

Amy C. Beal. 2006. *New Music, New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

**Reviewed by Laura Silverberg**

To judge from the recent surge in publications on music of the Cold War, musicologists in increasing numbers are casting off the prejudices, anxieties, and animosities that for decades blinkered scholarship on postwar music.<sup>1</sup> Cold War divisions between the communist East and democratic West had once fostered the presumption that music intersected with politics principally in those lands in which music fell under state control, whereas Western modernism was “abstract” in the fullest sense and ideologically neutral. Consequently, issues of music and politics mainly inhabited ghetto chapters in histories of twentieth-century music, walled off from discussions of new compositional techniques.<sup>2</sup> Scholars seldom sought connections between musical decisions and ideological positions among composers of postwar music.<sup>3</sup> But if more recent scholarship is any indication, the dubious division between “political” music of the Eastern Bloc and “apolitical” modernism of the West is losing its historiographical force. This more recent body of literature compellingly demonstrates that any inquiry into music of the Cold War ought to consider the various ways in which music, aesthetics, and politics interact. Scholars are devoting ever more attention to matters of patronage, performance, and reception of new music, and they are grappling with the ideological associations of serialism, neoclassicism, indeterminacy, and experimentalism. This new literature not only examines institutions that influenced musical development (such as music festivals in the West or composers’ unions in the East), but also the proclivities of the individuals who directed them. And even though most recent publications focus on a single country, they nonetheless reveal the transnational nature of Cold War music by illustrating musical border-crossings ranging from predictable to thought-provoking.<sup>4</sup>

In the same spirit, Amy C. Beal’s *New Music, New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification* offers a detailed account of West German patronage of American experimental music. Drawing from a wealth of archival documents, newspaper reviews, and interviews she conducted between 1997 and 2002, Beal describes the network of individuals and institutions that supported American experimentalists during the Cold War. According to Beal, a complex of political,

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economic, and social conditions, combined with individual efforts to promote experimentalism, made West Germany “a context of prolific exile for American experimental music” (2). Frequently, American composers enjoyed more professional exposure and financial support in West Germany than they did in their home country. As I will describe in the first part of this review, Beal’s study provides ample evidence that American experimentalists did indeed find numerous professional opportunities in West Germany. But the detailed documentation of individual biographies, performances, commissions, and broadcasts leaves little room to consider why American experimentalism was so successful in West Germany. Compared to other recent studies on music during the Cold War, this book does little to address the relationship between modern music, patronage, and Cold War politics. In the second part of this review, I will consider the consequences of divorcing specific musical events from the political and social currents of the Cold War.

Despite the pervasive presence of American troops and American popular culture in West Germany, the success of American experimental music there was by no means a foregone conclusion. As Beal observes, West German reviews of American music conveyed both condescension and enthusiastic exoticization. Both sentiments reflected broader German notions of American culture as wild, innocent, free of European influence, and lacking an established tradition. Detractors of American music thus described it at best as historically naïve, unsophisticated, and lacking in quality, at worst as a rejection of Europe’s most venerated traditions and an attack upon the *Werkbegriff* itself. Meanwhile, proponents of American music regarded America’s relative youth and distance from Europe as a source of new musical possibilities and a welcome antidote to European stagnation. As Beal notes in the introduction, these attitudes have similarly colored German historiography of postwar music:

... comparisons of European and American music by German music historians and theorists can be expected to exhibit two basic ideas: (1) The European avant-gardist, even when opposing it, functions within a modernist paradigm framed by a highly authoritative tradition based on works of art created by single authors; and (2) the American avant-gardist functions in an egalitarian, heterogeneous society (within a vast, “open” landscape) where individuals create their own artistic frameworks, and American society depends on and values such individuality. (6)

In part because experimental music best affirmed positive stereotypes of music in postwar America, West German writings on American music have privileged experimentalism over serialism and neoclassicism. Acknowledging that the term can be difficult to define, Beal describes experimental music

in terms of technique, aesthetics, and patronage. “Network-driven” rather than “institutionally-bound,” experimentalists relied on a web of like-minded composers, performers, and patrons rather than the university for support. Seeking alternatives to serialism and neoclassicism, they “investigated new sound sources, novel formal structures, and idiosyncratic performance practices while developing their own means of publicity, performance, and distribution” (3). This broad definition encompasses composers as diverse as John Cage, Henry Cowell, Christian Wolff, Pauline Oliveros, Morton Feldman, Charles Ives, and Conlon Nancarrow. By contrast, composers such as Milton Babbitt, Elliott Carter, and Aaron Copland received comparatively little attention in the German musicological literature. Because they embraced serialism or neoclassicism and sought support through more traditional institutions, they failed to fit German conceptions of American music as distanced from and unburdened by European tradition.<sup>5</sup>

