*, and its function in Jacques Strunz's string quartet arrangement of the opera. Given the association of the genre of the romance with femininity one cannot help but think that the implications of a group of men embodying a female voice in this case are more extensive than Sumner Lott implies.[3] She simply concludes that "because this operatic number already utilizes a style appropriate to the salon or parlor, no significant changes are needed" (57), but much more can be made of this double translation—from the feminine genre of the romance, to grand opera and, finally, back to the salon, this time to a specifically masculine genre. This does little to diminish the overall impact of the book. Still, a lengthier discussion of issues of gender in such arrangements would have provided a valuable element of nuance to Summer Lott's argument, set out in the introduction, about string chamber music as masculinizing endeavor.

In the next two chapters, Sumner Lott turns to original chamber works for strings. Here she not only successfully addresses the sometimes-thorny link between biography and works, but also solidifies an idea central to her book, the notion that the use of musical conventions is a mode of coded social communication. In her third chapter, "Music for Men of Leisure," she turns to works by composers that she concedes might be called—borrowing Philip Bohlman's (1992) term—"unremarkable." The subsequent chapter deals with "remarkable" composers who are nevertheless often seen as traditionalists and therefore not associated with a musical avant-garde. Rather than drawing a harsh line between the two groups of composers, Sumner Lott points out parallels: not only did each faction participate in the creation of social groups through musical convention, but each also focused particularly on establishing their work as masculine and "serious" and tried to distance it from musical attempts they saw as frivolous. Here it becomes difficult not to read a stronger gendered impetus in both of these groups' desires to divorce their work from the domestic leisurely sphere and thus move their music even further from "the feminine" than before. It appears that in order to gain canonic status, the genre had to undergo what Judith Fetterley has called "immasculation" (1978, xx), a process of

imbuing something with characteristics traditionally seen as masculine.[4] Sumner Lott tells us that "these progressive composers purposely sought to distance themselves from the more conversational and leisurely performer-centered style being developed at the same time" (143), but a more in-depth exploration of the impetus behind that distancing would have made her argument even more compelling.

Closeness among composers is also the topic of the fifth chapter, wherein Sumner Lott discusses programmatic works by Onslow, Gade, and Smetana. The programmatic content discussed in this chapter has a different function than in more well-known symphonic programmatic works. The programs of these chamber works were often either not publicized, such as in the case of Onslow's "The Bullet," or were revised depending on their audience, as in Smetana's quartet "From My Life," which had a much more personal, private program for its performances among a close circle and a more political, nationalist program for its public performances. In this chapter Sumner Lott again deftly demonstrates the influence that these small communities of artists, performers, and amateurs exerted both on music made for their own consumption and on public musical life.

Each of the final two chapters explores the way these small communities influenced the chamber string oeuvre of a specific composer: Brahms in the sixth chapter and Dvořák in the seventh. Sumner Lott pays close attention to the associations and communities which these composers frequented. Much is made of the care each composer took to fit into an extant tradition and therefore into a community of composers and performers. While Brahms's poverty in early life somewhat distanced him from the societies of the type discussed in the first part of the book, his earlier quartets show an admiration of domestic composers such as Spohr and an attempt to fit his work into their mold in order to make a name for himself. According to Sumner Lott, it was only the inscription within this domestic tradition that then allowed for his later works, such as the op. 51 quartets, to move "from the parlor to posterity" (196). In the subsequent chapter, Dvořák is demonstrated to have undergone a similar progression and to have addressed a similar multitude of audiences. His early works place him squarely in the community of the New German avant-garde, while his middle-period quartets show his ability to accommodate his style to the desires of listeners, rapidly shifting from a more specifically Slavonic inspired composition in op. 51, to a more Germanic work in the Viennese tradition in op. 61. His later op. 96 "American," by contrast, makes use of the style of the "unremarkable" composers of the third chapter. This allows Sumner Lott to conclude that "at the end of the century, Dvořák summed up the dominant trends of the string chamber music of his generation"

(243). This is the final sentence of the book; there is no standalone concluding chapter. It is understandable that Sumner Lott would feel reluctant to neatly tie up the multitude of topics broached in the book, but at this point, having visited so many locales and traversed the entirety of the nineteenth century in a relatively short monograph, the reader would have been well-served by the anchoring point of a conclusion.

In its examination of the manner in which such male, middle- and upper-class domestic leisure and play influenced the output of musical works, both well-known and all-but-forgotten, Sumner Lott's book is an enjoyable, engaging, and informative read. The few minor problems of the monograph can be excused by the benefits provided by its breadth. It is a rare find of a book that weaves historical documentation and analysis so expertly into a tale about what society tells us about music, about what music tells us about society, and about the way in which the two can function dialectically. By focusing on the practical side of music production in the nineteenth century, Sumner Lott demonstrates how, through an adept managing of the material culture of the past, the transient quality of musical performance can become not an impediment, but rather an asset to understanding its past.

Notes

1. The effect of associations and societies on social and political life has been discussed, as Sumner Lott points out, with particular skill by historian Carol Harrison (1999).

2. As Sumner Lott shows through an examination of the Calculationbucher of publication companies, unlike piano works, where the publication might number a few pages, multiple impressions had to be made to produce chamber works for strings, due to the multiplicity of parts and the (usually) increased length of these works.

3. A more extended examination of the gender politics of the romance can be found in Cheng (2011).

4. The notion of "immasculation" has been applied to music by Jeffrey Kallberg (1998).

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