

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

Preface

Chapter: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Source:

This volume covers what is often called the romantic period of music history. Like most terms of periodization, it is a misnomer. Music did have an important romantic period, but it began in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and its great protagonist was Beethoven. Most of Beethoven's work is covered in volume 2 of the *Oxford History*, but he remains a vital presence throughout the present volume, as the forefather to whom practically every nineteenth-century creative musician claimed kinship. By the second third of the nineteenth century, however, romanticism was only one of a number of important trends—some, like nationalism, closely allied with romanticism; others, like realism, quite opposed to it—that jostled one another in the burgeoning European musical scene.

That burgeoning is itself an important story. The nineteenth century, the century of urbanization and industrialization, witnessed the beginnings of mass musical dissemination. The Industrial Revolution transformed the printing and distribution of sheet music. The huge growth in the population of cities gave rise to a new class of domestic music consumers as well as to the concert and opera worlds we still inhabit, in which great numbers of people throng together to experience performances. Large concert halls, subscription series, concert touring, arts management—all of these had their start in the nineteenth century, as did daily newspaper criticism, academic music scholarship, and musical historiography. To study the social practice of music in the nineteenth century is to study the early history of our musical present.

The nineteenth century was also the century in which the literate practice of music spread far and wide into territories, like America and Russia, that had not previously been productive participants in that tradition. The relationship between these outlying areas and the traditional seats of education and innovation for literate music is complex and, in the true sense of the word, dialectical (i.e., mutually transforming). The last section of the last chapter (“National Monuments”), which brings the account of this particular development to its conclusion, is new, specially written for the present edition of the *History*. Added partly to rectify the sparse coverage or omission (acknowledged in the preface to the first edition) of several well-known composers, and to provide an appropriate context for them, this new section continues the international survey of late nineteenth-century symphonic music into Britain and Scandinavia and also brings to a close the history of national symphonic “schools.” For this reason, it spills over into the twentieth century, at times very far indeed. That spillover is a deliberate reminder that the history of art music in Europe and America, like the history of any cultural phenomenon of comparable scope, is not a single story, but rather a congeries of many narratives, and that there is no one time line along which all may be simultaneously recounted or observed. The histories of various genres and localities are often asynchronous, and the continuation of chapter 14 past the arbitrary cutoff marked by the turn of century provides a good opportunity to demonstrate and underscore the point.

R. T.

September 2008

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 1 Real Worlds, and Better Ones

Beethoven Vs. Rossini; Bel Canto Romanticism

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 Real Worlds, and Better Ones

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

DEEDS OF MUSIC

In only one area did Beethoven fail to exert a transforming influence on the music of his time, and that was opera. *Fidelio*, his single operatic venture, initially a flop, was revised so often and so extensively that three distinct versions and no fewer than four overtures for it survive. As if recognizing that his talent suffered a limitation where the theater was concerned, Beethoven concentrated thereafter on composing “incidental music” for dramatic plays.

The overture to *Coriolan* (1807), meant to be performed before the curtain went up on a tragedy by Heinrich Josef Collin (1771–1811), was his first essay of this kind. The complete performance of the play no doubt included more music by other composers in the form of entr'actes (music to fill up the time it took to change the scenery), music to accompany silent stage action (chiefly fights and duels), “melodramas” (lofty declamation to musical accompaniment) for the main characters, perhaps some little songs and choruses for minor characters, and of course dances.

In 1810 Goethe's historical tragedy *Egmont*, about a Flemish general and statesman whose political martyrdom sparked the revolt of the Low Countries against Spain, was performed with a complete incidental score by Beethoven. The Overture is in F minor, which with Beethoven was a kind of extra tragic, intensified C minor—compare his Piano Sonata, op. 57 (called the “Appassionata”), the String Quartet, op. 95 (called the “Serioso”), and so on. One of Beethoven's most characteristically heroic orchestral works, the *Egmont* Overture plays out the *Kampf-und-Sieg* (Struggle and Victory) scenario to the very hilt. The brief but boisterous F-major coda in military style seems to compress the whole effect of the Fifth Symphony finale into a couple of coruscating minutes; it was reprised at the end of the play as the “Siegessymphonie”—the Victory Symphony.



fig. 1-1 Beethoven's *Fidelio*, lunette by Moritz von Schwind (1804–1871) in the foyer of the Vienna State Opera.

Two years later, two plays by August von Kotzebue (1761–1819), the most popular dramatist of the time and a notoriously reactionary politician, were staged with incidental scores by Beethoven to inaugurate the National Theater in Pest, the administrative seat of the Hungarian provinces. One was an exercise in exoticism: *Die Ruinen von Athen* (“The ruins of Athens”), from which a “Turkish March” and a chorus of whirling dervishes became great concert favorites. The other was a somewhat ambiguous exercise in nationalism: *König Stephan* (“King Stephen”), about the semilegendary founder of the Hungarian nation, who formed Hungary's first alliance with the German-speaking lands. It, too, features victory music, but the victory it celebrated was a thinly veiled celebration of Hungary's submission to Germany.

The ill-favored opera, toward salvaging which Beethoven labored all through the period of his incidental music, started out as *Leonore, oder Der Triumph der ehelichen Liebe* (“Leonora, or the triumph of conjugal love”), on words translated and adapted by the court librettist Joseph von Sonnleithner, assisted by a whole committee of Beethoven's friends, from a famous libretto by Jean-Nicolas Bouilly dating from 1798. The libretto exemplified a genre that became something of a craze after the French revolution. Modern scholars have christened it the “rescue opera,” a loose, anachronistic term that covers many situations. In general, though, French *opéras comiques* (operas with spoken dialogue and happy endings) in the decades surrounding the Revolution symbolized the theme of social emancipation in stories that portrayed an unjust abduction or imprisonment (usually at the hands of a tyrant) and a liberation, usually as the result of sacrifice—by lover, spouse, or servant, but in any case by a “common person” whose virtue is contrasted with the depravity of the tyrant.

The chief composers of rescue operas on their native soil were André Grétry (1741–1813), whose *Richard Coeur-de-Lion* (“Richard the Lionhearted,” 1782) launched the genre and provided an early example of a motto melody that returned at significant points throughout the drama; Étienne-Nicolas Méhul (1763–1817) with *Euphrosine, ou Le Tyran corrigé* (“Euphrosine, or the Tyrant Rebuked,” 1790); Rodolphe Kreutzer (1766–1831), with *Lodoïska* (1791), which combined the liberation motif with Polish patriotism; and especially the transplanted Italian Luigi Cherubini (1760–1842), with another *Lodoïska* in the same year, and with many more rescue operas to follow. The first composer to set Bouilly's *Léonore, ou L'amour conjugal* was the otherwise unimportant Pierre Gaveaux (1760–1825), for performance in Paris in 1798. Thereafter it was set twice in Italian by composers well known to

Beethoven: Ferdinando Paer (as *Leonora, ossia L'amore conjugale*; Dresden, 1804) and Simon Mayr (as *L'amor coniugale*; Padua, 1805). Paer's score was in Beethoven's library at the time of his death, and contains some conspicuous parallels with Beethoven's setting.

The basic story line of this much-traveled and much-translated libretto, set in a fictionalized Spain, was a virtual paradigm of the rescue formula. Here it is, as summarized by the opera historian Scott Balthazar, with the names of the characters, and their voice ranges, adapted to Beethoven's setting:

Leonore (soprano), disguised as the boy Fidelio, has apprenticed herself to the jailer Rocco (bass), hoping to free her husband Don Florestan (tenor), who has been unjustly imprisoned for two years by his enemy Don Pizarro (bass-baritone). Pizarro learns that his superior, Don Fernando (bass), who is unaware of his treachery, will arrive the next day. Fearing a reprisal, Pizarro orders Rocco to arrange for Florestan's murder by a masked man (to be Pizarro himself) and permits Leonore to be present at the scene. Before Pizarro can kill Florestan, Leonore intervenes, long enough for Fernando to arrive and rescue her husband. Rocco is pardoned and Pizarro imprisoned.¹

Sonnleithner's adaptation of this simple plot for Beethoven complicated and extended it with subplots for minor characters (such as Marzelline, Rocco's daughter, who has fallen in love with "Fidelio"), so that Bouilly's swift two-act play became a slow-moving and fairly shapeless three-acter, which probably accounts for its initial failure. *Leonore* closed after three unenthusiastically received performances in November 1805 (ironically enough, during Napoleon's occupation of Vienna; the audience consisted largely of French officers). A slightly shortened revision failed again in 1806, whereupon Beethoven radically scaled the work back and replaced several of the remaining items with shorter, more forceful alternatives. Leonore's large aria—"Komm, Hoffnung," or "Come to me, O Hope"—near the end of act I, for example, was furnished with a very intense accompanied recitative addressed to Pizarro: "Abscheulicher! Wo eilst du hin?" ("Despicable man! Where are you rushing off to?").

The new version, now titled *Fidelio* to distinguish it from its predecessors, has been a repertory item ever since its premiere at the Vienna Kärntnertor Theater on 23 May 1814. One of the reasons for its staying power is surely the fact that it at last allowed Beethoven to play to his strengths. The short second act, beginning with the imprisoned Florestan's recitative and aria (his first appearance) and ending with a jubilant choral finale in praise of Leonore's steadfastness, embodies yet another permutation of the basic dark-to-light scenario from Haydn's oratorio, *The Creation*, that went into several of Beethoven's instrumental works. Here it could be made more explicit than ever, not only by the presence of words, but by the use of actual stage lighting and scenery.

Beethoven recognized the congruence between the reshaped libretto and his trusty heroic trajectory, and took steps to abet it. The only second-act items in the 1806 version of the opera that were significantly revised for the 1814 performance were the first and the last, and both were revised to make more vivid the contrast of dark and light as emancipatory metaphor. Florestan's recitative and aria, "Gott! welch dunkel hier!" ("O God, what darkness here!"), is preceded by an orchestral introduction containing some of the "darkest" music Beethoven ever wrote. It resembles the beginning of the *Coriolan* Overture, except that the unisons are played softly (as if emanating from a remote place) and, as already mentioned, it is plunged one degree deeper into the dark flat region of the circle of fifths, to F minor. In pointed contrast, the C-major Finale begins with the chorus of townsfolk and prisoners praising the day ("Heil sei dem Tag!") in bright colors intensified, as in the Fifth Symphony finale and the *Egmont* Overture, by the addition of a piccolo to the orchestra.

The darkness and harshness of the introduction to Florestan's aria are underscored by a number of well-understood conventions, including the hoary *passus duriusculus*, the chromatically descending bass with a history that extends back to the passacaglias and ciacconas of the sixteenth century. A more modern, indeed almost prophetic touch is the tuning of the timpani to a tritone, E \flat and A, on which discordant notes the drums beat out a jarring tattoo during long-sustained diminished seventh chords. The stabbing woodwind phrases that follow have an uncanny vocal quality—cries in the dark (Ex. 1-1a). They are answered, as it were, by Florestan's own opening cry—"Gott! welch dunkel hier!" ("Oh God, what darkness here!")—one of the truly bloodcurdling moments in opera (Ex. 1-1b).

ex. 1-1a Ludwig van Beethoven, *Fidelio* in vocal score, no. 11 (Florestan, introduction and aria, mm. 14-20)

Just as the musical artifices in the introduction are Janus-faced, linking past and future, so the aria has two stanzas that play on the same dramatic contrast. The first, in $A \flat$ (the relative major), is a reminiscence of the past, in which youthful freedom is contrasted with present slavery by the use of a sudden modulation to the pathetically fraught key of the flat mediant ($C \flat$). The second, in F (the parallel major), was added to the aria for the 1814 revival. It foreshadows the metaphorical coming of day, as much by the use of the concertante solo oboe in its highest register as by the words that predict as a dream of heavenly immortality the events that are about to unfold in real life.

The Finale testifies to the opera's descent, for all its seriousness and its high ethical tone, from the comic operas of the eighteenth century, with their complicated "chain finales" in which continuous music underscores and reflects the dramatic action. It is constructed very much like a symphonic movement, with significant departures from and returns to stable tonalities. An opening march and chorus are followed by Don Fernando's accompanied recitative, which maintains the C -major tonality as the words explicitly evoke the "stripping off of night." Then, while Florestan is brought up from the dungeon out into the sun, the tonality begins to modulate flatward, as if Florestan's dark key were accompanying him, only to be dispelled as Don Fernando recognizes the prisoner.

Florestan

Gott! Welch' Dunkel hier!

O grau - en - vol - le Seil - le!

ex. 1-1b Ludwig van Beethoven, *Fidelio* in vocal score, mm. 33-41

The reuniting of Florestan and Leonore takes place in the warmly gleaming key of A major, which darkens momentarily into its relative minor as the crowd vents its wrath on Pizarro. The moment in which Leonore, at Don Fernando's behest, actually unlocks her husband's chains is set, as if in fulfillment of Florestan's dream, in the dream key of F major, approached as a deceptive cadence from the dominant of A. All that remains now is for the assembled characters and chorus to *celebrate* the reuniting of the pair, and Leonore's steadfastness, in a concluding blast of C major that reaches its peak of energy (*Presto molto*) in a veritable *Siegessymphonie*, colored every now and then with a little dab of B \flat harmony just so that it can be dispelled again and the modulation into the bright clarity of C major reenacted (Ex. 1-2).

solists
Nie wird es zu hoch ge - sun - gen. Ret - te - rin den

Chorus
Wer ein lob - des Weib er - run - gen.

