



BOOK REVIEW:
Music in Tolkien's Work and Beyond

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Eilmann, Julian, and Friedhelm Schneidewind, editors. *Music in Tolkien's Work and Beyond*. Walking Tree, 2019. ISBN 978-3905703399.

From the beginning of the creation-myth *Ainulindalë* to the last pages of *The Lord of Rings*, music is frequently depicted in Tolkien's legendarium and other works. Fortunately, there have already been some studies delving into this side of Tolkien's oeuvre. For example, the collections *Middle-earth Minstrel* edited by Bradford Lee Eden (2010) and *Music in Middle-earth* edited by Heidi Steimel and Friedhelm Schneidewind (2010) both offer analyses on various topics, such as the functions of music in the narrative; styles of lyrics and poems and of their counterparts in other stories and the real world; biographical remarks regarding what may have influenced Tolkien; how Tolkien's work has inspired musicians and composers; and so forth. As the successor of Steimel and Schneidewind's collection, *Music in Tolkien's Work and Beyond* continues to investigate music and musical elements in Tolkien's texts in a similarly wide-ranging fashion. A hefty volume with almost 500 pages, *Music in Tolkien's Work and Beyond* comprises 21 articles by a diverse group of writers. Fields of study include, among others, musicology, theology, philosophy, philology, literature, and history. It also includes from professionals in other areas, such as musicians and teachers. This multitude of viewpoints opens Tolkien's work in a way that would be impossible for a single author. However, this is not without problems (as often is the case in this kind of collection): research methods, thoroughness, and writing styles vary widely from easily accessible fan texts to more demanding scholarly essays.

The articles are organised into five sections, which, however, are quite broad and not as thematically or methodologically consistent as one might expect. That being said, some common aspects emerge. The articles in the

opening “Tolkien and Music” section, for example, use biography-based interpretations to uncover how Tolkien’s Christianity, his work as a philologist, his participation in the Great War, his English nationality, and his time period have – or may have – affected his literature. The second section, “The Power of Music”, collects papers that may be understood as different aspects of power. This section explores music’s power not only in a concrete sense, such as how music may be used in creation and enchantments, but also how it works for worldbuilding and informing the history of the secondary world. Furthermore, two articles in this section examine the musicality of Tolkien’s prose in terms of the kind of power that music-like elements of language may have over readers. The third section is titled “Music of Different Texts and Characters”, which is suitably descriptive, but somewhat too broad since other sections concern texts and characters as well. This section deals with Beren and Lúthien, Arwen and Fíriel (from *The Notion Club Papers* and *The Lost Road*), Aragorn, and various evil characters. The title for the fourth section, “Instruments in Middle-earth”, is somewhat misleading as, rather than instruments, the opening article introduces real-world classical music inspired by Tolkien’s secondary world. Likewise, Allan Turner’s article explores the liminality that music may indicate rather than instruments in Middle-earth. Fortunately, two other articles better fit the title as they examine the harp in Tolkien’s works and speculate what portable organs may look like in Middle-earth. “Music Beyond Tolkien” finishes the collection with two articles juxtaposing Tolkien’s texts with the works of others, namely Richard Wagner and Patrick Rothfuss, and an introduction to composing game music for Tolkien’s world.

Although organising the articles into the sections is arguably superfluous, quite a few articles by themselves stand out in a positive light. John Holmes’s “*Nis me ti hearpun hygi*: Harping on One String in Middle-earth” examines Tolkien’s various references to the harp and makes excellent observations of its functions. Holmes argues that the harp is used to indicate sorrow and an “elegiac mood” (361). Another interesting article, Chiara Bertoglio’s “Polyphony, Collective Improvisation, and the Gift of Creation”, suggests an illuminating reading of *Ainulindalë*. Bertoglio likens Ilúvatar’s themes to *cantus firmus* and the music of the Ainur to improvised polyphony. Also noteworthy are Bradford Lee Eden’s “‘The Scholar as Minstrel’: Word-music and Sound-words in Tolkien’s ‘New Works’” and Maureen Mann’s “Musicality in Tolkien’s Prose”, which highlight Tolkien’s ideas regarding the sound of language as aesthetically pleasing and analyse musical elements of various texts.

