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First published 2008

University of Rochester Press
668 Mt. Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620, USA
www.urpress.com
and Boydell & Brewer Limited
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK
www.boydellandbrewer.com

ISBN-13: 978–1–58046–250–1
ISBN-10: 1–58046–250–2

ISSN: 1071–9989

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beyond the art of finger dexterity : reassessing Carl Czerny / edited by
David Gramit.
p. cm. — (Eastman studies in music, ISSN 1071-9989 ; v. 53)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN-13: 978-1-58046-250-1 (hardcover : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 1-58046-250-2
1. Czerny, Carl, 1791–1857—Criticism and interpretation.
2. Music—19th century—History and criticism. 3. Piano—
Performance—History—19th century. I. Gramit, David.
ML410.C99B48 2008
786.2092—dc22
2007037309

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

This publication is printed on acid-free paper.
Printed in the United States of America.

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Introduction

David Gramit

> And should it ever happen that a history of nineteenth-century music opened with the remark, "On 20 February 1791 Carl Czerny was born," this would involve less the transmission of a fact than an announcement that a roundabout and tortuous argument was about to begin in *ex post facto* justification of such an obviously grotesque placing of emphasis.
>
> Carl Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History*

Carl Dahlhaus's brief mention may seem a singularly inauspicious way to begin a volume of essays devoted to Czerny. And yet, his choice of Carl Czerny to lead off a self-evidently preposterous approach to the history of nineteenth-century music neatly reveals Czerny's paradoxical situation in the received history of European music. Dahlhaus's strategy is clear enough: in order to demonstrate the rhetorical practices implicit in music-historical narrative, he places an icon of insignificance in the rhetorically crucial opening position of an imagined history. Just to make certain that there would be no mistaking this strategy, he preceded his turn to Czerny by another music-historical fact, one whose status as significant is to be understood as unimpeachable: "On 19 October 1814 Franz Schubert composed his 'Gretchen am Spinnrade.'"[1] Czerny, then, serves as a foil, simultaneously representing historical inadequacy and warning against ill-conceived attempts by historians to engage in "obviously grotesque" revisionism. Not just any mediocrity, however, would do in this position. In order for the reference to succeed, Dahlhaus needed more than an obscure name; he needed a name that was familiar enough to *represent* obscurity. And to do so, whether in a sudden burst of inspiration or after prolonged reflection, an inspired choice—Carl Czerny—came to mind.

Why did Czerny work so effectively in this role? First, his name accomplishes something that few others in the history of classical music would: recognition not only by scholars of the *Kleinmeister* of the period, but by virtually everyone with more than a passing familiarity with that musical tradition—but that familiarity is not based on any reputation as a great composer. So firmly established and enduring was Czerny's name that early in the twentieth century, Willa

Cather could also use it as a kind of self-evident shorthand, albeit of a more positive sort. Cather's *Song of the Lark* chronicles a diva's rise from small-town obscurity through her unique strength of character and determination, and those qualities are foreshadowed in the book's opening pages: the first suggestion of serious musical interest—or indeed, of any music at all—that the reader encounters is the passing observation that among the comforting objects that meet the eye of the near delirious eleven-year-old protagonist, Thea Kronberg, in her family's parlor is "Czerny's 'Daily Studies' which stood open on the upright piano."[2] As Cather was well aware, Czerny's ubiquitous piano etudes have ensured familiarity, if rarely affection, from countless pianists since his lifetime. He has come to stand for diligence, technical facility, and manual dexterity—qualities very nearly diametrically opposed to the ineffable genius conventionally associated with compositional greatness.

But Dahlhaus's hypothetical history invokes more than a famous but famously noncreative name. It specifies a date, thereby calling to mind the musical era in which Czerny existed, and thus also the towering figures against which he has been compared when evaluated as anything but a pedagogue: born in Vienna in the year of Mozart's death there, while Haydn resided there as a revered master, the year before the young Beethoven arrived there from Bonn, and only six years before Schubert's birth there, Czerny faced the stiffest local competition imaginable in a contest for enduring musical significance, and the utter absence of any of his music in the canon carries with it an unmistakable implication: not only did Czerny not win, place, or show, he apparently failed to finish the race at all. Add to this the knowledge—not, to be sure, as familiar as Czerny's exercises, but familiar enough to students of the canonic composers—that Czerny studied with Beethoven and taught Liszt, and the image of a musician who could at best be considered an also-ran is apparently complete.

