



The Politics of Appropriation: German Romantic Music and the Ancient Greek Legacy (New Cultural History of Music)

Jason Geary

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The Politics of Appropriation uncovers a largely forgotten chapter in music history by considering the intersection of music and Hellenism in nineteenth-century Germany. While the influence of Greece on the literature, art, architecture, and philosophy of this period has been much discussed, its significance for music has received considerably less attention. Beginning in 1841 with Felix Mendelssohn's wildly popular score for the groundbreaking Prussian court production of Sophocles' *Antigone*, author Jason Geary draws on research from the fields of musicology, history, classical studies, and theater studies, to explore the trend of combining music and Greek tragedy that also included productions of Euripides' *Medea*, Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, and Sophocles' celebrated *Oedipus the King* with music by Wilhelm Taubert, Mendelssohn, and Franz Lachner, respectively. Staged at royal courts in Berlin and Munich, these productions reflect an effort by the rulers who commissioned them to appropriate the legacy of Greece for the creation of a German cultural and national identity, while the music involved seemed to its contemporaries to mark the advent of an entirely new Romantic genre. By drawing a line between these compositions and Wagner's very different approach to recovering classical tragedy, Geary offers a reassessment of the composer's reception of the Greeks, highlighting the degree to which he was reacting against works such as Mendelssohn's *Antigone* when he called for the creation of a music drama rooted in the spirit of Attic tragedy. Geary further argues that Wagner's *Ring* cycle can be understood as the composer's attempt to reclaim the mythic significance of the Oedipus myth in the service of his own aesthetic aims. Placing these developments within the context of Germany's longstanding obsession with Greece, *The Politics of Appropriation* demonstrates the enduring significance of antiquity as a trope that helped to shape the European cultural and artistic landscape of the nineteenth century.

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