Furthermore, this collection succeeds in balancing studies that delve deep into a single case and more wide-ranging analyses that deal with various depictions of music. For example, in the essays by Łukasz Neubauer and Jörg Fündling, over fifty pages in total are reserved for Aragorn and Legolas’s “song which accompanies Boromir’s departure for his ultimate journey” (Neubauer 80), which indicates the richness of meaning and the influence a single song may have in Tolkien’s work. A good example of a contrasting approach to Tolkien’s works is Elizabeth Whittingham’s “‘A Matter of Song’: The Power of Music and Song in Tolkien’s Legendarium”, which explores numerous occurrences of music in *The Silmarillion*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Hobbit*. The sheer number of instances illustrates how important a role music has in the legendarium. As a result of these different approaches to the material, this

collection as a whole offers a comprehensive picture of the use of music in Tolkien's works.

Nevertheless, a couple of articles stand out as relatively unrefined, which is especially unfortunate given that they present intriguing viewpoints. Sabine Frambach's "Where You Hear Song, You May Rest at Ease': The Music of the Evil Ones in Middle-earth" raises an interesting question of the musicality of evil characters, but she takes beautiful music to be a sign of heroes and disharmonic sounds, croaking, and noise as signs of evil in an unduly rigid and absolute sense. For example, Frambach concludes that the villains "do not sing beautifully" (339), but the argument is largely based on the music of the Orcs, which is described only from a Hobbit point of view, hence making the whole argument rather Shire-centric. Also, Frambach argues that evil characters only use music in a functional sense; i.e., not for its own sake, but for some other end. This might very well be true, but Frambach calls the opposite of functional music "dysfunctional music" (335). Perhaps something is lost in translation, but it sounds somewhat harsh to call music valued for its intrinsic worth as "dysfunctional".¹ Another interesting yet incomplete article is Allan Turner's "The Horns of Elfland". The text starts off by referring to Tennyson's *The Princess* and Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter* and notes how music is used to create "a liminal area between the real and the unreal" (290), but he only briefly applies this notion to Tolkien's works. This is one of the shortest articles in the collection, so this idea could easily have been expanded.

A few articles are less scholarly but nevertheless enjoyable. Heidi Steimel's "An Orchestra in Middle-earth" introduces Tolkien-inspired "classical orchestral works" by Carey Blyton, Johan de Meij, Aulis Sallinen, Craig H. Russell, and Martin Romberg (356), although Steimel scarcely analyses them. Nevertheless, as a playlist to listen to while reading Tolkien, these might work. Rainer Groß's "Portatives in Middle-earth: A Speculative Approach to Organ Instruments in Tolkien's Work" is a delightful text introducing the history of portative organs and imagines how they might look – images included! – if made by Elves, Dwarves, and Hobbits. These speculations, however, are quite shallow and brief, conjured from very basic impressions regarding different peoples. Tobias Escher's "Of Home Keys and Music Style Guides: Orchestral Scores for Tolkien-based Video Games" is a straightforward introduction to game music, with examples from games dealing with Tolkien's world. A more analytical approach would have been welcome, but since this article is already 26 pages long, perhaps this topic would need a book of its own.

Also, several minor problems caught my attention. In Anja Müller's "The Lords of the Rings: Wagner's *Ring* and Tolkien's 'Faërie'", quite a few citations are only in German. Although I respect that citations are presented in their original languages, it might have been a good idea to have English translations as well. I would also have wanted to see an index. Given that these articles cover a wide range of topics, an index would have made it easier to find relevant texts for those who are not necessarily keen to read this bulky collection from cover to cover.

¹ In the section "Acknowledgements", Doreen Triebel, the series editor at Walking Tree Publishers, mentions that this collection is also published in German "under the title *Musik in Tolkiens Werk und darüber hinaus* by Edition Stein und Baum", and some of the papers were originally written in German.

Overall, the structure of the collection and the varying quality of the articles lessens the impact of this book as a whole. Individual articles, however, offer interesting reading for various audiences, although this variability complicates identifying the proper audience. On the one hand, nonacademic fans of Tolkien might find this collection too difficult at times. On the other hand, academic readers familiar with the subject and its research may find several aspects of this collection trivial. But, for students and scholars who want to have a general idea of how Tolkien used music in his works, *Music in Tolkien's Work and Beyond* – together with its predecessor *Music in Middle-earth* – offers a nice overview on the subject.

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