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The Work of Music: Situating Bach in a Public Culture of Blasphemy, Devotion, and Resurrection

This talk reinvestigates the place of Bach, as name, icon, musician, in the imaginary museum of musical works. The talk takes its titular terms from the writings of Adorno and McClary to ask again after the 1800 break that I once also proposed myself, that made Bach a “before” and Beethoven, if not the “after,” then the name standing for the threshold of change. The critique or deconstruction of the musical canon was strong not only, but particularly post Second World War, then again in 1980s. Do the terms of the critique still have relevance for us today?

Is it still possible to maintain one claim in the dominant critique, that the musical canon was made to serve a public culture of devotees?