Yet during the immediate postwar years, the performance of art music in Germany—classical or modern, American or German—required not just enthusiasm and initiative, but also the reconstruction of a cultural infrastructure devastated during the Second World War. The book’s chronological account begins with a survey of American programs aimed at rebuilding German musical life during the occupation. Officials with the State Department and the United States Office of Military Government in Germany (OMGUS) viewed cultural renewal as integral to Germany’s political and economic rebirth, and maintained that culture could reaffirm Germany’s national unity during a time in which its political and economic divisions grew increasingly pronounced. To quote a directive from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to General Lucius Clay, Deputy Governor of Germany during the Allied occupation:

The reeducation of the German people is an integral part of policies intended to help develop a democratic form of government and to restore a stable and peaceful economy; it believes that there should be no forcible break in the cultural unity of Germany, but recognizes the spiritual value of the regional traditions of Germany and wishes to foster them; it is convinced that the manner and purposes of the reconstruction of the national German culture have a vital significance for the future of Germany. (19)

Musical policies in American-occupied Germany therefore aimed at both reeducation—the replacement of Nazi values with democratic ones—and rebuilding institutions that supported musical composition and performance. To counter German stereotypes of America as a land without culture, OMGUS initiatives promoted music both by Americans and by Europeans who immigrated to the United States and thrived under American condi-

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tions. America Houses, which OMGUS established to educate Germans about American culture, contained scores and recordings of American music and sponsored concerts and lectures. Most important, the American military government funded and supervised West German radio stations and music festivals. When placed in German hands by the early 1950s, these two interrelated institutions played a central role in promoting American experimental music in West Germany.

Although this first chapter situates musical events within the political context of the immediate postwar years, it does not adequately describe the extent of exchange, competition, and animosity between occupying Allied forces within Berlin and throughout Germany. For example, it fails to clarify that American troops did not take control of their sector of Berlin until July 1945, and that the Soviets oversaw the crucial initial weeks of musical reconstruction in all of Berlin. It was only with Soviet approval that the earliest symphonic concerts took place in Berlin in May 1945. While keeping tight reins on an elaborate musical infrastructure of their own creation, occupying Soviet officers generously funded musical institutions and willingly overlooked the Nazi past of talented musicians who had been blacklisted in the other Allied sectors.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, American funds spent on rebuilding musical life were not simply aimed at reeducation. Rather, the State Department offered generous financial and logistical support for German cultural programs in an attempt to outdo the Soviets. By providing an alternative to the Nazism of the past and the encroaching communism of the present, American music could serve as a potent symbol of freedom and democracy. In short, interactions between the Allied powers, as well as discrepancies in their music policies, affected the performance of American music, experimental or not.

The next three chapters, which cover the years from 1950 through 1961, chronicle the emerging support for American experimental music in West Germany, particularly in the cities of Cologne and Darmstadt. The music of John Cage dominated European conceptions of American music during this period, and Beal accordingly emphasizes Cage and the performers, patrons, and composers who championed him. Detailed descriptions of American pianist David Tudor's activities in Darmstadt, Donaueschingen, and Cologne persuasively establish Tudor's instrumental role in convincing German audiences of the value of experimental works by Cage and others. In Cologne, composer Herbert Eimert presented the first German radio feature on Cage for his *Musikalisches Nachtprogramm* in 1952; a young Karlheinz Stockhausen, who, like Eimert, worked for the *Westdeutsche Rundfunk*, ardently promoted Cage and Tudor. (Tudor returned the favor by performing Stockhausen's music in West Germany and the United

States.) Mary Bauermeister (-Stockhausen) hosted performances of music by Cage, Brown, Feldman, Terry Riley, and others in her Cologne studio, as well as what she called a “counter-festival” to the International Society for Contemporary Music festival in 1960.

The German conception of an American experimental tradition crystallized at the Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik in Darmstadt (IFNM), which, under the direction of Wolfgang Steinecke, offered a forum for the performance and study of American experimental music. There, lectures by Wolfgang Rebner (1954) and Stefan Wolpe (1956) emphasized a common heritage of experimental composers from Varèse, Cowell, and Ives to Cage, Brown, Feldman, and Wolff.<sup>7</sup> Regarding the latter four composers, Beal writes, “Wolpe emphasized these composers’ use of silence, indeterminacy, and chance, and his musical examples demonstrated how the ‘official style’ in America, as he put it, was slowly becoming ‘radicalized’” (81). By the late 1950s, she concludes, “those American composers closest to the radical sound world introduced in Darmstadt during the fifties continued to enjoy both historical and practical pride of place within German new music circles” (103–4).

