Introduction

The essays collected in this volume were presented at the Second International Conference on Word and Music Studies held at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in August 1999. The conference was also the second meeting of the International Association for Word and Music Studies (WMA), which was founded two years earlier during the preceding conference on Word and Music Studies held at Graz.

One focus of the Ann Arbor conference were general issues of word and music relations, which had already formed the thematic focus at Graz in 1997. Providing a platform for interdisciplinary discussions of interart or ‘intermedial’ relations between words/literature and music is indeed one of the principal raisons d'être for the WMA, whose aim it is to coordinate and connect the worldwide research in the field. This intermedial field is in fact so wide that even basic general perspectives on it, be it from a typological, semiotic, culturalist, or reception-aesthetic point of view, can hardly be adequately covered by one or two conferences. The discussion will consequently have to continue (at least) in the following conference organized by the WMA in Sydney in July 2001.

In addition, a second centre of interest of the Ann Arbor conference was the song cycle. It had been chosen from vocal music as an obvious area of word and music interaction. As a musico-literary genre, the song cycle not only elicits analyses of relations between text and music in individual songs but also raises the question if, to what extent, and under what conditions words and/or music contribute to creating a larger unity beyond the limits of single songs.

These two centres of interest of the conference also provide the bipartite structure of the present volume. The first section, entitled “Defining the Field”, is a sequel to the same topic to which the entirety of volume 1 of the Word and Music Series was dedicated. The subjects discussed in this section of the present volume are threefold: issues linked with a culturalist approach
to literature and music, the verbalization of music, and the cognitive and
reception-orientated problem of what happens when a literary work attempts
to imitate music.

The two opening contributions by John Neubauer and Michael Halliwell
both deal with the culturalist issue, though from differing angles: Neubauer
("Organicism and Modernism / Music and Literature") addresses a very
general topic: the problem of finding a common historical and theoretical
terminology which besets all interart/intermedial reflections as opposed to
‘internalist’ ones. He illustrates this problem taking the example of ‘organici-
sm’ as a widely recognized notion in musical as well as literary histories of
Modernism. Referring, on the one hand, to contemporary musicological
discussions by A. B. Marx, Schenker, Schönberg, Bartók and others and, on
the other hand, to literary critics such as Rudolf Steiner, Günther Müller, I.
A. Richards and Cleanth Brooks, Neubauer reveals with a remarkably
deconstructive impetus that ‘organicism’ had different meanings not only in
writings about music and literature but also in different cultures and for
different authors and thus appears unsuitable as a term characterizing Mod-
erism. Ultimately, by also including ‘Modernism’ in his terminological
deconstruction, Neubauer leaves a vast space for alternative notions that
could be devised for the project of a “culturally embedded histor[y] of music
and literature” (22) as advocated by him. Halliwell ("‘Singing the Nation’:
Word/Music Tension in the Opera Voss") concentrates on a more specific
but no less interesting issue: the contribution of vocal music to the self-defi-
nition of Australia as a post-colonial nation. His case study focuses on the
operatic version of the Australian epic Voss, regarded as the key work of the
nobel prize winner Patrick White. Exploring the relation of the opera to the
original novel as well as the interrelation between operatic text and music,
Halliwell comes to the conclusion that Voss may not be a ‘great national
opera’ in the traditional sense, but with its in-built tensions, its hybridity and
eklecticism it expresses the contemporary uneasy state of Australian nation-
hood particularly well.

The next two essays, by Mary M. Breatnach and Peter Dayan, highlight
the problem of verbalizing musical experiences, and they both do so with
reference to nineteenth-century French culture, in which, notably in the
context of Symbolism and Le Parnasse, music played an outstanding role.
While Breatnach investigates Charles Baudelaire’s response to Richard Wagner, whose music became a catalyst for Baudelaire for formulating the essence of his own aesthetics and in particular his ideas about ‘great art’ (‘Writing about Music: Baudelaire and Tannhäuser in Paris’), Dayan concentrates on Stéphane Mallarmé’s comments on music in Divagations. In this essay Mallarmé suggests that individual musical compositions are examples of an ideally non-referential ‘ethereal’ art which resists verbalization, unless such comments centre on music in general, while verbal criticism can at least bring out the difference between actual literary works with their inevitably inadequate referentiality and the Mallarmean idea of an ideal book. According to Dayan, Mallarmé thereby foreshadows poststructuralist approaches of literature and at the same time highlights a problem that is still worth considering with regard to today’s musicological discourse.

Finally, in this section, Frédérique Arroyas, in posing the question, “When is a Text Like Music?”, investigates a crucial issue of all literature that purports to approach the condition of music. Her reception-orientated answer is based on a cognitive approach: a text appears to be musicalized if it elicits a reader response in which elements of the two cognitive fields ‘novel’ and ‘music’ produce a particular kind of ‘blending’. The emergence of this cognitive ‘blending’, which is more that the sum of the component parts involved, does not exclusively depend on explicit references to music in the text but can also result from the foregrounding of the acoustic dimension of fictional language or from other unusual devices. This theory is convincingly illustrated by Roger Laporte’s novel Fugue, a nouveau roman that blends the frames of reference ‘fiction’ and ‘music’ by combining experimental novelwriting with structural analogies to a fugue.

