

Baumann, Dorothea

Music and Space

A systematic and historical investigation into the impact of architectural acoustics on performance practice followed by a study of Handel's *Messiah*

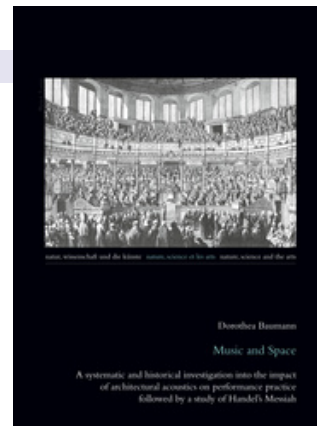
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Book synopsis

This book explores a paradox: how can a musical work that was written specifically for a certain architectural space «survive» dramatic changes in performance conditions, as in the case of Handel's *Messiah*? From the chamber music hall in Dublin where it was first performed in 1742, small baroque theaters, and the chapel of London's Foundling Hospital, performances of *Messiah* after Handel's death moved to cathedrals, to new and large 19th-century concert halls, and finally to the immense Crystal Palace in Sydenham. Are there boundaries determining an adequate performance? How can we define the quality of room acoustics and how does this quality affect the performance as actual sonorous presentation of a musical work? In short, how do different acoustical conditions affect basic aesthetic premises?

There are no simple answers to these complex questions, which elicit different responses according to varying points of view. This aspect of cultural history necessarily calls for an investigation based on systematic, historical, and psychological methods. In the first part of this book, which draws from an extensive database of documents on halls, theatres, and churches, essential concepts from the main disciplines involved are introduced in order to define quality of room acoustics in relation to different performance situations. This background then serves as framework to investigate the performance history of Handel's *Messiah* in the second part.

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About the author(s)/editor(s)

Dorothea Baumann, Privatdozentin Dr., teaches musicology at the University of Zurich, where she studied musicology, physics and German literature, received her PhD and completed her habilitation in musicology. Her groundbreaking research on the relation between room acoustics and performance practice has appeared in numerous journals and reference works of international scope. Likewise, she contributed core writings on the Italian Trecento. Baumann has held teaching positions at the University of Berne, the Department of Architecture of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (guest lectures), and was visiting professor at the University of Innsbruck and at the Graduate Center, City University of New York.

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