Gat - ten - ein. wie wird es zu noch ge -

stimm' in un - ser'n Ju - bel ein.

sun - gen Ret - te - rin Ret - te - rin

Ret - te - rin

nie wird es zu hoch ge - sun - gen. Ret - te - rin Ret - te - rin.

ex. 1-2 Ludwig van Beethoven, *Fidelio*, Act II finale

So powerful is the tonal trajectory of the second act of *Fidelio*, and so practiced and surefooted Beethoven's enactment of it, that one can fairly regard it as the “nub and kernel, preceding all form,”² to quote Schopenhauer, the reality that underlies the dramatic action and gives it life. This is what Richard Wagner, who saw himself equally as Beethoven's heir and Schopenhauer's, would later try to summarize in his famous definition of “music drama” —*deeds of music made visible*.³

Is the music in an opera a supplement to—or metaphor for—the action and emotion portrayed? Or are the action and emotion portrayed a metaphor for the underlying life force in which we all participate, of which music is the most direct and palpable embodiment we can ever know on earth, hence prior to all reason and representation? The latter, of course, is the true romantic (or at least the true German) answer—the answer that boggled the nineteenth-century mind and crowned instrumental music, of which Beethoven remained the preeminent master even when writing opera, as the supreme artistic medium.

Notes:

- (1) Scott F. Balthazar, "Leonora," in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. II (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 1150.
- (2) Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. I, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), p. 263.
- (3) *Ersichtlich gewordene Thaten der Musik* (or, in W. Ashton Ellis's translation, "deeds of Music brought to sight"); R. Wagner, "On the Name 'Musikdrama'" (1872), in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, Vol. V (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1896), p. 303.

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Gioacchino Rossini

Opera: The 19th century

Guillaume Tell

THE DIALECTICAL ANTITHESIS

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 Real Worlds, and Better Ones

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

All these heady considerations notwithstanding, *Fidelio* had a negligible impact on the operatic culture of its time, nor did Beethoven loom very large in the consciousness of the theater-going public. Within that world, within that consciousness, and within Beethoven's own career, the work was something of an aberration. Its pedigree was decidedly off the main operatic line, which remained Italian or at least Italianate. So it would remain, arguably, for another hundred years, or as long as opera retained its cultural potency. In this sense, at least, Beethoven did not come anywhere near "receiving Mozart's spirit," to recall the behest of Count Waldstein, his early patron. To claim, as many (beginning with Wagner) have done, that Beethoven's impact on opera came belatedly, through Wagner, is to regard Wagner as in some sense Beethoven's direct or ordained successor. As we shall see, there were many claimants to that title.



fig. 1-2 Gioacchino Rossini, in a photograph taken long after his retirement.

The man who did inherit the Mozartean operatic legacy (albeit not “from the hands of Haydn”) was cast immediately—and in terms that resonated far beyond the confines of the opera house—as Beethoven's opponent, his rival, or (to use the language of German philosophy), his dialectical antithesis. In Gioacchino Rossini, the hardy pre-romantic temper survived into the romantic age, and thrived to the point where even Raphael Georg Kiesewetter (1773–1850), an Austrian nobleman who in 1834 published the first scholarly history of music in German (thus becoming the first “musicologist” in the present-day sense of the term), found he had to title his concluding chapter not “The Age of Beethoven,” as national pride might have prompted him to do, but “The Age of Beethoven and Rossini.” This is well worth pointing out because a century and a half later, in 1982, the eighth volume of the authoritative and impeccably scholarly *New Oxford History of Music* was issued, its title page emblazoned “The Age of Beethoven, 1790–1830.” The only apology came in the form of an editorial introduction, which began, “The title of no other volume of the *New Oxford History of Music* includes the name of a composer. But no other period of musical history is so completely dominated by one composer.”⁴ Nobody during the period in question would have agreed with that statement. The word “history” in the second sentence should obviously have been replaced by “modern historiography.” A historiography of early nineteenth-century music that allows itself to be completely dominated by Beethoven is one that has deliberately read his antithesis out of the canon.

Kiesewetter's recognition of Rossini as a counterweight to Beethoven is first of all an acknowledgment of opera's continuing importance, indeed its dominance, among musical genres, which accounts for Rossini's dominance among composers. As the Rossini scholar Philip Gossett has emphatically stated, "no composer in the first half of the nineteenth century enjoyed the measure of prestige, wealth, popular acclaim or artistic influence that belonged to Rossini."⁵ But Kiesewetter's recognition of Rossini can also be taken as an indication that German nationalism had not yet reached its most aggressive and intolerant phase. (For one of the dogmas of German nationalism was that "prestige, wealth, and popular acclaim" are inimical to true artistic values, which lie entirely within the artist and are vouchsafed to every artist by his national patrimony.)

Nationalism, in the modern sense, was as much, and as importantly, a creation of the nineteenth century as was historiography. Indeed, neither concept can be understood except in terms of the other. Modern historiography was the product of nationalism, and modern nationalism was crucially supported by modern historiography. This nexus will be an important subtext to all the chapters that follow, not only those that deal with it overtly. Hence this little digression. Like anything else when viewed historically, Kiesewetter's title tells us more than it told its contemporaries.

At the time Kiesewetter wrote, Beethoven had been dead for several years, but Rossini was still very much alive. And yet, as Kiesewetter may have known, both their careers were over, even though Rossini still had more than thirty years of life ahead of him.

Rossini was born on 29 February 1792 in the central Italian town of Pesaro on the Adriatic, then part of what were known as the Roman or Papal States, ruled directly by the Holy See. His father was a professional horn player in local bands, his mother a soprano. By the age of thirteen, the future composer was already appearing as a boy singer in operatic performances. He was sent the next year to the Liceo Musicale in Bologna for as well-rounded a traditional musical education as could then be had anywhere in the world. He wrote his first opera the year after that.

A lucky break in 1810 landed the eighteen-year-old Rossini a contract with the Teatro San Moisè in Venice, and during the next eighteen years he would compose under contract some thirty-eight operas for houses all over Italy and eventually abroad, for a career average of better than two a year. Naturally, the frequency was at its greatest at the beginning, and became sparser near the end, when the composer commanded greater compensation and was no longer so driven by material need. Many of the early operas were composed in a month or less. The contract for *Il barbiere di Siviglia* ("The barber of Seville"), perhaps Rossini's masterpiece and surely his most famous work both then and now, was signed on 15 December 1815. The first performance took place on 20 February 1816. Composition could not have begun immediately after signing, since another opera of Rossini's (a now-forgotten rescue opera called *Torvaldo e Dorliska*) was nearing its hectic premiere, which took place on 26 December. During the eight weeks that remained the new opera had not only to be composed, but also copied, designed, and rehearsed. The actual writing probably occupied three weeks at most.

These facts and figures bear eloquent testimony to the conditions under which Rossini, like all composers for the Italian commercial stage, then worked. Italian operatic life was a maelstrom of commissions, revivals, revisions, triumphs, fiascos, and pastiches, in which composers worked as part of a team with a theater impresario, a librettist, and a performing staff. His product, like any commercial product, was subject to all kinds of exigencies and prerogatives once it left his hands, with the result that, as Gossett puts it, "an Italian opera in the first half of the nineteenth century," and no matter how distinguished the composer, "was treated as a collection of individual units that could be rearranged, substituted or omitted depending on local conditions of performance, local taste or, on many occasions, whim."⁶ Nor did only impresarios and singers so treat it. Composers' attitudes were no different. Rossini reused a duet from his first opera in five subsequent works. The very famous overture to *Il barbiere* was borrowed wholesale from a previous opera that had flopped.

It was a kind of factory system, the economy in which Rossini flourished—music's industrial revolution. It was centered not on scores but on performances, and so the central figures in the musical economy were the performers, and among performers the *prima donna* (leading lady) above all—which is how the term acquired the meaning it now has, applied to persons of either sex who expect others to cater to their every whim.

Needless to say, no composer could afford to act like a *prima donna*. Nobody was about to treat a mere hired hand with that sort of deference. His was essentially a service role. Like the librettist's, his primary aim was to please—the impresario, the singers, and (finally and most importantly) the paying public. He regarded his activity as a career, not

a calling. Often enough he did not even get to choose his subject, and only rarely did he choose his librettist. Up to the very raising of the curtain on opening night he was busy with last-minute alterations at the request of all and sundry, and thereafter would be compelled to make endless revisions, at top speed, if the opera's reception fell short of a triumph. The vocal lines had to be written in such a way as to accommodate the singers' personalized ornaments (unless he was required to write the ornaments himself, as Rossini was compelled to do for at least one famous singer).

Never did composers enjoy—if that is the word—a more practical, hands-on involvement with the rest of the musical economy. At the same time, rarely was there a musical economy that offered novice composers so many opportunities. And while any commercial undertaking will throw up its share of duds, by no means did it preclude “quality,” by whatever standard one measures. More than eighty years after its premiere, Giuseppe Verdi, Rossini's undisputed successor as Italian opera king, looked back on *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, that three-week wonder of 1816, as “the most beautiful *opera buffa* there is.”⁷

Mozart would have understood this life, these activities, these exigencies and these aims (as, more recently, would a composer of Broadway musicals). Once he moved to Vienna, Mozart lived a life not unlike Rossini's, though a less successfully adapted one since commercial prospects were fewer and he had to act as his own impresario (which is why he produced more piano concertos than operas). Indeed, Mozart was Rossini's chosen role model: “the admiration of my youth, the desperation of my maturity, and the consolation of my old age,”⁸ as he put it, famously, in retirement. The reclusive Beethoven, by the end of his life, for reasons both within his control and very much outside of it, had become wholly estranged from the practical world of music. Thus the dialectical relationship in which Beethoven and Rossini have been cast is fully warranted.

Every facet of Rossini's musical life and activity thus far described stands in the maximum possible contrast to Beethoven's—beginning with the contrast between a career average of two operas a season and an output consisting of a single opera thrice revised over a period of a dozen years. It is the latter that is now regarded of course as “great composer behavior,” with Beethoven's sketchbooks, a living record of agonizing labor, providing the ethical yardstick by which the work of all composers now tends to be measured.

The score produced by such exacting toil is now regarded (or if the composer is great enough, venerated) as a definitive text embodying the “work,” of which performances can only be imperfect representations. Rossini—who did not leave a single sketch behind (which of course does not mean that he never made them), and who once boasted that, composing (as usual) in bed, he started a new overture rather than get out from under the blankets to retrieve one that the wind had blown away—represented a completely different value system, in which little importance was attached to the score as a document. All the score was, to a composer like Rossini, as to the impresario and the cast, was part of the equipment that made an opera performance possible.



fig. 1-3 Title page of the first edition of the vocal score of Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri* (Mainz: Schott, 1819).

Within his own world, of course, Rossini was recognized as a great figure indeed. During his lifetime he achieved a prestige and authority that easily rivaled Beethoven's. His first international successes came in 1813, when he was twenty-one: *Tancredi*, an *opera seria* (or *melodramma eroico*, in the newer language of the time) based on Voltaire, and *L'Italiana in Algeri* ("The Italian girl in Algiers"), the frothiest of farces. To write in direct (and, of course, lightning-swift) succession two masterpieces at opposite ends of the stylistic spectrum marked Rossini as by far the most "universal" master of his highly specific craft.

A signal triumph was his appointment in 1815 (aged twenty-three) as director of all the opera theaters in Naples, then still the operatic capital of the world. He still answered to the impresario, but now had a say in the hiring of librettists and the casting of roles, both for his own operas and for those of other composers. That was real power, such as composers rarely enjoyed. During the seven years of his Neapolitan reign Rossini composed nine operas for the theaters under his jurisdiction, and another nine for other cities ranging as far afield as Lisbon. All but one of the Neapolitan operas were large tragic works, quite belying Rossini's posthumous reputation as a jester. That reputation was in part the result of the survival patterns of early nineteenth-century opera generally, in part the result of the composer's own later life in retirement (when his reputation as a "character" began to rival his reputation as composer), but also the result of insistent "northern" propaganda that continues to this day, inhibiting the revival of Rossini's serious operas.

After 1822, Rossini, by now (aged thirty) an international celebrity, worked mainly abroad. His last five operas were written for the theaters of Paris, the wealthiest in Europe. For one year (1824–25), Rossini served as director of the Théâtre-Italien, where operas were given in Italian. There he produced a single opera (*Il viaggio a Reims*, "The Journey to Rheims") to celebrate the coronation of King Charles X, the surviving grandson of Louis XV, who succeeded his brother Louis XVIII on the restored Bourbon throne. Thereafter Rossini transferred his allegiance to the main Paris opera house, the Académie Royale de Musique.

His first two productions there were adaptations of works from his Neapolitan period to French librettos, and to the incredibly lavish production values of what the French called *grand opéra*, a term that has gone virtually untranslated (as “grand opera”) into English to denote opera as extravagant or downright excessive spectacle. These operas certainly lived up to that billing, but all were cast into the shade by Rossini's last opera, the vast historical epic *Guillaume Tell* (“William Tell”), after a play by Schiller.



fig. 1-4 “Oath of the Three Cantons,” illustration by Celestin Deshayes for Rossini's opera *Guillaume Tell*.