Despite enthusiastic support for American experimental music by the directors of various music festivals and radio stations, not everyone was convinced of the value or significance of Cage’s sound experiments. Covering the period from 1962–74, the next two chapters show that West German opinions of American experimental music were highly polarized. Nowhere was this division more painfully apparent than at Darmstadt after the unexpected death of Steinecke in December 1961. During what Beal describes as “Darmstadt’s darkest decade” (135), Steinecke’s successor Ernst Thomas banished from the IFNM the music of Cage and others associated with him. Maintaining that Cage’s music threatened European musical tradition, Thomas invited only those American composers who did not embrace an experimental language, such as Milton Babbitt. (Earle Brown was a notable exception to this policy, but, as Beal observes, his gifts as a conductor and European connections likely shielded him from the Cage ban.) Consequently, smaller music festivals such as Hans Otte’s festival *Pro Musica Nova* in Bremen and Josef Anton Riedel’s *Neue Musik München Klang-Aktionen*, as well as ensembles like *Gruppe Neue Musik Berlin*, rose to fill the void left by Darmstadt. These new initiatives became important sources of commissions and performance venues for Feldman, Wolff, Riley, Oliveros, Steve Reich, and La Monte Young.

The final chapter, “New Allies and Old Heroes,” continues Beal’s account of West German support for American experimentalism from 1975 through reunification. While describing the continued enthusiasm for “old heroes”

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like Cage, the chapter focuses on the experiences of younger experimentalists Nancarrow, Feldman, Oliveros, and Riley and their relationship to “new allies” such as composers Ernst Albrecht Stiebler and Walter Zimmermann. As music director of the Hessische Rundfunk in Frankfurt, Stiebler promoted experimental music, particularly that of Feldman and Cage, through radio broadcasts, concerts, and commissions. Zimmermann’s advocacy manifested itself in a variety of ways: through his book *Desert Plants: Conversations with 23 American Musicians* (originally published in English), his venue Beginner Studio in Cologne, and his general efforts to forge connections and arrange concerts for Americans visiting Germany. This final chapter largely restates the principal observation Beal made previously: due to generous state funding, a rich assortment of music festivals, and the efforts of many individuals, American composers enjoyed an abundance of professional opportunities within West Germany. And even if these opportunities diminished during the 1990s—in part due to changing budget priorities following reunification, in part due to the rise of commercial radio stations, which prioritized more profitable popular music—experimental composers remain central to German conceptions of American modern music.

Ambitious in scope, *New Music, New Allies* describes a tumultuous forty-five-year period while also covering the culturally and economically diverse cities of Darmstadt, Donaueschingen, West Berlin, Munich, Cologne, Frankfurt, Bremen, and Baden-Baden. Yet a glut of factual details and archival evidence crowds out a critical evaluation of the people and events portrayed. All too frequently, descriptions of publications and performances emphasize logistical arrangements over content and reception. The account of Cowell’s 1956 tour, discussed in chapter 3, is a case in point. While providing exhaustive details of his itinerary and personal reflections on war-torn Berlin, the section offers only a cursory description of his actual performances and lectures and makes little case for why Cowell’s tour was especially important to promoting American experimental music in West Germany.

At other times, the book merely alludes to potentially intriguing events that should warrant additional discussion. Chapter 5, for example, mentions that “despite his skepticism about European festivals’ obsession with experimental music, [Everett] Helm also wrote two broadcasts on American music for SWF [Südwestfunk, Baden-Baden] in 1962 that included examples of works by Feldman, Ives, Lou Harrison, and Harry Partch” (134). But it makes no mention of Helm’s actual assessment of these composers. While often citing American experimental composers heard on West German radio or in concerts, the book only rarely describes how audiences and critics received this music. Such inattention to reception history seems to

imply that the mere presence of American experimental music—rather than its critical judgment—confirms the success of experimental composers in West Germany. And despite the promise, at the beginning of the conclusion, to describe “why” American experimental music came to prominence (as opposed to the previous seven chapters, which, as Beal notes, dealt with the “how” of the story), the meager discussion that follows barely begins to grapple with the web of economic, political, social, and biographical circumstances that affected the West German new music scene. Ultimately, the study’s focus on minutiae, coupled with a general avoidance of drawing broader themes and judgments from the events described, leaves the reader questioning why such details are important. The end result is a book in which a potentially colorful palette of people, places, and events has been used to create a muddy monochrome of facts and trivia.

