

Paul Henry Lang (1901–1991)

I

At the time of its publication in 1941, *Music in Western Civilization* won unstinted praise from every quarter. Warren D. Allen's review in *Books*, October 26, 1941, page 23, contained such accolades as these: "Not since the appearance of the two great histories by Dr. Charles Burney and Sir John Hawkins has there been anything in English to compare with Lang's colossal achievement." In *Library Journal*, September 1, 1941, P. L. Miller cited it as "the most complete of its kind. . . . Dr. Lang's sympathies are broad: he sees his whole subject clearly and writes about it in an absorbingly readable style." Howard Taubman, reviewing it in *The New York Times*, December 21, 1941, called it "a tremendous achievement, the product of comprehensive and comprehending scholarship. . . . His perception is equal to the size of the undertaking." Roy D. Welch's 1100-word appraisal in the *Yale Review*, Spring 1942, summed up previous criticisms by remarking that "rarely has a book received and warranted such high recommendation."

However, a quarter-century later when the other linchpin among Lang's books was published—his 731-page *George Frideric Handel* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966)—it came away with somewhat less perfervid praise. Indeed, such English reviewers as Denis Arnold in the *Listener* signalled errors and the *Times Literary Supplement* appraiser complained that it was not Lang but rather it was Ernest Walker, a writer dismissed by Lang "because he does not agree with some of his [Walker's] value judgments," who in reality had pioneered in relieving Handel from an oppressive smell of sanctity.

The declining emphasis on Lang's significance, so far as can be judged from the amount of space allotted him in dictionaries, can be illustrated from his entries in *The New Grove* of 1980 and *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 1986. Carleton Sprague Smith's voluminous article in *The New Grove* of 1980 (x, 444–445) was accompanied by a 37-item list of Lang's writings—followed by reference to "18th-Century Studies in Honor of Paul Henry Lang," *Current Musicology*, no. 9 (1969), pages 47–189. In stark contrast, his barebones two-paragraph entry in the 1986 dictionary (iii, 12) lacks any attendant list of writings, nor is there any mention of a *Festschrift*. Throughout the 1980's the researcher also looks in vain for biographical entries in such standard works as *Who's Who in America* and *Who's Who in the World*. True, the *International Who's Who* (London: Europa Publications) does list him in recent issues, but with a nondescript profile of a mere dozen lines. Despite his years as editor of *The Musical Quarterly* (1945–1973), as chief music critic of the *New York Herald Tribune* (1954–1963), and his presidency of the International Musicological Society (1955–1958), Lang therefore claimed no increasing visibility in his closing years.

In the obituary that appeared in the *AMS Newsletter*, xxii/1 (February 1992), pages 6–7, Ernest H. Sanders quoted Winston Dean's complaint that Lang could be "almost profligate" in his carelessness over detail. Sanders also noted Lang's inaccuracy in citing even the title of his own Cornell University 1934 doctoral dissertation, which should read "The Literary Aspects of the History of the Opera in France."

Allan Kozinn's obituary in *The New York Times*



of September 24, 1991, "Paul Lang, Musicologist and Critic, Is Dead at 90"—although not accompanied by a picture, as is the obituary of "Pao Yue-Kong, 72, Ship Owner" on the same page—does include such otherwise little known facts as Lang's having been a member of the 1924 University of Paris Olympic rowing team and his having begun his writing career as an assistant at the *Revue Musicale*. Kozinn also calls attention to Lang's "little sympathy for the original instrument movement that came into prominence in the 1960s and 1970s," a distaste that Lang vented in scathing criticism of "performances that made special claims to authenticity." Kozinn also mentions Lang's having edited *One Hundred Years of Music in America* (1961). Among Lang's students Kozinn lists Richard Taruskin, Neal Zaslaw, Rosengard Subotnik, Piero Weiss, James McKinnon, and Joel Sachs.

II

Lang died September 21, 1991, at his home in Lakeville, Connecticut. The author of the present necrology, not a Lang student, first made his personal acquaintance in 1955, when appointed to a one-year visiting assistant professorship at Columbia University. No senior scholar could have been more gracious. To Lang, he owed the commission to write the chapter on USA church music history that after entering *One Hundred Years of Music in America* became in expanded form the W. W. Norton text, *Protestant Church Music in America* (1966). Eight years later Lang was responsible for this writer's sections on USA church music entering Friedrich Blume's *Protestant Church Music: A History* (W. W. Norton, 1974). Lang was also responsible (after Nathan Broder's death) for this author's being named American Editor of *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart's* later volumes.

Lang's nonpareil "comprehensiveness" and "comprehension" took many other forms. Already in

Music in Western Civilization, he was the first USA-based historian who gave Iberian composers more than perfunctory notice. On the other hand, not always accurate Donald J. Grout, author of the most influential history text of the century, always treated Spain and Spanish America as inconsequential and unworthy stepchildren.

Because Lang invited attention to Mexico's colonial heritage ("Music in the New World," pages 311–312), Steven Barwick spent two years in Mexico on a John Knowles Paine Fellowship. His 1949 Harvard University dissertation, "Sacred Vocal Polyphony in Early Colonial Mexico," justly ranks as the most valuable introduction to its subject ever written. The Magnificats by Hernando Franco (1532–1585) transcribed in the musical appendix later became the bulk of Barwick's epoch-making *The Franco Codex* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965). Alice Ray's University of Southern California 1953 dissertation, "The Double-Choir Music of Juan de Padilla, 17th-Century Composer in Mexico," would in turn never have been written without Barwick's pioneer work. In a real sense, Lang fathered Barwick, and after Barwick, seeded all colonial Mexican studies that followed.

At a time when *Notes of the Music Library Association* allowed a renowned reviewer to characterize all colonial Mexican music as effete and mongrel, Lang opened the pages of *The Musical Quarterly* to a review of *Music in Mexico: A Historical Survey* that enthusiastically welcomed Mexico's Renaissance and Baroque patrimony. Further on, when the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* completely ignored *Spanish Cathedral Music in the Golden Age*, Lang's *Musical Quarterly* rescued *Spanish Music in the Age of Columbus* with a review signalling the importance of the subject. For these, and many other favors, *IAMR's* editor gratefully recalls Lang among giants of his generation as the foremost protector of historic music in the Spanish-speaking world.