This was a work of unprecedented scale. The arias were of a newly expanded scope, composed according to a formula that Rossini had perfected in Italy. And yet the musical texture is dominated not by them but by the ensembles, many of them including the chorus for a truly huge frescolike effect. There are also two ballet episodes and several grand processions of a kind the French had been using for some time, making the opera an eclectic summary, a kind of operatic “state of the art” as of the third decade of the nineteenth century.

Guillaume Tell had its premiere performance on 3 August 1829. Rossini, aged a mere thirty-seven, then retired from the operatic stage; so that although he lived (luxuriously, in the Paris suburb of Passy) until 13 November 1868, when he died at the age of seventy-six, his actual career was of a downright Mozartean precocity, intensity, and brevity. And yet, it appears that Rossini regarded it, even at the peak of inspiration and innovation, as a job; having made his fortune—not only from the fruits of his pen but also from investments, one of them in a gambling casino—he could reward himself with a life of leisure.

While it would not be fair to repeat without qualification the old jape that Rossini gave up composing for eating (for all that he was indeed a famous amateur chef and gourmet, albeit frequently impeded in these activities by bad health), his early retirement does confirm the essentially commercial nature of his career, one completely out of joint with the new romantic temper—possibly another reason for Rossini's decision to quit. In 1854, in a letter to an admirer, Rossini referred to himself in retrospect as “the last of the classics.”⁹ On one level, of course, this was just an ironic comment on his inactivity; on another it was a boast that his art had weathered a quarter of a century of change in style and fashion and still remained viable in the repertory

On perhaps the most profound level, Rossini's comment was an affirmation of the artist's status as a social animal in solidarity with his audience, in opposition to the romantic cult of the lonely, alienated hero. On the most spurious level, the one Rossini meant to mock, it signaled the spread of the anachronistic notion, associated with German critics of the 1830s, that there had been a "classical period" in music that had ended with Beethoven. To claim in the 1850s to have been a part of that was to acknowledge that one was indeed a walking anachronism.

Rossini did not give up composing altogether during the last forty years of his life. But he did it increasingly as a sort of hobby—to amuse himself and the friends who attended his exclusive Paris salon at a time when to amuse or "please" was no longer considered a worthy aspiration for a self-respecting artist in the public arena. Most characteristic of all were the 150 or so little songs and piano pieces, composed between 1857 and 1868 but never published during his lifetime, to which Rossini gave the nickname *Péchés de vieillesse*—Sins of Old Age (a takeoff on the cliché *péchés de jeunesse*, sins of youth).

A few of these elegantly silly pieces found their way into print in an album called *Quelques riens* ("A few nothings"), published in Paris in the 1880s. They immediately acquired a cult following among connoisseurs, and were finally orchestrated in 1919 (by the Italian composer Ottorino Respighi) for a popular ballet called *La boutique fantasque* ("The magic toy shop"). Later the *Péchés de vieillesse* became the basis of another ballet—or rather two ballet suites, *Soirées musicales* (1936) and *Matinées musicales* (1941), by the English composer Benjamin Britten. These arrangements take their place in the anti-Beethoven discourse of the cynical and disillusioned period between the two World Wars. Rossini, though no longer given recognition as such, was still Beethoven's dialectical antagonist.

The only large-scale works Rossini attempted during his retirement were religious ones: an oratoriolike setting of the thirteenth-century hymn *Stabat mater* ("The mother stood by the cross") for soloists, chorus, and orchestra, composed at a snail's pace between 1831 and 1841, and a thoroughly idiosyncratic *Petite messe solennelle* ("Little solemn mass"), for soloists, chorus, two pianos, and harmonium, composed a few years before his death. (Almost his last work was an orchestration of the Mass, done in order to foil "pirates" in an age that did not yet provide international copyright protection to composers.)

Unlike Beethoven (but again, quite like Mozart), Rossini did not make any substantial alteration in his style when writing sacred music. The immensely popular *Stabat mater*, in particular (and especially the aria "Cujus animam," belted out by a *tenore di forza*), became an emblem of "secularized" or "operatic"—that is, sensuously appealing—sacred music, and a frequent target of abuse from the clergy (though a favorite with choirs). It was finally banned in the wake of a *motu proprio* or personal pronouncement by Pope Pius X, promulgated in 1903, famous (and popular) among music historians for its restoration of the Gregorian chant to active church use and its discouragement of polyphonic music (a battle the Church hierarchy had been fighting with composers and singers since the fourteenth century).

The *motu proprio* contained the warning that

since modern music has risen mainly to serve profane uses, greater care must be taken with regard to it, in order that the musical compositions of modern style which are admitted in the Church may contain nothing profane, be free from reminiscences of motifs adopted in the theaters, and be not fashioned even in their external forms after the manner of profane pieces.¹⁰

Accordingly, a convention of the Society of St. Gregory of America, meeting in Rochester, New York, in 1922, drew up an index of "disapproved music," in which Rossini's name headed all the rest. A whole paragraph was devoted to the *Stabat mater*, in which it was directed that "all of Rossini's compositions should be excluded from the Catholic choir. These works are unchurchly, to say the least. The *Stabat mater* is most objectionable from a liturgical standpoint."¹¹

So yet again it appears that Rossini and Beethoven stood as dialectical antagonists: the one as a composer of secularized church music, the other as a composer of sacralized secular music. And the Vatican's objections to Rossini's "profanity" are (as we shall see) directly comparable to romantic objections to his sensuality—his *Sinnlichkeit*, to use E. T. A. Hoffmann's language, as against the *Geist* or spirituality of Beethoven. And yet the fact that Rossini's *Stabat mater* still needed banning more than eighty years after its first performance is only another indication of Rossini's equal, if opposite, rank with Beethoven in the active repertory, if no longer in the official "canon" of great art. His fame surpassed that of any previous composer, and so, for a long time, did the popularity of his works. Audiences took to his music as if to an intoxicating drug—or, to put it decorously, to champagne, with

which Rossini's bubbly music was constantly compared.

One inkling of his unbelievable vogue is the fact that it almost drove the 1824 premiere of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony out of Vienna, a city Rossini had then just conquered. Reaction to the Rossini craze cemented the association of Beethoven's art with spirituality on the one hand and with Germanness on the other, thus forging a fateful nexus between idealism and nationalism. Another choice indication of Rossini's wingspread came from far-off St. Petersburg, the capital of Imperial Russia, where between 1828 and 1831 eighteen different Rossini operas were performed, eleven in 1829 alone. (*Semiramide*, the last and largest of Rossini's serious Italian operas, first performed in Venice, came to St. Petersburg in 1836, and launched a period of absolute Italian operatic hegemony in the Russian capital, with severe consequences for the development of indigenous opera there.) The Rossini craze has been associated with the spirit of imperial restoration; indeed, Prince Metternich, the arbiter supreme of post-Napoleonic Europe and the very apostle of political reaction, personally commissioned a pair of cantatas from Rossini for performance at the Congress of Verona (a sequel to the more famous Congress of Vienna) in 1822. The Rossini craze in Imperial Russia, and in the Paris of the Bourbon Restoration, would seem to give credence to this association. And yet this was one sphere—perhaps *the* one sphere—in which Rossini and Beethoven were not dialectical antagonists but comrades. Beethoven also supplied music for Metternich's consumption, and was also especially popular in Imperial St. Petersburg (where the *Missa solennis* actually had its premiere). Beethoven's heightened, somewhat archaic spirituality (as exemplified by his fugal style) and Rossini's flighty nonchalance—or at least their reception by European society—were thus responses to a common antiheroic or pessimistic stimulus. Both stances, as the music historian Carl Dahlhaus wisely pointed out, signaled a resigned detachment.¹²

Notes:

- (4) Gerald Abraham, "Introduction," in *New Oxford History of Music*, Vol. V (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. v.
- (5) Philip Gossett, "Rossini," in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. XXI (2nd ed.; New York, Grove, 2001), p. 734.
- (6) Philip Gossett, "The Operas of Rossini: Problems of Textual Criticism in Nineteenth-Century Opera" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1970), p. 21.
- (7) Giuseppe Verdi to Camille Bellaigue, 2 May 1898; *Verdi: The Man in His Letters*, ed. F. Werfel and P. Stefan, trans. E. Downes (New York: Vienna House, 1973), p. 431.
- (8) Quoted in Richard Osborne, "Rossini," in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. IV (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 57.
- (9) Rossini to Count Fay (1854); quoted in Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), p. 58.
- (10) Pius X, *Motu proprio*, on sacred music; in Nicolas Slonimsky, *Music since 1900* (4th ed.; New York: Scribners, 1971), p. 1286.
- (11) "The Black List of Disapproved Music," in Slonimsky, *Music since 1900*, p. 1291.
- (12) Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, pp. 58–59.

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Romanticism

Overture

Giovanni Paisiello

THE CODE ROSSINI

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 Real Worlds, and Better Ones

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Perhaps the greatest difference between the romantic sensibility, as represented by Beethoven, and the pre-romantic one, as exemplified by Rossini, lay in their respective attitudes toward forms and genres. As early as his op. 1, a set of piano trios, Beethoven was strongly inclined to “push the envelope” with respect to genre, transgressing generic and stylistic boundaries in a way that made his teacher Haydn uneasy. As his career went on, Beethoven’s attitude toward form became increasingly—and deliberately—idiosyncratic, with the result that it was always with him (and with us, contemplating him) an important esthetic issue.

Or perhaps it would be more appropriate to call Beethoven’s formal procedures not so much idiosyncratic as *syncretic*, a word that emphasizes the recombination into new wholes of elements (symphonic and chamber styles, for example, or sonata and fugue) formerly regarded as disparate or even opposing. The familiarity or traditionalness of the elements recombined insures a degree of intelligibility, but the need for novelty and constant modification reflects the romantic emphasis on individuality and peculiarity, which became over the course of the nineteenth century an ever more pressing demand for originality, the more fundamental (radical, profound) the better.

Rossini, by contrast, was very respectful of genres, as a composer whose works were assembled out of interchangeable parts had to be, to say nothing of a composer who staked his livelihood on pleasing an audience that, like all entertainment audiences, was fickle and conservative and knew what it liked. His idea was not to experiment radically with form in every piece, but rather to hit on a winning formula (ideally one that he could turn out better than any competitor) and, having created a demand for his product, stay with it and, if possible, keep on improving it. (Only a proven recipe, with a known purpose and a tested mechanism, can be improved or perfected in the strict sense, rather than merely changed or departed from.) So successful was Rossini in standardizing and improving his wares in accordance with public taste that his formulas eventually became everybody’s formulas. The history of Italian opera in the *primo ottocento* or early nineteenth century became the story of their continual growth and expansion at the hands of Rossini himself and his many followers.

The opera historian Julian Budden very wittily called this set of formulas and conventions the Code Rossini.¹³ It is a marvelous term because of the way it parodies the so-called *Code Napoléon*—the French emperor’s revision of the time-honored Roman Law, an extremely rationalized and systematic civil code that spread over Europe in the wake of Napoleon’s conquering armies. Despite its imposition by force of arms, it was considered a model of enlightened efficiency and liberality, and remained in force long after Napoleon himself had passed from the scene. (It is still the basis of the French civil code, and its influence survives in all the countries of the European continent and their former colonies.) The *Code Napoléon* achieved its standardizing purpose in the short run by force of Napoleon’s authority, but in the long run because it worked, and provided a basis for further elaboration. That is what makes it such an apt analogy to the “Code Rossini.”

The Code Rossini, like its Napoleonic namesake, was the basis for an extraordinarily detailed *modus operandi*. Its full measure is something only specialists can take. (One specialist, Richard Osborne, has constructed a “prototype” for the first act of a Rossinian comic opera, for example, consisting of nine standard sections, some of them with several equally standardized constituent parts.)¹⁴ Here it will suffice to describe a few of the typical components—overture, aria, ensemble—and show how they operated. All of them were based on models inherited from past practice; none was Rossini’s wholly original invention (“wholly original invention” being after all contrary to the whole point and purpose of the Code). Nor did he complete the process of standardization that modern musicologists

have described. But he revised and renewed all components and turned them into proven recipes—which is only a more casual and businesslike, less “mystified” way of saying that he turned them into classics.

Mozart was of course one of Rossini's antecedents. More direct ones were Giovanni Paisiello (1740–1816), Rossini's predecessor as opera czar in Naples, serving there for almost half a century (1766–1815), with a few years out for duty at the court of Catherine the Great in St. Petersburg (1776–84); and Domenico Cimarosa (1749–1801), another Neapolitan whose exceptionally peripatetic career also included a lucrative St. Petersburg stint (1787–91). There is nothing in Rossini that does not derive ultimately from the work of these three; but there is also nothing in Rossini that does not have “New! Improved!” stamped all over it.