The second section, dedicated to “The Song Cycle”, offers insights into generalities of the genre and the (problematic) coherence of song cycles, and into historical examples ranging, in chronological order, from Franz Schubert to Benjamin Britten and contemporary concept albums. According to Werner Wolf (‘‘Willst zu meinen Liedern deine Leier drehn?’ Intermedial Metatextuality in Schubert’s ‘Der Leiermann’”), Schubert’s Die Winterreise is a rare case of a nineteenth-century song cycle in which a truly cyclic unity is achieved – due to the metatextuality of the last song. This metatextuality allows a retrospective reading of the cycle as a ‘self-
begetting' work and provides a fictional motivation for it as a 'duo-
dramatic' re-enactment of the experience of the wanderer, who appears to
sing his story accompanied by the hurdy-gurdy man. In addition, it seems as
if Schubert had answered the wanderer's question terminating Müller's text
with his own composition, so that the intermedial reference to the "Leier"
(the hurdy-gurdy) also appears to motivate the musical accompaniment of
the wanderer's songs.

In partial contrast to this thesis of the achievement of cyclical unity at
least by metatextual implication, Leon Plantinga, making ample use of
contemporary evidence, warns against the unhistorical assumption, stem-
mind from a later (Schenkerian) aesthetics, that nineteenth-century song
cycles generally aimed at aesthetic unity through textual and musical
devices, even if the mention of 'cycle' and similar ideas in some of their
titles may suggest such unity to modern minds. Discussing "Design and
Unity in Schumann's Liederkreis, Op. 39?", Plantinga emphasizes the
narrow limits of such a quest for unity in Schumann's famous setting to
music of Eichendorff poems and likens this song 'cycle' with its loose
coherence more to a collection of pictures in a gallery. The same question of
a possible coherence in Schumann's Op. 39 is addressed by Jürgen Thym,
though from the perspective of the compositional genesis and the
publication history of the Liederkreis. While not denying certain unifying
devices, he, too, stresses the problematics of a quest for unity of a song cycle
which appears with different beginnings in different editions and which all
in all turns out to be more (as Thym's title has it) "A Cycle in Flux" rather
than a static pre-conceived whole.

A rather different answer to the question of unity of a song cycle is
provided by Harry E. Seelig. He regards "Hugo Wolf's Seventeen Divan-
Settings" not only as "An Undiscovered Goethe-Cycle" but also as a thor-
oughly through-composed song cycle. According to Seelig, this unity
derives largely from the fact that the Divan-settings respect the motivic
coherence of Goethe's West-östlicher Divan and retain the duodramatic
structure which is already present in Goethe's text and which is given addi-
tional relief by Wolf's treatment of the female voice of Suleika, a part that
was originally inspired by Goethe's friend, Marianne von Willemer.
Again in contrast to the preceding contribution, Suzanne M. Lodato's investigation into “Problems in Song Cycle Analysis and the Case of Mädchenblumen” continues the scepticism towards the unhistorical quest for unity already emphasized by Plantinga. Her main critical reference are pro-unity interpretations of Schumann song cycles by Patrick McCreless and David Neumeyer, to which she opposes a more balanced interpretation of Richard Strauss’s Mädchenblumen, an ‘experimental’ song cycle whose compositional history challenges and even compromises assumptions of ‘organic unity’. Walter Bernhart's main focus is on a typology of song cycles which he develops from an analysis of “The Variety of Benjamin Britten’s ‘Charms’”, that is, carmina, songs; yet the seemingly inevitable issue of coherence between songs in a song collection reoccurs in his contribution, too, namely in the guise of criteria for typological differentiations. Groups of songs to which such criteria do not apply are labelled ‘editorial collections’, to which Bernhart opposes three other kinds: a) ‘loose song cycles’ whose coherence rests on no more than the role of a unified lyric persona, b) song cycles unified by (further) predominantly literary means, and c) song cycles whose unity is based on a predominantly musical principle of coherence.

Markedly differing from the predilection of ‘high art’ of the past to which all the contributors to the section on the song cycle mentioned so far testify, Martina Elicker investigates a related form of vocal music in present day pop culture: “Concept Albums: Song Cycles in Popular Culture”. After defining the genre ‘concept album’ and giving an overview of outstanding examples of this genre that have appeared since the inaugural Beatles’s album Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band of 1967 she presents Paul Simon’s award winning album Graceland as a case study of the various textual and musical means used in concept albums to create coherence even among seemingly heterogeneous songs. The song cycle thus appears as a form which, in spite – or perhaps because of – its relative looseness and flexibility, is not confined to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but continues the tradition of word and music interaction in our day, albeit in another cultural context and in a different form.

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The editors would welcome comments, suggestions and queries both concerning the present volume and the International Association for Word and Music Studies at their following email addresses:

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