This received history, which made Dahlhaus's choice of Czerny so apparently unexceptionable, is precisely what this collection sets out to question, through a multifaceted reassessment of Czerny, his context, his accomplishments, and his legacy. Our collective argument—and one, we hope, neither roundabout nor tortuous—is that both the assumptions and the knowledge on which Czerny's historical positioning has been based are limited enough to result in significant distortions. Reassessment reveals a figure who, far from being a cooperatively insignificant icon of mediocrity, made important contributions to nearly every aspect of musical life in the early nineteenth century: not only in pedagogy, but also in editorial work, publication, music history, and, perhaps most unexpectedly but remarkably of all, composition in the serious vein in which he long seemed so signally unmemorable. And furthermore, the nature of his activity in a number of these areas ultimately contributed to his obscurity as much as it did to the success of the larger enterprise of serious music.

The argument can proceed from two not necessarily easily compatible positions. Both of these, I hasten to acknowledge, originate well before the present

volume, both in general and with respect to Czerny in particular. The first, and the most plainly applicable to Czerny, disputes the assumption that music history is exclusively or even primarily the history of canonically recognized great works of musical art and their creation. A diverse variety of musical subfields—including, with no claim to completeness or hierarchical ordering, ethnomusicology, popular music studies, feminist scholarship, and some strands of a "new" musicology now surely approaching middle age—have long argued, *pace* Dahlhaus and many others, that approaching music as a practice rather than an assembly of works, far from impoverishing our understanding, enriches it immeasurably and, to put the matter more bluntly, *corrects* it. As far as Czerny is concerned, this course correction is most apparent in the pioneering work of Grete Wehmeyer, whose *Carl Czerny und die Einzelhaft am Klavier* (Carl Czerny and Solitary Confinement at the Piano) drew attention not only to the variety of Czerny's activities, including his serious compositions, but also, as its title and even more its subtitle (*oder Die Kunst der Fingerfertigkeit und die industrielle Arbeitsideologie* [or, "The Art of Finger Dexterity" and the Ideology of Industrial Labor]) intimates, to the relationship between the quotidian musical activities with which Czerny is most closely associated and basic values and practices of society as a whole.[3] All the contributions to this volume are indebted to both her example and the foundation she has established for renewed study of Czerny. From this perspective, understanding music implies understanding the myriad ways in which people engage in and conceptualize musical activities, from the most mundane to the most rarefied, and the ways in which those activities and ideologies shape their conceptions of who they are, individually and collectively. And from this perspective, a person like Czerny, who not only quite literally shaped the activities and the bodies of countless pianists during his lifetime and beyond, but also, through his editorial work and advocacy, particularly for Beethoven, fundamentally shaped the way European culture conceived of the nature of art music, indeed becomes a figure of major significance.

The second approach to arguing for Czerny's significance aligns much more closely with traditional values of work-centered music history but points out that the exclusion of his music from the canon occurred not through critical appraisal and rejection but through simple ignorance. Due to circumstances that Otto Biba in particular discusses in his contribution to this volume, the publicly available music that shaped Czerny's reputation during his lifetime and for long thereafter did not include a great many of his works in "serious" genres like the Mass, the symphony, or the string quartet. These survived primarily in manuscript and are now housed in the Archives of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien. They are "works that have no history," to an even greater extent than the long-forgotten Neapolitan operas of Czerny's contemporary Rossini, to describe which Philip Gossett coined that phrase.[4] Rossini's operas have indeed fallen into obscurity, but they were at least publicly performed; in the case of Czerny, many works have to the best of our knowledge received their

premieres only in recent decades, and still more have yet to be performed. Once heard, however, those works prove remarkably engaging. The result, as I trace in the final chapter of this volume, has been a reappraisal of Czerny the composer, a reappraisal to which several other chapters contribute in greater musical detail than has yet been available. That reappraisal has gained momentum as a result of scattered individual performances and a body of commercially available recordings that has swelled significantly over the past two decades; it has culminated, for the time being at least, in the event at which many of the chapters in this volume originated, the first music festival devoted to Czerny, held at the University of Alberta in June 2002 and organized by the Canadian Centre (now the Wirth Institute) for Austrian and Central European Studies in collaboration with the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien. The self-perpetuating cycle of visibility leading to performances and recordings, leading in turn to critical reception and further enhanced visibility, is belatedly under way for Czerny.[5] A gap of some two centuries between creation and reception means that these works will indeed never have the historical influence that Czerny's other activities did, but they are at last becoming available as a part of the concert repertoire.