Take the overture to begin with. As we may remember from Mozart, the Italian opera *sinfonia* by the end of the eighteenth century was essentially a short “first movement” (or “sonata-allegro”). As a reminder we can take a brief look at the overture from Paisiello's *The Barber of Seville*, first performed at St. Petersburg in 1782, based on the very same play—and partly on the very same libretto—as Rossini's smash hit of 1816. The play, incidentally, was the first in Beaumarchais's famous trilogy of which *The Marriage of Figaro*, musicked by Mozart and Da Ponte as *Le nozze di Figaro*, was the second. It concerns the madcap courtship of the young Count and Countess whose midlife marital woes form the premise of the second play. (In both plays the barber Figaro acts as the invincible comic accomplice—in the first to the Count, in the second to the Countess.) Paisiello's setting was also a great and famous success; so much so that Rossini took a big risk in competing with it.

Paisiello's overture (like Mozart's to *Figaro*) starts off with a busy, scurrying theme that sets an antic mood from the very start. Like many such themes, it stirs anticipatory excitement in the audience by proceeding through a rising sequence and a crescendo. Ex. 1-3 shows the beginning of Paisiello's overture up to the elided cadence that sends the harmony off in search of the dominant key. When that key is reached, there will of course be a new theme group and a cadence. Then, according to the binary model, we expect a modulatory passage leading, through a far-out point (FOP), to a double return (first theme in original key), and a replay of the opening section with all themes in the tonic, concluding with a reinforced cadential flourish by way of coda.

What Paisiello actually supplies is a streamlined or compacted version of the usual procedure, one regularly employed in *opera buffa* overtures. Instead of happening at the end of a modulatory passage and a FOP, the double return follows immediately after the dominant cadence, as if the opening section were being repeated. But where there had originally been a quick move to the dominant, now we get the modulatory section, replete with FOP, which, when it circles back to the tonic key, hooks up not with another “double return” but with the second theme group, now in the tonic. In standard “sonata form” lingo we could say that the development section, instead of coming between the exposition and the recapitulation, has been miniaturized and shoehorned into the recap.

The image displays a musical score for the beginning of the Overture to *Il barbiere di Siviglia* by Giovanni Paisiello. The score is written for piano and is organized into ten systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The tempo is marked "All. P. Presto". The music begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes various markings such as *cresc.*, *pp*, *ff*, *e sotto voce*, *rep.*, and *ff*. A first ending bracket labeled "1" is present in the eighth system. The score concludes with a final *f* dynamic marking.

ex. 1-3 Giovanni Paisiello, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Overture (beginning)

Now compare the overture to Rossini's *Barbiere*. It is at once fancier and more streamlined. It has an extended slow introduction of the kind we have encountered in Haydn's London symphonies, or Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, but it is far more elaborate than either. In fact, it is a bigger introduction, and more important to the impression the piece makes, than in any but the most elaborately prefaced symphonies (among Beethoven's, only the Fourth and the Seventh). It makes the customary functional progression from a strong tonic opening to an expectant dominant finish, but it is cast very decoratively in a miniature ternary or ABA form of its own: the midsection, consisting of a flowery cantabile melody reminiscent of an aria, is sandwiched or showcased between two segments that feature a pliant, harmonically malleable motive (four repeated thirty-second notes as upbeat to an eighth) from which a melodic fabric is constructed to support the necessary modulation from tonic to dominant (Ex. 1-4a). (It is a technique closely related, in fact, to the one by which the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth is so famously constructed.)

The quick main section of the overture is “binary,” cast in two parallel but not quite equivalent halves. The first, as in Paisiello, is similar in content to a symphonic exposition: a theme in the tonic, a more lyrical theme in the dominant (or, as here, in the relative major because the tonic is minor), with a headlong, noisily orchestrated dash of a transition to connect them and a codetta to confirm arrival at the secondary key. What is unlike the usual symphonic binary movement is the full-blown structure of both themes. Especially striking is the second, cast in the form of elaborate woodwind solos (including a juicy solo turn for the horn, Rossini's father's instrument).

The codetta (Ex. 1-4b) is Rossini's special trademark, something without which no Rossini overture (except the self-consciously “Parisian” one for *Guillaume Tell*) is ever complete: a series of ostinatos over a regular tonic-dominant seesaw in the harmony, sustaining a gradual, inexorable, magnificently orchestrated crescendo to a blazing fanfare of a *tutti* in which the bass instruments carry the melodic ball. This orchestral juggernaut—the “Rossini crescendo”—stands in the baldest possible contrast (or so it seems) to the spirituality of the German romantics.

ex. 1-4a Gioacchino Rossini, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Overture, slow introduction

The image displays four systems of musical notation for the Overture to *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. Each system consists of two staves (treble and bass clef). The first system is labeled 'Vlins.' and shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the treble and a bass line with chords. The second system is labeled 'Vlins. & Cl.' and features a more complex melodic line in the treble with many beamed notes, and a similar bass line. The third system is labeled 'Fl. Ob. etc.' and 'Corni & Trombe', showing a dense texture of notes in the treble and a bass line with chords. The fourth system continues the dense texture with many beamed notes in the treble and a bass line with chords. The overall style is characteristic of the 'Rossini crescendo'.

ex. 1-4b Gioacchino Rossini, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Overture, Allegro, Codetta (“Rossini crescendo”)

The exposition having come to its brilliant conclusion, the most perfunctory four-bar transition imaginable leads into what sounds like its repetition, but turns out to be a truncated recapitulation, with both themes in the tonic, and the transition between them virtually eliminated. The crescendo is not omitted, however: in the tonic it makes a bigger splash than ever. In fact, the way the recapitulation is abbreviated to speed its arrival makes the repetition of the rollicking crescendo seem like the overture's very *raison d'être*. Its point and purpose has been to create a mood of festivity—or, to put it another way, to mark the occasion of its performance as festive.

The mood of festivity is a generic one, unrelated to the content of the particular opera that follows. “Opera,” not *this* opera, is what is being marked as festive, and that ritualized sense of occasion—that sense of social ritual—will bring back to mind a great deal of what was observed in “music in the seventeenth & eighteenth centuries” chapter 4 about the nature and function of the old *opera seria*, that most festive and social of all “pre-Enlightened” genres. In fact—and this may seem surprising—overtures like this prefaced Rossini's tragic operas as well as farcical ones like *Il barbiere*, for they were festive social occasions, too.

Indeed, the overture we have just examined *was*, originally, the preface to a serious opera, the forgotten *Aureliano in Palmira* (1813), the one flop in the otherwise golden year that produced *Tancredi* and *L'Italiana in Algeri*. Dissatisfied with the overture that prefaced *Il barbiere* at its unsuccessful premiere (or perhaps acting in response to the audience's dissatisfaction), Rossini salvaged the earlier overture and tacked it on to the new opera, of which it now seems such a perfect encapsulation. That will show just how interchangeable Rossinian parts were meant to be. Even individual themes could be shifted and recycled from overture to overture.

From this it follows that the generic description of one Rossini overture, such as the one to *Il barbiere*, can serve as generic description of them all. They all have the same tripartite slow introduction; they all have the same bithematic exposition (in which the second theme is always a woodwind solo); they all have the same “headlong, noisily orchestrated dash of a transition”; they all have the same crescendo-coda; they all have the same truncated recapitulation. Does this mean that “when you've heard one you've heard them all?” Not at all! What differs

inexhaustibly are the details—"the divine details,"¹⁵ as the novelist Vladimir Nabokov used to say of novels, another form in which generic similarities can blind a naive or unsympathetic reader to what connoisseurs rejoice in.



fig. 1-5 Costume designs for Rosina, Don Basilio, and Figaro from the first production in Paris of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Théâtre Italien, 1819).

Rossini's orchestration, for one thing, is more varied, more minutely crafted, and (at the climaxes) more richly sonorous than that of any previous composer. The great nineteenth-century flowering of virtuoso orchestration starts with him. His woodwind writing, above all, was epoch-making. And so was his use of percussion or "pseudopercussion" like the beating out of rhythms by violin bows on candlesticks (nowadays on music stands) in the overture to *Il signor Bruschino*, another opera from the amazing year 1813 (Rossini's twenty-first). Every Rossini crescendo may produce a similar frisson, but the specific means of production (the gimmicks, to use a current insider's term) are endlessly variable.

For another thing, Rossini's melodic invention is inexhaustibly fertile. Those cantabile themes in his introductions, and those full-blown woodwind solos in the expositions may be interchangeable in function, but that function was to be catchy. They each etch a distinct profile in the aural memory. The combination of generic uniformity with distinction in particulars was the Rossini secret—seemingly anyone's secret, but inimitable. Most memorable of all are the true virtuoso solos found in some overtures, which simulate with instruments all the appurtenances of a vocal scene. In *Il Turco in Italia* ("The Turk in Italy," 1814) the florid cantabile, replete with roulades and trills, is played, improbably but all the more memorably, by the French horn. One of the most difficult horn solos in the repertory even now, with the benefit of the modern valve mechanism that revolutionized brass instrument design beginning around 1820, it must have been all but unplayable in Rossini's time—the ultimate tribute to the composer's father. The successful player must have earned the same kind of spontaneous ovation enjoyed by the singers—behavior increasingly disallowed under the new romantic etiquette.

That is not the only aspect of Rossini to antagonize the romantic temper. Most conspicuous by its absence in his work is any hint of thematic "development." Rossini overtures are often described, rather lamely, as sonata forms without development sections; but as we have just seen in the overture to Paisiello's *Barbiere*, one can have development in other places, too. Rossini seemingly shuns it everywhere; nor is there any real FOP in his tonal design. The place where Paisiello had them (between the first and second themes in the recapitulation) is the place where Rossini dispenses with transition altogether.

It is doubtful whether Rossini shunned development by design; more likely he merely found it unnecessary to his very direct and sensuously appealing purpose. Dispensing with it was a matter of business efficiency. But the avoidance in his music, on the one hand, of rigorous motivic unfolding, and, on the other, of symbolic harmonic drama was something German musicians and their colonial adherents found infuriating, for these (along with the spirituality that was assumed to result from them) were the very terms on which they staked their claim to universality of appeal. Music that could do without them, and yet succeed with many audiences, undermined the

claim.

And once Germans had pronounced their anathema on Rossini, his music was turned into a high esthetic cause by resisters. The lack or avoidance of thematic development became a matter of principle. Or rather, what was a lack in Rossini was turned by later generations of “Latinate” composers into an avoidance, and touted. The best illustration is a quip supposedly made by Claude Debussy, thought by many to be the greatest French composer at the tail end of the nineteenth century, while listening to a symphony by Johannes Brahms, thought by just as many to be the greatest German composer at the time: “Ah, the development section! Good, I can go out for a cigarette.” The century-long war of *Geist* vs. *Sinnlichkeit*—“spirit” vs. “sensuality”—was reaching a head.

Yet, as is always the case with culture wars, this one was founded on an absolutely needless polarization of values. And as always, the polarization breaks down under scrutiny. Nothing in Rossini was so offensive to idealistic romantic taste as those infernal crescendos that appealed to an audience's basest, grossest instincts. And yet, one of the greatest of all “Rossini crescendos” is the one that informs the coda to the first movement of Beethoven's Third Symphony, the towering *Eroica*, which (as any romantic idealist will tell you) is the loftiest expression of absolute musical values—spiritual values—achieved as of its date (or, at any rate, as soon as that silly dedication to Napoleon was removed). What makes the one crescendo brutish and the other sublime? Context alone, as always—including the context of interpretive discourse and polemic.

Notes:

(13) Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. I (New York: Praeger, 1971), p. 12.

(14) Richard Osborne, “Rossini,” in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. IV (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 57.

(15) Quoted (from Ross Wetzsteon) by John Updike in the Introduction to Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), p. xxiii.

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Paisiello: *Il barbiere di Siviglia*

Rossini: *Il barbiere di Siviglia*

Opera buffa

IMBROGLIO

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 Real Worlds, and Better Ones

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The comic ensemble is another area in which comparison with Paisiello will help us take the measure of the Code Rossini. As in Mozart's operas, the comic ensemble finale was the site where composers could experiment with ways of suffusing fully composed music, formerly the province of the static or “freeze-time” aria, with real dramatic action, the more frenetic the better. Audiences loved the effect, and librettists began seeking opportunities to contrive dramatically active ensembles, often based on slapstick gimmicks, in other spots besides finales. As the *opera buffa* became more musically antic, it reverted once again to purely comic type, reversing the trend toward mixing dramatic genres that characterized Mozart's later comic operas on librettos by Lorenzo da Ponte, with their occasional serious characters and their attendant vocal genres. The Countess in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* is a *seria* character, despite the nature of the opera as a whole. Rosina, the same character (albeit not yet a countess) in *Il barbiere*, is a pure *buffa* ingenue (or, if more knowingly played, a “soubrette”).

We can sample the pure-comic style pre-Rossini in the *trio buffo* from the second act of Paisiello's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Ex. 1-5). The action revolves around a plot, masterminded by Figaro, to bring Count Almaviva and his beloved Rosina together, thus thwarting the designs of Dr. Bartolo, Rosina's jealous guardian, who is planning to marry her himself. The first act ends with Figaro smuggling the disguised Count into Dr. Bartolo's house. At the beginning of the second act, a frantically suspicious Dr. Bartolo is trying to find out who had visited the night before. He interrogates his two servants, Giovinetto (“Youngster,” i.e., an old man) and Lo Svegliato (“Mr. Wide-awake,” i.e., a simpleton), but to no avail. Figaro had taken the precaution of slipping drugs to each of them: Lo Svegliato has received a sleeping draught and can only yawn; Giovinetto, having taken a powder, can only sneeze.