While devoting careful attention to the details of particular performances, commissions, and festivals, this study neglects to provide the reader with a basic grounding in general musical and historical currents of the Cold War. In particular, an explanation of the technical differences between experimental music, serialism, and neoclassicism, as well as a discussion of the ideological baggage associated with these musical languages, would have been welcome to non-musicologists. Although the absence of musical analysis should make this book appealing to scholars of German history, casual references to the music of Cage, Feldman, Ives, and others seem to presume prior musical background on the part of the reader. Musicologists, meanwhile, will come away from this book with only a vague idea of the complex nature of the Allied occupation and the broader social, cultural, economic, and political currents that shaped musical and aesthetic debates during the Cold War. By failing to inform the reader about contemporaneous musical and historical movements, this study leaves both musicologist and historian without an adequate framework for understanding the significance of the individuals and events described.

These shortcomings would not be so distracting had the introduction not promised that the book “reflect[s] international political events as well as changing attitudes about American music and contemporary composition during the postwar and Cold War eras in West Germany” (6). Only a page later, it further notes that the primary focus will be on the political, economic, and musical circumstances that made West Germany especially conducive to the work of American experimentalists. Yet political events—the end of the Second World War, the construction of the Berlin Wall, the Vietnam War, and German reunification—serve as little more than convenient points of historical periodization. Despite the assertions of the introduction, the book only rarely connects musical developments to political shifts. When

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it does, the results are frustratingly superficial. For example, Beal relates the 1961 construction of the Berlin Wall to support for American experimental music as follows:

The chronic effects of Berlin's divisive isolation on cultural policy and American-German relations would have a direct impact on young American composers coming to Europe on postgraduate grants such as those funded by the Ford Foundation and Fulbright Commission during the 1960s, and on political-ideological interpretations of new American music. The increasingly anarchist new music—presented primarily by Tudor and his friends Wolff and Behrman, and Fluxus artists like Paik—provided a temporary distraction from the troubling political developments. (123)

Beyond the fact that this section avoids actually discussing the impact of the Berlin Wall on political-ideological interpretations of American music, the conclusion that American experimental music provided a “temporary distraction” barely begins to capture the shattering effects that the Wall's construction had on musical and political life in East and West Berlin. (Among other things, the Berlin Wall severely hampered exchange between East and West German composers and musicologists.) Connections between anarchistic musical programming and social unrest brought about by the Vietnam War, the Prague Spring, and the student protests during 1968 are similarly underdeveloped.

This study's treatment of ideological debates, particularly the relationship between aesthetic and political positions, is disappointingly perfunctory. All too often, Beal essentializes terms like “political engagement” without informing the reader how composers expressed their engagement or what their political convictions were. As an example, I quote at length from a section entitled “Music and Ideology”:

In 1969 Luigi Nono published an essay titled “Music and Revolution,” in which he divided musicians into five groups depending on their degree of political involvement. In the following years European and American composers alike explicitly responded to political and social challenges through their musical choices. Unable to ignore the growing belief that new music was elitist, some composers adopted political agendas. Many agreed that their music needed to address urgent social concerns and to confront institutional hierarchy . . . At the same time, since experimental music itself challenged concert music conventions, Germans sometimes interpreted that music as subversive, and therefore acceptable. Some Americans—especially Cage, Rzewski, and Wolff—embraced revolutionary ideas and allowed them to inspire their compositional methods and performance practice. This stance helped their reputations within a politically charged milieu. (171)



Besides neglecting to elucidate the main points of Nono's essay, this section does not fully explain what is meant by "political involvement." As a number of recent publications on music of the Cold War have shown, the concept can be interpreted in a number of different ways, particularly in light of the shifting ideological implications of serialism, neoclassicism, or experimentalism. But Beal's book circumvents these issues entirely and fails to distinguish between different forms of political pursuit. Through vague terms like "political agenda" and "revolutionary ideas," politics remains shrouded in mystery—much as was often the case in musicological scholarship during the actual Cold War.

In spite of these limitations, *New Music, New Allies* offers a detailed portrayal of an important chapter in the history of musical patronage and the reception of American music in West Germany. It will be a useful resource for scholars interested in the experiences of American experimentalists in Germany, the careers of West German patrons of new music, and the nature of West German radio and festival culture. Moreover, this book proficiently illustrates the processes by which American experimental music came to prominence in West German musical life. But Beal should have aimed higher than this. By sidestepping, rather than confronting, the thorny issues of politics, aesthetics, and ideology, she has managed to write a book about music during the Cold War without discussing music or the Cold War in any detail. Recent books by historians Toby Thacker and Elizabeth Janik are far more successful in relating musical life to Cold War politics in postwar Germany.<sup>8</sup> Musicologist Danielle Fosler-Lussier's *Music Divided: Bartók's Legacy in Cold War Culture* (2007) offers a wonderfully nuanced examination of the various interactions between modern music, politics, and ideology. But a comprehensive study on experimental music in West Germany—one that fully grapples with Cold War politics and American influence—remains to be written.

