

André Boucourechliev, *Beethoven* (1963)

Beethoven, published in 1963, was André Boucourechliev's second book. It appeared in the series "Solfèges" with Éditions du Seuil, like his *Schumann* of seven years earlier, but whereas the latter still presents fairly traditional musicography, *Beethoven* is strikingly original: here, for the first time, Boucourechliev the composer comes through and imprints his own aesthetic concerns on the writing.

The book's originality lies first and foremost in its form. Breaking with the "life-and-works" format customary in the genre, Boucourechliev reverses the order: the work precedes the life. This reversal comes with a quantitative imbalance: 150 pages on the music and 80 pages of biography. For Boucourechliev, it was essential to deal with the works first because Beethoven exists only through his music: he creates it, but it also creates him. This "idea of a man created by his works" (p. 7 in the 1994 Seuil reprint) is precisely what justifies "examining the artist's life *after* having examined his work" (p. 8).

The life's work, in turn, exists only through the listeners who confront it. Rejecting both the Classical Beethoven and the Romantic version, Boucourechliev prefers the idea of a modern Beethoven, always contemporary. Beethoven's work transcends history, speaks to the present, challenging today's listeners and keeping them constantly "on the alert" (p. 24). Endowed with "the gift of perpetual migration" (p. 6), such music is forever metamorphosing with each generation's listening.

Hence the need to write about it once again, to take a fresh look: this modern Beethoven is not a "safe bet" but a "perpetual unknown" (p. 7). And this is what Boucourechliev tries to do throughout his book. Rejecting both "academic" analysis, with its arid descriptions, and the emotional, idiosyncratic discourse of "subjective" analysis (p. 12), he calls for a return to the music in its reality, initiating the approach he would later describe as "phenomenological". In a series of chapters organized by genre rather than chronology, he characterises this work as the expression of a creative will that flouts all convention, or (inventing the new terms that this music demands) as a congeries of independent "lines of force" (p. 15).

The book introduces most of the themes developed by Boucourechliev in his later works: the idea of the composer being created by the work, the rejection of a supposedly rigid style of academic analysis, the phenomenological return to the reality of the work, and above all, the revalorisation of listening - not as passive reception but as a creative activity. By pulling Beethoven out of the crust of received wisdom, presenting him in a new and personal light, Boucourechliev inaugurates a truly modern musicography. This modernity, above and beyond the insights in the musical commentary, is what guaranteed Boucourechliev's book a lasting success, and a definite influence on authors such as Roland Barthes, Olivier Revault d'Allones, and Bernard Sève, all of whom referred to it explicitly.

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