The musical trick here is constructing the whole interrogation out of typical pairs of balanced (“question-and-answer”) phrases, and endless melodic sequences derived from them: musical clichés given renewed freshness by their unexpected appositeness to the inane dramatic situation. Familiar from Mozart (especially the role of Leporello in *Don Giovanni*, the quintessential *basso buffo* servant role) is the rapid patter—even declamation at a note value shorter than a beat—to which Dr. Bartolo's part in the trio is largely confined, with all three parts joining in at the end.

Paisiello's trio is a little masterpiece, and Rossini, when it came his turn to set *Il barbiere*, wisely refrained from competing with it. He left the episode with the yawning and sneezing servants in recitative, and nowadays it is almost always dropped in performance. Nevertheless, he did surpass his predecessor—indeed all predecessors—in the new level of zany virtuosity to which, hiding his sophisticated craftsmanship behind a smokescreen of ludicrous situations and effects, he brought all their techniques and devices. He loaded his operas with more ensemble pieces than ever, meanwhile extending the finales to a previously unheard-of scale, both in length and in what Da Ponte, Mozart's comic librettist, called *strepitoso-strepitosissimo*, “tumult upon uproar,” which required fantastic virtuosity from all concerned, resourceful composer and rapidly enunciating performers alike.

The image shows a musical score for a Terzetto buffo from Act II of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. It consists of four staves. The top staff is for Giovinetto (soprano), the second for Lo Svegliato (bass), the third for Dr. Bartolo (bass), and the bottom two staves are for piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: Giovinetto: "Ee - ci... Ee - ci..."; Lo Svegliato: "Ah... Ah..."; Dr. Bartolo: "Oh che can-to è que-sto qui! Oh che can-to è que-sto qui!". The piano part includes dynamic markings like 'f' and 'p'.

ex. 1-5 Giovanni Paisiello, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Act II, *Terzetto buffo* (yawning and sneezing)

As far as rapid *buffo* patter is concerned, Rossini's *Barbiere* contains the two absolute classics of the genre: “Largo al factotum” (“Make way for the jack-of-all-trades!”), Figaro's bumptious cavatina or entrance aria in act I; and “La calunnia è un venticello” (“Slander is a gentle breeze”), the caustically brilliant aria in which Don Basilio, Rosina's music teacher who doubles as a marriage broker, concocts a word-of-mouth campaign to disgrace Count Almaviva and thwart his designs. Figaro's cavatina begins like a typical da capo aria: its “A” section and “B” section are easily spotted. But the return to A is hilariously preempted by a frenzy of patter, as Figaro is overwhelmed with thoughts of all the demands everybody makes of him, uniquely gifted as he is. The final section (“Ah bravo, Figaro...,” Ex. 1-6) is traditionally taken as fast as the singer can manage it (and often a lot faster than that).

Don Basilio's aria does not quite hit such a peak of vocal virtuosity; the virtuosity this time is the composer's. For the whole dramatic point of this seemingly traditional “simile aria” rests on the crescendo idea: a little breeze of slander gathering force and becoming a hurricane of scandalous babble. And so all of Rossini's skills as an orchestral illustrator are called into play, including such *recherché* effects as violins bowed *al ponticello*—“right on the bridge”—producing a strangled whisper to start the breeze on its way; or, at the storm's acme, tongued tremolos in the woodwinds.

Ah bra-vo, Fi-gu-ro, bra-vo, bra-vi-si-mol ah bra-vo, Fi-gu-ro, bra-vo, bra-
 vi-si-mol a te for-tu-na, a te for-tu-na, a te for-tu-na non man-che-
 ria La la ran, a te for-tu-na a te for-
 tu-na, a te for-tu-na, a te for-tu-na non man-che-ria

ex. 1-6 Gioacchino Rossini, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, “Largo al factotum,” coda

The *buffa* style can only be exhibited at fullest strength, of course, in a finale; and there is no *buffa* finale in all of Rossini—which is to say, in all of opera—that can equal the first-act finale from *L'Italiana in Algeri*, one of the big hits of 1813, as an exhibitor of what it was that made Rossini the great counterweight to Beethoven in the eyes even of his German contemporaries. Running through almost a hundred pages of vocal score in record time, it is the most concentrated single dose of Rossini that there is.

A first-act finale must always portray the height of imbroglia—the moment of greatest, seemingly hopeless, tangle in the plot line. So here is what has happened:

Mustafà, the Bey of Algiers, has grown tired of his wife Elvira and decides to marry her off to his Italian slave Lindoro. He sends his pirate commander out to find him an Italian girl. The pirates sink a ship, on which Isabella, the Italian girl of the title, is cruising in search of her fiancé (Lindoro, of course), and bring the survivors to the Bey's court as captives. The commander announces her capture, and the Bey tells Lindoro he can go home if he takes Elvira with him.

That is the setup. Things come to a head as the captive Isabella, on her way into the throne room, catches sight of

Lindoro, on his way out. (Here is where the first-act finale begins.) The moment of recognition has a very conspicuous Mozartean resonance. Like the moment of recognition in the ballroom finale to the first act of *Don Giovanni*, it takes place over the strains of an unusually slow minuet—the trio (*andantino*) in which Lindoro, Elvira, and Zulma (Elvira's slave) had been singing their farewells to Mustafà. A Rossini finale always takes to extremes the tempo trajectory on which all *buffa* finales are built. The *Andantino* is, so to speak, the launching pad.

The lovers' emotion is reflected in a wrenching flatward turn in the harmony, but just as the expected cadence to E \flat is about to happen (and a love duet seems imminent), Mustafà chimes in with a typically bouncing, satirically florid mood-shattering *buffo* aside to express his befuddlement. The threatened duet turns into a septet, set against the continuing strains of the *Andantino*, in which all the assembled characters take part, Lindoro and Mustafà (as it were competing in confusion) in the lead.

This moment of frozen perplexity having passed, the quick-witted Isabella confronts the Bey in a fast tempo that from here on will only get faster. With what we are now apt to recognize as the “arrogance of Enlightenment” (arguably the butt of Rossini's humor, depending on how it is played), she berates the cowering Mustafà for his barbarian transgressions against universal human norms. How can he expect her to love a man who treats his wife so cruelly? How can he simply order Lindoro to marry a woman he does not love? Then, immediately contradicting herself, she insists that Lindoro, a fellow Italian, be made her retainer forthwith. A hopeless impasse has been reached: as the assembled singers declare, “Va sossopra il mio cervello, sbalordito in tanti imbrogli!” (“My little head is topsy-turvy, dumbfounded at such imbroglios!”). It is time for metaphors.

The first metaphor, expressed *allegro vivace*, is the time-honored shipwreck, the standard metaphor of emotional breakdown. Then, in a *stretta* marked *più mosso*, everybody goes into an onomatopoeical tizzy. This is Rossini's favorite comic device, the idea (as Budden puts it) of “human beings transformed by emotion into puppets,”¹⁶ and this ensemble set a benchmark of mechanical grotesquery never to be surpassed (Ex. 1-7). The ladies compare their mental agitation to a little bell a-ringing (“din din”); Lindoro compares his to a little clock a-ticking (“tic tic”); Taddeo, Isabella's chaperone, compares his to a little crow a-cawing (“cra cra”); the pirate commander Ali to a hammer pounding (“tac tac”); and Mustafa to a cannon firing (“bum bum”).

The image shows a page of a musical score for Gioacchino Rossini's opera *L'Italiana in Algeri*, Act I Finale. The score is in E major and 2/4 time. It features vocal parts for Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), Bass (B.), and Chorus (C.), along with piano accompaniment. The lyrics include 'din din din din din din', 'bum bum bum bum bum bum', 'Cra cra', 'Alli', and 'tac tac tac tac tac tac'.

ex. 1-7 Gioacchino Rossini *L'Italiana in Algeri*, from the Act I Finale

For twenty or so pages of vocal score they continue shouting and gesticulating in this vein, the chorus of Algerian harem girls and Italian sailors finally joining in to raise the hubbub to an even higher pitch of furious futility. And then the masterstroke: contrary to all reasonable expectation, the whole *stretta*, *din-din*, *bum-bum*, and all, is replayed *ancora più mosso*—yet faster! In a good performance the audience will not believe its ears. Rossini has taken bootless delirium, the jewel in the *buffa* crown, about as far as it can go. (Just in case anyone is worrying, though, the opera ends with Isabella and Lindoro in each others' arms, and Mustafà and Elvira reconciled.)

The device of comparing human emotion to mechanical or animal noises is as old as opera buffa itself; it goes all the way back to the closing duet in Giovanni Battista Pergolesi's intermezzo *La serva padrona*, an item that produced a sensation comparable to Rossini's about eighty years earlier. Over that span the *opera buffa* had traced a fairly straight trajectory of expanding technical resources (but not harmonic ones—that was German terrain!) and mounting, fairly coldhearted hilarity. Rossini stands unquestionably at its pinnacle. The *buffa* had reached the end of the line.

Notes:

(16) Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. I p. 18.

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Opera seria

Rossini: *Tancredi*

HEART THROBS

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 Real Worlds, and Better Ones

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Not so the *seria*. Under the impact of romanticism, serious opera flowered anew, and again Rossini was at the forefront, although this aspect of his historical contribution is less evident in the context of today's performing repertoire. It may be argued, in fact, that the most fertile articles in the Code Rossini were those that pertained to the serious aria (or more precisely and to the point, the *scena ed aria* that replaced the recitative-plus-aria unit of old) and those that pertained to the dramatic ensemble, imported from the *opera buffa* to serve serious or tragic aims. These were crucial renovations. They gave serious opera a new lease on life, transforming it into opera as we know it today.

Once again it should be emphasized that neither these nor any Rossinian novelties were his wholly original invention. They were newly standardized and redeployed adaptations from previous practice. One can find them foreshadowed in the work of many composers, including Mozart. But beginning with Rossini, opera became unthinkable without them.

The Rossinian serious aria (or duet) consisted of two main sections in contrasting tempos—the *cantabile*, or lyric effusion, and the *cabaletta*, or brilliant conclusion. The etymology of *cabaletta*, a term first encountered around 1820, is uncertain. It may be a corruption of the Iberian *cobla*, meaning stanza, for it usually consisted of a short stanza strophically repeated either in whole or in part, with an orchestral ritornello in between the repetitions and a brilliant coda, all of which amounted to an eager invitation to the singer to embroider away. Indeed, the double-aria conception is a quintessentially singerly one. It allowed the virtuoso to show off everything from beauty of tone and breath control (in the *cantabile*) to euphoric fireworks (in the *cabaletta*).

For Italian opera, especially serious opera, remained a singers' showcase. The new style of aria did serve new dramaturgical purposes and meet new dramaturgical criteria by allowing, through its new emphasis on contrast, for more action to be accommodated within what had formerly been static "aria time." When preceded by an orchestral introduction and an accompanied recitative, when fitted out with a turn of plot (often involving the chorus) between the *cantabile* and the *cabaletta* to motivate the latter's incandescence, or when enhanced by what were called *pertichini* (brief interventions by other characters in dialogue with the soloist), the aria could be built up into a whole *scena*, or dramatic scene, with a self-contained dramatic trajectory. But it served old purposes, too, and better than ever, since every aria became a varied demonstration of traditional vocal prowess, giving the audience that much more of what they had come to bask in.

The item that put this new style of aria permanently on the map and made it de rigueur for perhaps fifty years to come was "Di tanti palpiti" ("So many heart throbs"), the hero's cavatina (entrance aria) from *Tancredi*, the other colossal hit of the miraculous year 1813, and the most famous aria Rossini ever wrote. (As was often the case, the piece is named after its *cabaletta*, the most memorable part.) Years later, looking back on his career and feigning shame at his success (all the better to mock the pretensions of the great), Rossini thanked his publisher for a gift by abasing himself as the "author of the too-famous cavatina 'Di tanti palpiti.'"¹⁷ Too famous, indeed. So completely had it come to symbolize Italian opera and all its values that, as long as it remained current on the recital stage, parodies of it were a universally recognized code among German composers and their audiences for triviality, flightiness, and inanity. As late as 1868, Wagner quoted it (and surely expected his audience to notice it) in the bleating Tailors' Chorus from *Die Meistersinger* (Ex. 1-8). What could better recommend it to our attention?

Tancredi, a "heroic musical drama," is in its externals a quasi-historical opera of the old school, even down to the

casting of the title role, a valiant knight-crusader, for a so-called *musico*—a contralto “in trousers.” (See Fig. 1-6; a generation or two earlier, the role would have been composed for a castrato.) In other ways, the libretto substantiates the frequent claim (or complaint) that romantic opera amounts in essence to a constant rehash of the myth of *Romeo and Juliet*: “star-cross'd lovers.” The title character, the exiled heir to the throne of Syracuse, and his beloved Amenaide are the children of warring clans. In Voltaire's drama, on which the libretto was based, mutual suspicion prevents their union, and the drama ends with the hero's death on the battlefield. In the first version of the opera, a happy ending was substituted. Later, Rossini retrofitted the last act with a tragic finale closer to the original (but also with a love duet, otherwise lacking in the opera). Nineteenth-century audiences preferred the first version; twentieth-century revivals, mainly instigated by scholars, have favored the more serious tragic ending.¹⁸

Schnei der, ein Schnei der, ein tail or, a tail or, a

Str. dazu,

Die Triller () sind von den Sängern als sogenannte Bockstriller auszuführen.
 *These trills must imitate the bleating of goats.