#### Notes

1. Significant recent arrivals include Joy Haslam Calico, "Jüdische Chronik: The Third Space of Commemoration between East and West Germany," *Musical Quarterly* 88 (2005): 95–122; Mark Carroll, *Music and Ideology in Cold War Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jennifer DeLapp-Birkett, "Aaron Copland and the Politics of Twelve-Tone Composition in the Early Cold War United States," *Journal of Musicological Research* 27 (2008): 31–62; Danielle Fosler-Lussier, *Music Divided: Bartók's Legacy in Cold War Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007); Lars Klingberg, *Politisch fest in unseren Händen: musikalische und musikwissenschaftliche Gesellschaften in der DDR: Dokumente und Analysen* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1997); Maren Köster, *Musik-Zeit-Geschehen: zu den Musikverhältnissen in der SBZ/DDR 1945 bis 1952* (Saarbrücken: Pfau Verlag, 2002); Peter Schmelz, "Andrey Volkonsky and the Beginnings of Unofficial Music in the Soviet Union," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 58 (2005): 139–207; Anne C. Shreffler,

"Berlin Walls: Dahlhaus, Knepler, and Ideologies of Music History," *Journal of Musicology* 20 (2003): 498–525; Adrian Thomas, *Polish Music since Szymanowski* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Rachel Beckles Willson, *Ligeti, Kurtág, and Hungarian Music During the Cold War* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Historians Elizabeth Janik, Toby Thacker, Uta Poiger, and David Monod have also made substantial contributions to the growing literature on musical life in postwar Germany. See Elizabeth Janik, *Recomposing German Music: Politics and Musical Tradition in Cold War Berlin* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Toby Thacker, *Music after Hitler, 1945–1955* (Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007); Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000); David Monod, *Settling Scores: German Music, Denazification, and the Americans, 1945–1953* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

2. Richard Taruskin has criticized histories of nineteenth-century music for grouping together Eastern Europe, Russia, Scandinavia, and Britain in "ghetto chapters" on musical nationalism. Such chapters typically focus on the presence of so-called folk harmonies, melodies, and rhythms that add color to supposedly universal (i.e. German) forms and genres. See Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), xviii n. 10; "Introduction," *repercussions* 5 (1996): 9–10. This historiographical approach has persisted in treatments of postwar European music, which paint modernist techniques such as serialism as transnational and ideologically neutral phenomena, and keep politically-influenced music on the periphery. For example, Robert P. Morgan's *Twentieth Century Music: A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America* (New York: Norton, 1991), discusses Eisler, Cage, Stockhausen, Cardew, Rzewski, Wolff, Henze, and Nono in a six-page section entitled "Music and Politics." (Chapter 10, "The Influence of Politics," concentrates on music between the two world wars.)

3. This is not to say that scholars avoided matters of music and Cold War politics entirely. Taruskin's commitment to examining the interaction between musical composition and reception, aesthetics, and political ideology has been a force in musicological scholarship for decades. For one example, see Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays*. Another notable exception is Martin Brody, "Music for the Masses": Milton Babbitt's Cold War Music Theory," *Musical Quarterly* 77 (1993): 161–92.

4. Few scholars would find surprising the spread of socialist realism from the Soviet Union to the rest of Eastern Europe, described in most studies of the Eastern Bloc cited in note 1. But Fosler-Lussier has drawn attention to more unusual musical connections between Béla Bartók and westerners such as Bruno Maderna. Fosler-Lussier, *Music Divided: Bartók's Legacy in Cold War Culture*, 38–42.

5. As Beal notes, Hermann Danuser observed as early as 1985 that, in European studies of American music, "the 'avant-garde' was over-accentuated at the expense of the 'modern,' the experimental preferred over the not-experimental" (4). Hermann Danuser, "Plädoyer für die Moderne: Über die amerikanische Musik der fünfziger Jahre," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (22 November 1985), 41–42.

6. The second chapter of Toby Thacker's *Music after Hitler* offers a detailed comparative account of denazification in the four zones of occupation. See Thacker, *Music after Hitler, 1945–1955*, 39–73.

7. For a discussion and translation of Rebner's lecture, see Amy C. Beal, "Negotiating Cultural Allies: American Music in Darmstadt, 1946–1956," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 53 (2000), 128–35.

8. See note 1.

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