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***Conservatories and Nineteenth-Century Music Historiography: Pedagogy, Transformation, Reproduction***

Historical musicologists have often looked toward nineteenth-century Europe to assess the crystallization of modern art-musical practices and their subsequent institutionalization. Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of the field of high art music over the past 150 years has been its remarkable durability. In spite of groundbreaking work in the histories of listening (Johnson, 1995), canonization (Weber, 2008), the “work-concept” (Goehr, 1992), and various other domains of musical life, there remains a paucity of literature in the one area that can best explain this temporal stability: music pedagogy.

Focusing on the shifting landscapes of German music education, this paper argues that the burgeoning of music conservatories in the latter half of the nineteenth century played a central role in transforming art-musical expertise, only then to institutionalize that expertise generation after generation. As some recent sociological work has highlighted, social reproduction cannot be explained away by recourse to the concept of inertia, but is rather an “ongoing achievement” of “socio-material assemblages.” (Schubert, 2011) Using these perspectives to challenge widespread notions of these pedagogical institutions as somehow inherently conservative, and referencing a variety of archival and primary source materials, I analyze their reproductive role within the musical field as a historical phenomenon in its own right.

In order to align musicians’ skills, dispositions, and values with extant musical cultures, conservatories employed diverse pedagogical techniques: these include music libraries (which naturalize the canon as well as the accessibility of its texts), discourses and practices of student assessment (which inculcate in pupils the ethical and practical value of faithfully interpreting musical works in performance), and textbooks (which codify and disseminate established disciplinary knowledge). As well as looking at these specific practices, I outline why conservatory training was organized not to have pupils produce novel musical knowledge, but instead emphasized the mastery of technical competencies, especially in performance and music theory.

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