Schnei der zur Hand, der viel Mut hat' tail or ap - post, wise and good, who'

und Ver stand. knew no feat.'

**ex. 1-8 Richard Wagner, *Die Meistersinger*, Act III, Tailors' Chorus
 (“mit Bockstriller”)**

Tancredi's cavatina (act I, scene 5) marks his first appearance in the opera that bears his name. He has just returned to Syracuse in disguise, torn between his love for Amenaide and his duty to his father, whose rule is threatened by Amenaide's father. The orchestral Andante that opens the scene (Ex. 1-9a) is one of Rossini's characteristic tone-paintings, full of nature sounds that conjure up the beautiful landscape to which Tancredi addresses his first words of accompanied recitative: “O sweet, ungrateful native land, at last I return to you!” The accompaniment to the

recitative is full of orchestral and harmonic color, both of which change subtly to register the hero's fugitive moods. A switch, first to the relative minor and then to the subdominant, accompanies thoughts of Amenaide, at first painful, then sweet, finally resolute.



fig. 1-6 Marietta Alboni (with moustache) in the trousers role of Arsace and Giulia Grisi as the title character in a revival of Rossini's *Semiramide* (St. Petersburg, 1844).

The cantabile section, “Tu che accendi questo core” (“You who set this heart of mine afire,” Ex. 1-9b), ends with multiple cues for embellishment: the markings *a piacere* (“at pleasure,” i.e., do whatever you want) in the vocal part and *colla parte* (“stay with the soloist”) in the accompaniment. The fermata means “cadenza, please,” just as it did in the days of the da capo aria. If the notes on the page are recognizable at this point, the singer is not doing her job. The same goes double, of course, for the repeated strains in the cabaletta.

Andante

The image shows a piano accompaniment for the orchestral introduction of the duet 'Tu che accendi/Di tanti palpiti' from Gioacchino Rossini's opera *Tancredi*. The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems of music. The first system contains three measures, and the second system contains two measures. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melodic line with slurs and a final flourish of sixteenth notes. The left hand (bass clef) provides a steady accompaniment with eighth-note patterns and chords.

ex. 1-9a Gioacchino Rossini, *Tancredi*, Act II, "Tu che accendi/Di tanti palpiti," orchestral introduction

Moderato

Tu che accen-di que-sto co-re, tu che des-ti il va-lor
mi-o, al-ma glo-ria, dol-ce a-mo-re, se-con-
da-te il bel-de-si-o, ca-da un em-pio ma-di-
a piacere
to-re, co-ro-na-se la mia fe.

ex. 1-9b Gioacchino Rossini *Tancredi*, Act II, “Tu che accendi/Di tanti palpiti,”
cantabile

Di tan-ti pal-pi-ti, di tan-te pe-re.

da te, mio be - - ne, spe - - ro mer - cè.

Mi ri - ve - dra - i... ti ri - ve - drò...

ti ri - ve - drò... ne' tuoi bei

ex. 1-9c Gioacchino Rossini, *Tancredi*, Act II, “Tu che accendi/Di tanti palpiti,” cabaletta

What made this particular cabaletta such a favorite? One thing must have been the surprising modulation to the flat mediant (A \flat major) just where the first stanza seemed about to make its cadence (Ex. 1-9c). Not only did the little jolt give the audience a pleasurable frisson, it also functioned as a sort of FOP, requiring a modulation (via F minor) back to the tonic for the repetition of the opening line. The last dominant chord carries another fermata, requiring another cadenza: the harmonic structure and the vocal virtuosity work in tandem here to increase the satisfaction of return. And of course, the effect also plays upon—and plays out—the meaning of the words in the context of the action: the whole aria is about returning, and the very words that had launched the harmonic digression were “mi rivedrai, ti rivedrò,” “you will see me again, and I will see you.” The quick *passaggi* on the last page (Ex. 1-9d) were, as always, only a springboard for improvised delirium.

But such explanations are rationalized reflections and, to the extent of their rationalization, false to an experience whose essence is sensuous immediacy, a sense that the music is playing directly on the nerves and calling up the listener's own memories of the emotions portrayed. As the French novelist Stendhal put it in his *Life of Rossini* (1824), “without the experience, or the memory of the experience, of the madness of love, as love is known in the happy countries of the South, it is quite impossible to interpret the phrase *mi rivedrai, ti rivedrò*.” Stendhal's *Life* is far more than a biography. (As a biography it is quite useless in fact, being full of errors and fabrications.) It is a great work of music criticism, as crucial in its way, and within its Franco-Italian milieu, as E.T.A. Hoffmann's writings on Beethoven for an understanding of what—and how much!—the music of the early nineteenth century meant to its hearers. What Rossini's contagious heart throbs meant to Stendhal, or stimulated in him, was a great liberating impetuosity of soul that contrasted utterly with the (as he saw it) pompous and vapid spirituality touted in the Protestant north, where manners were restrained and souls unmusical. Pitting Stendhal against Hoffmann is perhaps the best way of encompassing the increasingly split world of music in the early romantic era, with its nation-based aesthetics and its hardened antagonisms

As the quotation about “Di tanti palpiti” already shows, Stendhal used Rossini (just as Hoffmann used Beethoven, just as Jean-Jacques Rousseau had used Pergolesi) as a springboard for national stereotyping. The passage continues, even more pointedly:

The nations of the North might devour twenty *Treatises on the Art of Poetry* as learned as that of La Harpe [Jean-François de La Harpe (1739–1803), French literary authority and theorist of “classicism”], and still have no understanding why the words *mi rivedrai* precede the words *ti rivedrò*. If any of our fashionable critics could understand Italian, they would surely detect a *lack of breeding*, if not indeed a *total contempt for the delicacies of social intercourse* in Tancredi's behavior towards Amenaide!¹⁹

ex. 1-9d Gioacchino Rossini, *Tancredi*, Act II, “Tu che accendi/Di tanti palpiti,” coda

Beyond that, Rossini's inimitable talent is said to reside in his plainness and clarity, in the indescribable rightness of his portrayal of things as they are, a rightness that silences criticism. Nowhere is this rightness better exemplified than in “Di tanti palpiti.” “What is there to be said about this superb *cantilena*?” Stendhal asks, using the fancy Italian word for song. “Talking about it to those who already know it would seem to me to be as absurd as talking about it to those who have never heard it—if indeed, in the whole of Europe there may still *be* people who have never heard it!” And in a footnote that drips with sarcasm, seemingly pointed directly at writers like Hoffmann who wax endlessly about the transcendent and the ineffable, he adds, “O happy lands, within whose boundaries there is known no stronger guarantee of a reputation for sublime profundity than a talent for being obscure and incomprehensible!” Behind this there lurks once again the figure of Beethoven, still alive at the time of writing, and already cast as the antipode to Rossini. In another passage, Stendhal removes all doubt that, compared with his idol, Beethoven and all that he stands for, is... well, limited. “Human emotions,” he declares, “tend to remain obstinately tepid when their reactions are interrupted by the necessity of choosing between two different categories of pleasure, each of a different quality.” And he illustrates his assertion with a remarkable comparison:

If I were to feel the urge to listen to a resplendent display of pure harmony, I should go and hear a symphony by Haydn, Mozart or Beethoven; but if I were to desire melody, I should turn to *Il matrimonio segreto* or to *Il re Teodoro* [*The Secret Marriage* and *King Theodore*, operas by Cimarosa and Paisiello respectively]. If I wanted to enjoy both these pleasures simultaneously (insofar as it is physically possible to do so) I should pay a visit to La Scala [the Milan opera house] for a performance of *Don Giovanni* or *Tancredi*. But I confess that, if I were to plunge any deeper than this into the black night of harmony, music would soon lose the

overwhelming charm which it holds for me.²⁰

How might Hoffmann have answered this? It would be easy enough to guess, but as it happens we can do better. Hoffmann himself never issued any comparable pronouncement about Rossini; but a writer known as “the Russian Hoffmann” did, and did it with specific reference to “Di tanti palpiti.” He was Vladimir Odoyevsky, a Moscow aristocrat who published novellas and fantastic sketches very much like Hoffmann’s, and who (again like Hoffmann) was an enthusiastic musical dilettante with some decent compositions to his credit.

In 1823, aged nineteen, Odoyevsky published a satirical novella that contained a scene at the opera drawn pretty much from life. A troupe of Italian singers had come to town under the direction of Luigi Zamboni, a famous *basso buffo* who had “created” (that is, sung the first performance of) the role of Figaro in Rossini’s *Barbiere*. A Count Gluposilin (the name means “Strong-and-stupid”) is holding forth to young Arist (“The Best”), the first-person narrator, on the merits of Rossini during a performance of *Tancredi*. (They listen to the arias, converse during the recitatives.) “Di tanti palpiti,” the moment everyone has been waiting for, proves too much for Arist:

—“What!” I shouted, “Tancredi is singing an *écossaise*, and a pretty poor one at that! And everyone is delighted with it??”

—“Calm down,” Gluposilin remonstrated, on the verge of anger, “you want to quarrel with the whole world. Don’t you know, kind sir, this aria is so good that every gondolier in Italy is singing it!”

— “I quite agree,” I answered him coolly. “This is a fine aria for a gondolier; but for Tancredi it won’t do at all. Do Mozart and Méhul write their operas like that? With what simplicity and strength they depict the slightest tinge of character! You won’t find Tancredi expressing his joys and sorrows like any old gondolier with them!”

— “Enough already! Forgive me,” Gluposilin insisted, “but this aria is first-rate! It’s beyond argument, beyond argument!”...I had my revenge on Gluposilin. For the whole duration of the performance I tormented him with my doubts. When, for example, he went into ecstasies at roulades and trills, I stopped him cold with the remark that they were being done to the words *Io tremo* (“I tremble”), *i miei tor menti* (“my torments”), *il mio dolente cor* (“my grieving heart”). Another time I pointed out to him that Argirio really shouldn’t be using a dance tune to tell Amenaide *Non ti son più genitor* (“I’m no longer a father to you”); and so on. I spent the evening angry at myself for understanding Italian, angry at the singers for their distinct enunciation; it took away half my pleasure.²¹

Notes:

(17) Rossini to Tito Ricordi (1865); quoted in Gossett, “Rossini,” in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. XXI (2nd ed.), p. 738.

(18) See Philip Gossett, *The Tragic Finale of ‘Tancredi’/Il finale tragico del Tancredi di Rossini* (Pesaro: Fondazione Gioacchino Rossini, 1977).

(19) Stendhal, *Life of Rossini*, trans. Richard N. Coe (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), p. 58.

(20) Stendhal, *Life of Rossini*, p. 128.

(21) Vladimir Odoyevsky, “Dni dosad” (Vexing Days, 1823), in T. Livanova and V. Protopopov, *Opernaya kritika v Rossii*, Vol. I (Moscow: Muzika, 1966), pp. 312–13.

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Opera: The 19th century

“REALISM”

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 Real Worlds, and Better Ones

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Even as he denounces the cabaletta, Arist makes an important point about it when he notes its (to him) offensive dance rhythm. An *écossaise* (in German *schottische*, “Scottish”) was the early nineteenth-century version of the contredanse, by 1813 a ballroom favorite. So was the polonaise (“Polish”), a strutting processional dance in triple meter and another characteristic cabaletta rhythm. The use of ballroom dances as aria models had a considerable history, especially in Mozart. But it was in Mozart's comic operas that he relied on the practice, not his serious ones. The infiltration of serious opera by the rhythms of the ballroom was only one of the ways in which by Rossini's time the serious had adopted—and adapted to its purposes—the resources of the comic.

To say this is by no means to imply that serious opera had become comic, or in any way less serious. It had, however, become more “realistic” within the admittedly unrealistic terms of romanticism. (And from the perspective of a Hoffmann or an Odoyevsky, of course, that made it less “spiritual.”) It was more concerned, in the words of Wye J. Allanbrook, to “move audiences through representations of their own humanity,” and playing subliminally on their memories of social dancing was a potent way of achieving that.²² The other all-important resource that serious opera borrowed from the comic in the nineteenth century was the ensemble piece—at first in finales, then in introductions and finales, and finally wherever the plot reached a crux.

This, too, had nothing to do with comedy, but with “realism”: the possibility of integrating full-blown lyricism with interaction among characters, which is to say with dramatic action. In the nineteenth century, then, serious or tragic opera achieved what the comic opera had achieved in the eighteenth: the reconciliation of dramatic and musical values, so that they could be integrated in a single continuity rather than spotlighted in an “artificial” alternation.

But of course words like “realism” and “artificial” have to be put in quotes in discussions like this because opera (like any medium of artistic representation) is artificial and conventional by definition. What appears realistic is merely whatever artifice or convention happens to be accepted as that by a given audience. Dancelike arias and ensembles no more resemble real-life behavior than do alternations of continuo recitative and da capo aria. The most that can be said in favor of “true realism” is that the newer techniques enabled a somewhat more evenly unfolding action, so that operatic events took place in something more nearly resembling “real time” than before.

