

E. Gienow-Hecht, Jessica C.: *Sound Diplomacy. Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850-1920*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 2009. ISBN: 9780226292151; 352 S.

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This ambitious book provides a number of interesting insights into transatlantic relations between the United States and Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries. The author seeks in particular to explain and assess the remarkable relationship between German (and Austrian) symphonic music and its American admirers and consumers. The depth of this relationship and the preponderance of German music, German performers, German conductors in America, and, indeed, a German spirit which she identifies as a romantic internationalism, is perhaps little appreciated or understood. The popularity of German romantic music, particularly Mozart, Beethoven and Wagner transmitted an emotional language that both Germans and the Americans who created, paid for, and attended symphonic concerts, shared. As the author argues, this was both national (Germanic) but also identified as a universal spirit embodied and articulated by national composers. In effect, this transmission served as a form of cultural diplomacy carried on by private individuals, not the state, and was therefore far more effective.

The almost complete dominance of Germans in American classical music was, throughout the entire period, powerful and certainly unexceeded by any compositions, players, or influences from France, England, Italy, or indeed, from the United States itself. Germany was so important that American students and admirers flocked there to study and attend concerts. Wealthy enthusiasts founded symphony orchestras in New York, Chicago, St. Louis and Cincinnati and then hired German players and insisted on German-trained conductors. This triumph by the turn of the 20th century was almost complete and even some growing doubts about German Kultur and its political implications after 1900 did little to dampen the influence.

Even World War I, with its internment and deportation of some German musicians and conductors did not, in the long run, threaten the canon of German classical music or its hold on classical audiences. Even today, in the 21st Century, this oversized influence on American symphonic performances remains. Nineteenth Century German romantic music is still the backbone of the symphony program.

The importance of this book lies not just in the assembly of the names and numbers of performers and conductors and their programs. Instead, it suggests an important missing element in America's complex relationship to Europe. We know the story of American social science indebtedness to German training and educational innovations particularly in fields such as sociology, economics and psychology. We are certainly aware of the long love affair of Americans with Paris in the 20th Century. But this new story greatly enriches our sense of the complexity of this transatlantic relationship.

Jessica Gienow-Hecht, however, has much to say beyond this important story. She argues two further important points. The first refutes the idea, familiar to American historians that symphony orchestras and their sponsors participated in the sacralization of culture, disparaging popular culture and creating an exclusive, elite domain of inaccessible tastes and practices. Her argument is far more complex than this and suggests that the elites who founded symphony orchestras were genuinely interested in making this music available to a large public. And she argues that in many respects they were successful. (Here some more evidence about audiences would have been very helpful). Her other larger point is that emotion itself has a history and a character. It may even be identified with a nation on occasion. In this sense, the history of Germanic music in the United States is not the story of immigrants and their remembrances and celebration of the Fatherland. Far from it. But rather, this was an informal but profound exchange based upon the great 19th century productions of German musical culture that conveyed to Americans a deep and complex sense of a civilization that the United States seemed to lack at the time. It is perhaps also true that the United States became the most

important, among all nations, of this cultural exchange with Germany.

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