I will have occasion below to reconsider the potential tensions between these two directions from which Czerny can be approached, but in at least one respect, they intersect: whether implicitly or explicitly, any historical reassessment that focuses on a previously neglected figure demands a consideration of sources that have previously attracted little attention. To assert that documentary study is linked to a positivist avoidance of significant critical questions would not only be dogmatic, but hamper a truly critical undertaking by ensuring that the received documentary record, selected on the basis of precisely the untenable assumptions and ignorance that fostered Czerny's neglect, remained unchallenged. Nearly every chapter that follows therefore directs attention to documents or music that have received little or no previous scrutiny, but several sections merit special mention in this respect. One of the few areas of Czerny research that has been relatively well developed is the study of his autobiographical recollections, which have long been available in both English and German.[6] Attilio Bottegal's study, however, goes farther, providing not only a close survey of the origins and interrelations of all of Czerny's extant writings about his life but also editions and translations of two of those documents, one of them an extended account of his youth that has previously appeared only in excerpts. Ingrid Fuchs's chapter on Czerny as an advocate for Beethoven also takes as its primary concern the careful and complete establishment of the documentary record, and given the pivotal importance that Beethoven quickly assumed in the European musical tradition, it is not surprising that her contribution is one of those that has been most valuable to other contributors to the present volume. Finally, with respect to Czerny's music, the appendix kindly prepared by Otto Biba provides for the first time in print a full record of the

autograph scores held in the Archives of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien. By making clear the sheer breadth of music that remains to be explored, the appendix provides a concluding invitation to continue the project in which this volume participates through further musical and critical exploration.

The varying perspectives from which Czerny is revealed as a figure of interest have led to a volume in which authors of an unusually diverse variety of backgrounds have contributed chapters that vary widely in style, methodology, and priorities. In addition to the text-critical and documentary approaches I have already mentioned, contextual and biographical studies coexist with stylistic and formal analyses, intensive exchanges on questions of performance practice, and critical cultural studies. In several instances, authors' positions leave them in open or implicit conflict with the views of others. I have not attempted to impose an artificial harmony or mandate a unified view of Czerny or his legacy, but rather viewed these disagreements as the beginning of a long-overdue discussion in which differences are to be expected. Indeed, the existence of controversy around Czerny is one more sign that he is more relevant to understanding his musical culture and our own than we have previously realized.

The collection begins with studies that testify to renewed interest in Czerny the composer, but indirectly, by laying the groundwork for musicological evaluation in ways that have long been applied to Czerny's more renowned contemporaries. The questions are familiar, but asking them of Czerny leads to new perspectives on him and his era. Since the nineteenth-century beginnings of musicology as an academic discipline, along with interest in a composer's music has come interest in the composer's life and its context—the topic of the first chapters in this volume.[7] The cultural and musical context of Czerny's compositional accomplishment itself is Otto Biba's focus. His outline of the Viennese musical world after Beethoven and Schubert reveals not only why Czerny and many others found that light, "brilliant" compositions were far more viable in the musical market than serious works, but also how both that market and negative critical reception of Czerny's early compositional efforts may have consigned Czerny's later efforts at serious composition to the unpublished obscurity from which only a few have only recently begun to emerge. The result is perhaps the most fully developed sketch of Czerny's character yet to have been written.

To an extent that is unusual for musicians of Czerny's period, Czerny's own autobiographical writings form the basis for much of our factual knowledge of his life and for a great deal of his received image. Both Alice M. Hanson's and Attilio Bottegal's contributions proceed from that starting point, albeit in different directions. As I discussed above, Bottegal's chapter clarifies the nature of that documentary basis and the relationships among Czerny's various accounts and the history of their reception, as well as providing a critically edited text of one of the more significant of those sources. Hanson, however, proceeds outward from the sources. Beginning with Czerny's own periodization of his life, she provides for each period what Czerny's account conspicuously omits: a sense

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