Another change that to us may signal greater realism is the gradual abandonment in the 1830s of the heroic role *en travesti*. Men played men and women women; but the soprano lead was usually given a confidante sung by a lower-voiced woman—a contralto or a “mezzo-soprano” (to use a term coined in connection with the change) so that audiences could continue as before to enjoy virtuoso female duet singing, the brilliant cadenzas in thirds now representing devoted friendship rather than erotic love. But all of these modifications are matters of degree, not kind; and the degree, while crucial enough to matter (and to be in its time an object of controversy and acrimony), is rather small.

The idea that “men are men and women women” might seem to have come late to opera, but in fact (as some recent cultural historians have argued) it arrived there no later than in many other areas of nineteenth-century thinking and doing. Gender identities, as categories incorporating and regulating both biological and social roles, seem to have hardened around the same time that national identities, and many other forms of personal identity, took on their modern definitions. In fact, the development of modern voice categories in nineteenth-century opera is an excellent illustration of the process described by Michel Foucault (1926–84), a French historian of ideas, whereby *ars erotica*, erotic art (or sexual artifice), was replaced by *scientia sexualis*, the science (or true knowledge) of sex.²³

Only since the nineteenth century, in this view, have gender roles and their attendant behaviors been as well defined

as standardized, and (consequently) as well policed as they are today. Another symptom of the change was the coining of the terms “homosexual” and “heterosexual”—terms that radically dichotomized, and set in opposition, modes of sexual behavior that had formerly coexisted and mixed more freely, especially among the aristocracy. Matters that had formerly been regarded as varieties of social behavior were redefined as matters of natural endowment or identity. As Foucault put it, it was nineteenth-century society, and no earlier one, that “set out to formulate the uniform truth of sex.”²⁴

This development, abetted as much by the nineteenth-century scientific revolution (which envisioned the possibility of a single, all-encompassingly “true” representation of nature) as it was by the rise of “Victorian” morality (whereby the behavior of the middle class was accepted as a social norm for all classes), made it harder for nineteenth-century audiences to accept soprano voices in heroic roles. The voice range could no longer be separated from the rest of the “female” constitution, nor could it credibly represent a character type that did not accord with Victorian notions of femininity, firmly identified with an ideal of bourgeois domesticity that would not be effectively challenged until past the middle of the twentieth century.

Notes:

(22) Wye J. Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 16.

(23) See M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 57ff.

(24) Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 69.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Gender in music

Vincenzo Bellini

Bel canto

Norma

BEL CANTO

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 Real Worlds, and Better Ones

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

To see the new serious opera in its fullest flower, we can turn to Rossini's successors: Vincenzo Bellini (1801–35), who was to the early 1830s what Rossini had been to the 1820s, and the somewhat late-blooming Gaetano Donizetti (1797–1848), who enjoyed a like preeminence in the decade 1835–45. In viewing their works we will see the coming of a truly romantic temper to the *opera seria*, and (partly for that reason) we will be dealing with operas that survive in active repertory, unlike those of Rossini, who is represented on today's operatic stage by his comic operas alone. More specifically, we will see how the cantabile-cabaletta format was continually expanded until it could encompass long scenes packed with highly diversified action.

Bellini, the son and grandson of composers, received intensive musical instruction from the Mozartean age of four, but did not write his first opera until his twenty-fifth year. He made up rapidly for lost time, even if he never quite developed Rossinian facility. By the time of his death, two months before his thirty-fourth birthday (more shades of Mozart), he had completed ten operas. At least four—*I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (“The Capulets and Montagues,” 1830), *La sonnambula* (“The maiden sleepwalker,” 1831), *Norma* (1831), and *I puritani* (“The Puritans,” 1835)—have entered the permanent Italian repertory, while the two 1831 operas are international standards.



fig. 1-7 Vincenzo Bellini, anonymous portrait at the Museo Teatrale alla Scala, Milan.

Eight of Bellini's operas were written in collaboration with Felice Romani (1788–1865), the leading librettist of the period, whose eighty-odd scripts were set by dozens of composers from Rossini in 1813 to the Austrian piano virtuoso Sigismond Thalberg in 1855, some of them many times over. With Bellini, though, Romani formed the closest working relationship of his career; their partnership merits remembrance on a par with Lully/Quinault, Gluck/Calzabigi, and Mozart/Da Ponte. Like the others, the Bellini/Romani partnership created a type that defined a phase of operatic history.

That type is sometimes rather vaguely called *bel canto*. All that the term means is “fine singing,” and it has been applied to many things, starting as far back as the Venetian opera of the 1630s. The application is always retrospective, however; *bel canto* is always something that has been lost—a golden age. The application to the operas of Bellini's time, the one that has remained current in loose common parlance, was made by none other than the sixty-five-year-old Rossini, in a conversation that supposedly took place after dinner at his Paris residence one evening in 1858.

“Alas for us, we have lost our native *bel canto*,” Rossini's interlocutor, a wealthy amateur, reported him as saying.

The loss consists “of three elements: first, the Instrument—the voice—the Stradivarius, if you like; second, Technique—that is to say, the means of using it; and third, Style, the ingredients of which are taste and feeling.” Such a loss can only portend debasement of all culture. The first symptom, as always, was contempt for honest labor.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece. It consists of seven systems of music. Each system includes a vocal line (soprano) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The lyrics are in Italian and are written below the vocal line. The music is in a minor key and features a complex, flowing melodic line in the voice, supported by a piano accompaniment with a steady, rhythmic pattern. The lyrics are: "In pa-gi-ne di mor-te, del-la su-per-fu-ro-na fi-erri-ssim-no-mi- al-la-gi-oc-no-mor-ti; Ma non per-vo-i, mor-ti per-vi-ssi-ssim-i: Quel cor-mu-ta mor-ti fo-r-tis-si-mo-ta-to. L'o-ra fa-tal che com-pi il gran-de-cu-so. Pa-ce s'in-si-mo, e il sa-cro vi-schio lo mi-a-to."

ex. 1-10a Vincenzo Bellini, *Norma*, Scene e cavatina (Act I, scene 5), *Parlante*: “In pagine di morte”

The “Stradivarius,” Rossini remarked (continuing the analogy with a priceless violin), used to be manufactured (he was referring, of course, to castrati), but now had to be cultivated—a task that began by assigning to the pupil, a child of no more than twelve, a strict regime of “guttural contractions,” soundless throat exercises, and this “purely aphonic gymnastic,” he noted, “could go on for months and months.” What was sought next was “equality of timbre over the whole range of the organ, equalization of the registers.” This took years, and no music was involved, only scales.

Norma

Ca - sta Di - va, ca - sta Di - va, che i - ran - giu - ti. Que - sta tu - ca, que - sta sa - cre an - ti - che pian - te. A noi vol - gi, il bel - sem - bian - te. A noi vol - gi, a noi vol - gi il bel - sem - bian - te. Sen - za - ra - be, e sen - za vol -

ex. 1-10b Vincenzo Bellini, *Norma*, Scene e cavatina (Act I, scene 5), Cavatina con coro (“Casta diva,” beginning)

Technique was acquired by singing exercises. Every voice teacher had his “page”—a set of studies or *vocalises* that imparted correct vowel placement and agility, leading to facility in *gruppetti* (fast ornaments), *roulades* (fast scales and arpeggios), trills, and the like. Typically, a student worked on the “page” for three years, and then another three were spent in “putting into practice as a whole,” or in combinations, “everything that had been studied in detail.” “Then,” according to Rossini, “at the end of a final year, the teacher could say proudly to that student (who had scarcely tried out a cavatina in class): ‘Go now, get on with you. You can sing whatever you wish.’”

But not even then was training over. Style had to be acquired before a singer dared perform before a paying audience. It meant listening to great singers and imitating them. For “style is traditions, and the secrets of those traditions could be surprised by the young novice only among great singers, the perfect models consecrated by fame.” Traditions, Rossini continued,

elude scholastic instruction. Only the performing model, taken from life, can inculcate and transmit them. So that if those who possess the great, true traditions disappear without leaving disciples on their level, their art vanishes, dies.

And of course, that is precisely what had happened. “Today there is no such school, there are neither models nor interpreters, for which reason not a single voice of the new generation is capable of rendering in *bel canto* the aria ‘Casta diva.’”²⁵

Inevitably, Rossini had named Bellini's greatest and most famous aria, Norma's cavatina in the opera that bears her name. And what was most telling was the fact that he referred to it not by the opening words of the cabaletta, but by those of the cantabile, for that was precisely the difference between the *opera seria* of Rossini's generation and the romantic *melodramma* of Bellini's. The great music now was the slow music, a music rarefied into fantastic *melodie lunghe, lunghe, lunghe* (“long, long, long melodies,” as an admiring Verdi called them),²⁶ for composing which Bellini had an unparalleled gift. There was nothing like them in Rossini. The Bellinian cantabile was music that, like romantic music anywhere, sought to plumb subjective depths and scale transcendent heights.

I. R. TEATRO ALLA SCALA.

Dal giorno 13 al 17 del corr. Maggio avranno luogo
due Recite, nelle quali agirà Madama MALIBRAN
rappresentando il Melodramma

NORMA

La Compagnia sarà composta inoltre dalle

Signora	GARCIA RUFFI	ATTALGISA
"	ROCCO TARRA	CLOTILDE
e dai Signori	BONA DOMENICO	POLLIONE
"	MARCO IONAZZO	OROYESO
"	VINCENZO GIUSEPPE	FLAVIO

Nell'intermezzo dei due atti vi sarà un PASSO A SETTE espressamente composto dal sig. Egidio Priora, eseguito dallo stesso, e dalle signore Rabel, Ancemont, Bonalumi, Braschi Amalia, Frassi Adelaide e Romagnoli.

Con altro avviso sarà indicato precisamente il giorno della prima recita, restando fissato quello della seconda nel succennato giorno 17, e saranno pure indicati i prezzi d'ingresso e delle Sedie chiuse.

Dal Gazzettino dell' I. R. Teatro alla Scala il 3 Maggio 1836.

fig. 1-8 Poster for a revival of Bellini's *Norma* at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan.

It also partook of a romanticism that, as spoofed by W. S. Gilbert in *The Mikado*, “praises with enthusiastic tone/Every century but this and every country but [its] own.” Long long ago and far far away remained the preferred operatic locale, so that time could unfold in a leisurely mythological or epic manner. In the case of *Norma*, the place was ancient Gaul (the Celtic provinces of northwestern France) standing in for Britain—land of misty islands and the romantic locale *par excellence* for continental artists—and the time was that of the Druids as described by Julius

Caesar in his history of the Gallic campaigns.

The premise, as usual, was forbidden love. Norma, the Druid high priestess, is torn between her public duties and her guilty love for Pollione, the Roman proconsul, against whose occupying forces the Druids are planning to revolt. Her love has lately been aggravated by jealousy; for, although she has borne Pollione two children in violation of her oath of chastity, he has forsaken her in favor of Adalgisa, a temple “virgin.” In the end, Norma and Pollione, his love for her rekindled, perish on a sacrificial pyre in the Druid temple in voluntary expiation of their sin.



fig. 1-9 Giuditta Pasta (1797–1865) in the title role of Bellini's *Norma*.

“Casta diva,” Norma's cavatina, provides the framework for a scene of grandiose proportions, involving the participation of another soloist, her father Oroveso, the Archdruid (bass), and the full chorus, with the orchestra supplemented by what was known as the *banda*, a brass ensemble played on stage by musicians in costume. Almost all of its components have their counterparts or prototypes in the scene from Rossini's *Tancredi* that culminates in “Di tanti palpiti.” But the growth in dimensions, the infusion of spectacle, and especially the enormous influx of stage action into what had formerly been an exclusively reflective domain can be interpreted as either a new romanticism or a new realism, and shows the ultimate futility of trying to distinguish between the two.

The scene depicts a ritual: a sacrifice to the moon goddess and an augury in which the Druids hope to learn from the goddess whether the time is ripe for revolt. First, in an accompanied recitative, Norma haughtily addresses the populace and counsels patience. Her father objects, supported by stormy tremolando strings and seconded by the chorus, but she silences one and all by claiming divine inspiration. In a sort of speech-song called *parlante* (Ex. 1-10a), in which a repeated orchestral motif lends a momentary march-time regularity to the rhythm as if to underscore her words, Norma assures them that Rome will perish—but through decadence, not military defeat. She then leads the assembled congregation in a prayer. This is the famous cantabile, in which the priestess, entranced, cuts the sacred mistletoe from the holy oak and, responsively with the chorus, begs the goddess to calm the hearts of her compatriots.

The long, long, long melody is heard three times in all. It sounds first as a flute solo, the new key prefigured by a sudden excursion into its Neapolitan region, as if graphically to portray the advent of Norma's altered state of consciousness. The first two phrases of the ecstatically embellished melody, balanced four-bar periods, are played complete, but the third phrase is cut off after three measures and followed by a fermata—a favorite device for heightening expectation before a big lyric moment. Norma then sings the first stanza complete (Ex. 1-10b).

The miraculous coherence of the melody despite its inordinate length is achieved by a paradoxical trick. It is deliberately irregular in phrase structure, so that it cannot be parsed all the way down by successive binary divisions. The first two phrases, foreshadowed by the flute, have “classical” regularity. The eight-bar whole comprises two equal and parallel four-bar phrases, and each of these in turn comprises a pair of two-bar phrases set off by caesuras. Then follows a pair of parallel phrases (or rather a single phrase of one measure's duration and its embellished repetition) that veer off toward the relative minor.

But instead of being answered in kind, they are followed by a phrase of five bars' duration without any caesuras or internal repetitions at all. This last, longest, and least regular phrase, moreover, encompasses a thrilling contour. It arches quickly up to the melody's highest note, preceded by a whole measure that does nothing but “stall” a half step below, its momentary inability to move forward emphasized by the unstable diminished-seventh harmony and the syncopated rhythm of its repetitions. And then, over two luxuriant measures, the tension relaxes by degrees, with every beat sung to the same rhythm, and the harmony zeroing in on the tonic along the circle of fifths. As the dynamics subside from the passionate *fortissimo* at the melodic peak to the *pianissimo* on which the chorus will enter, the melody sums up its entire range, finally touching down on the low tonic G that has not been heard since the middle of the first phrase.

But there is another stratagem at work as well to keep this melody afloat, one that can be probed by taking note of how many beats begin with the melody sounding dissonances against the accompanying harmony. At first they are sparse. After the downbeat of the second measure, no such dissonance occurs until the functionally equivalent downbeat of the sixth. But then the tide of dissonance suddenly surges. Every beat of the seventh bar emphasizes the dissonant seventh (or the more dissonant ninth) of the dominant harmony, and the resolution to the tonic takes place against a chromatic appoggiatura to the third of the chord that clashes against its neighbor in the accompaniment as if G minor were vying with G major. The two one-measure phrases that provide the bridge to the climax are similarly riddled with accented dissonances; but the prize goes to the last two ostensibly relaxing measures, in which every single beat sounds a momentary discord, whether accented neighbor, appoggiatura, or suspension.

These purely melodic dissonances are smoothly approached and quit. None stands out as a jagged stab. One is conscious only of peaceful lyricism, but one's ear is kept perpetually on edge by an insistent undercurrent of harmonic tension in which practically every beat, crying out softly for resolution, maintains an understated but powerful undertow. When this great wave, this surge of melodic and harmonic electricity, has at last subsided, one feels that one has been transported and deposited in a different place. One's own consciousness has been altered. That is romanticism.

The two stanzas of the cantabile are separated by the choral response, to which the enraptured Norma adds the kind of roulades that Rossini, in 1858, already said no one could sing properly anymore. (We'll never know; and we'll never know what we're missing). On repetition, the cantabile is enhanced by the continued participation of the chorus and a short coda + cadenza. To provide a transition to the cabaletta, which requires a change of mood, something must snap Norma out of her trance. This the *banda* does quite handily, signaling the completion of the service.

Norma renews her promise that when the goddess commands, she will be ready to lead the attack. Oroveso and the chorus demand that Pollione be the first to die, and this of course sets Norma's heart afire. She promises to punish him, but her inner voice of conscience confesses her inability to harm the man she loves. The whole cabaletta ("Ah! bello a me ritorna," "Ah, come back to me, my beloved") is sung as an extended agitated aside (that is, an expression of unspoken thoughts), cast in a military march rhythm that emphasizes the war that rages within Norma's breast (Ex. 1-10C).

Like virtually all cabalettas of the period, it is cast in a very regular form with a pedigree that goes all the way back to the middle ages: a (four bars) a' (four bars) b (2+2 bars), a" (freely extended). Despite its rigidly conventional structure, however, it is the most personal music Norma gets to sing. "Heard" only by the audience, she addresses private words of love to Pollione, at complete variance with her public stance. This time the choral interjections between her phrases (and especially right before the coda + cadenza), in which the people wish ardently for a day that Norma hopes will never come, underscore not their community in prayer, but their secret irreconcilable opposition.

Norma

(Ah! bel - lo a me ri - tor - no, Del - fi - do a - mor pi -
mie - - ro; E con - tro il mon - do in - tie - ro Di - fe - sa - a - te sa -

enough, the more skill a librettist showed in redeploying the contents of a novel or drama for musical effect, the more artistically suspect his efforts were often held to be.

The matter becomes especially ironic when one considers that, as demonstrated by the music historian Michael Collins as recently as 1982, *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* was based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* only indirectly if at all. Its actual sources were the same sixteenth-century Italian novellas that had originally served Shakespeare, as filtered through more recent Italian plays, librettos, and ballets. This other tradition enabled Romani, as Collins put it, "to transform Giulietta and Romeo into nineteenth-century ideal types, the languishing heroine and the ardent hero, thus furnishing Bellini with the occasion to rise to great heights of Romantic expressiveness in his music."²⁷ To put it that way is to put the cart and the horse in the right order. It was the music that had to be served. Otherwise, why write operas?

This may seem obvious enough, but there has always been a vein of opera criticism that implicitly prefers spoken plays to musical ones, remaining blind or deaf to the way in which conventional musical forms expertly deployed (and beautiful voices expertly employed) can serve to channel and intensify emotion, often beyond the means of the "legitimate" stage. The primary target of such criticism has always been the cantabile/cabaletta combination, the libretto's supreme artifice. Thus Joseph Kerman, one of the most influential opera critics of the mid-twentieth century, could denounce the cabaletta ("one of the worst lyric conventions of early nineteenth-century opera") as inherently antidramatic:

This cabaletta was a fast, vehement aria or duet of extremely crude form and sentiment; it always came after a slower, quieter piece for the same singer or singers, and served to provide a rousing curtain. The form was strophic, and of the simplest pattern; the accompaniment consisted of a mechanically repeated polonaise or fast march rhythm. Between the slower aria and its cabaletta, a passage of recitative or *parlante* served to present some sort of excuse for the singer to change his mind.²⁸

But notice that everything is mentioned in this critique except the chief thing—the singing, for the sake of which the crude form and sentiment, the repeated rhythms, and the artificially contrived situation existed. Rossini might have ascribed this indifference to the vocal and sensuous aspects of opera to the critic's impoverished experience. A hundred years earlier, after all, Rossini had already proclaimed the death of "fine singing." But there was something else at work, too. Antipathy to Italian opera, quite the norm among mid-twentieth-century critics, was further testimony to the unquestioned dominance of the Hoffmannesque brand of German romanticism, with its strong preference for the "absolute" values of instrumental music and its idealist (Protestant and puritanical) contempt for all sensuality. Kerman's critique might as well have been written a hundred years earlier by Odoyevsky.

Notes:

(25) Edmond Michotte, "An Evening Chez Rossini, 1858," trans. Herbert Weinstock, *Opera XVIII* (1967): 955–58, condensed.

(26) Giuseppe Verdi to Camille Bellaigue, 2 May 1898; *Verdi: The Man in His Letters*, p. 431.

(27) Michael Collins, "The Literary Background of Bellini's *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi*," *JAMS XXXV* (1982): 538.

(28) Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (New York: Knopf, 1956), p. 146.

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Gaetano Donizetti

Lucia di Lammermoor

UTOPIA

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 Real Worlds, and Better Ones

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Even more adjustment became necessary when the object of “librettization” was a narrative rather than a dramatic work. As novels became increasingly popular, they furnished an ever greater proportion of operatic plots, which then had to be turned into scenarios, and finally into poetry for singing, with all the exacting formal and metrical requirements that implied. One of the most successful early nineteenth-century novel-operas was Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (“Lucy of Lammermoor,” 1835), to a libretto by Salvadore Cammarano, a staff poet and stage director at the royal theaters of Naples with whom many composers collaborated. Their opera was in fact the sixth one to be based on *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) by Sir Walter Scott, then the most popular writer in all of Europe, whose novels and poems were the source for more than fifty operas. But there would never be a seventh. In its way, *Lucia* was the romantic opera to end all romantic operas.



fig. 1-10 Fanny Tecchinardi-Persiani (1812–1867) as the title character in the first London production of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (lithograph by Edward Morton, 1839).

Living a good deal longer than Bellini, and working throughout his quarter-century career at a Rossinian pace, Donizetti amassed a lifetime total of sixty-six operas. Like Rossini, he excelled in all genres. At least three of his comic operas—*L'elisir d'amore* (“The love potion,” 1832), *La fille du régiment* (“The daughter of the regiment,” presented in Paris in 1840), and *Don Pasquale* (1843)—are repertory standards. But *Lucia* was his most impressive and influential achievement. It brought to a new scale and standard the incorporation of ensemble writing within the *opera seria*, and it provided the prototype for what would become a distinct subgenre of operatic tragedy, the “mad scene.” As in the case of Rossini, Donizetti did not invent either of these contributions out of whole cloth; that was not in the nature of the opera biz. Rather, he crystallized them in practice by providing seemingly unsurpassable models (the sort of thing called a *locus classicus*), thus stimulating legions of emulators.

The reasons for the popularity of Scott's *Bride of Lammermoor* as an operatic source are not far to seek. It was one of his so-called “Waverley novels,” mixing Scottish local color with horrific plots, a combination that was irresistible to romantic artists and their audiences. Anything set in Scotland, the mistiest locale within the British Isles, was surefire romantic fare, and the novel was also tinged with a few choice if incidental elements of what was known as

Gothic romance: mysterious or uncanny occurrences suggesting the influence of the supernatural, all set against the background of stormy landscapes, graveyards, dark ruins, and dilapidated castles.



fig. 1-11 Gaetano Donizetti, in a portrait by Giuseppe Rillosi at the Museo Teatrale alla Scala, Milan.

And, of course, it had the central ingredient—thwarted love. Lucy (Lucia) is the daughter of Sir William Ashton, Laird (lord) of Lammermoor, called Enrico in the opera, and cast as her elder brother. She is destined by her mother, Scott's villainess (who never appears in the opera), for a marriage of convenience to the Laird of Bucklaw (Lord Arturo Bucklaw in the opera), a rich man who will save the Lammermoor fortune. But she loves Edgar (Edgardo), the son of the Laird of Ravenswood, her family's mortal enemy. This basic situation, and some of the reasons for it, are set forth in act I of the libretto.

Getting wind of Lucy's attraction to Edgar, Lady Ashton (replaced by Enrico in the opera) coldly dismisses him from contention and sets about breaking her daughter's spirit so that she will assent to the marriage that has been arranged for her. In the novel, Lady Ashton intercepts a letter from Lucy to Edgar; when it is never answered, Lucy is induced to believe that her beloved has abandoned her. In the opera, Enrico contrives a forged letter in which Edgar declares love to another woman. After reading it, Lucia can no longer resist her brother's pressure. She signs the

proffered marriage contract. Only then does Edgar manage to break in on the betrothal ceremony and expose the hoax. In the novel, he arrives after the wedding has been performed and immediately reacts by challenging both Sir William Ashton and his son Henry—the prototype of the libretto's Enrico—to mortal combat on the morrow. In the opera, Edgardo directs his rage at Lucia, who (he is led to believe) has abandoned him. In a dramatic confrontation, he tears the ring he had given her off her hand and curses her. This, the height of the plot imbroglio, is the end of act II.

The central scene of the third act is devoted to the wedding and its grisly aftermath, in which Scott's Lucy murders her unwanted husband and appears, raving, among the guests. This episode is portrayed in far greater detail in the libretto than in the original novel. Disoriented, the heroine appears, dripping dagger in hand, believing that she is about to marry Edgardo. She goes through an imaginary ceremony with him, calls on him to meet her in heaven, and convinces one and all that her end is nigh. This famous scene, the mad scene, is sandwiched between a preliminary one (sometimes omitted) in which Enrico and Edgardo belatedly agree to their duel, and the final scene, in which Scott's original ending is given a typically operatic twist. In the novel, Edgar, galloping furiously along the shore to meet his antagonists, is swallowed up in a quicksand. In the opera, Edgardo, waiting for his enemy in the Ravenswood graveyard, learns of Lucia's death. He echoes her promise to meet in heaven, draws his dagger, and stabs himself, thus completing the parallel with the ubiquitous Romeo and Juliet.

Act II, scene 2, sometimes called the act II finale, is the most complexly structured scene in the opera, and the one that best illustrates the way in which elements perfected in *opera buffa* were appropriated by composers of romantic tragedies. In a way, the scene is constructed in just the opposite fashion from the older *opera seria*, often nicknamed “exit opera” for the way in which the da capo arias of old were contrived to precede and motivate exits, which in turn preceded and motivated applause. Romantic opera, especially as it moves in on the dramatic crux, could be nicknamed “entrance opera” for the way in which characters are made to accumulate on stage along with the dramatic tension, until it all boils over in a sonorous ensemble.

The scene, ostensibly an engagement party in a brightly lit, festively decorated hall, begins with two main characters, Enrico and Arturo Bucklaw, on stage, together with a chorus of guests, who begin the act by singing a toast to the lucky groom, to which he graciously responds. This conventional choral opener functions dramatically as the calm before the storm. From this point on to the end of the act, the musical form will be the one with which we are familiar: a cantabile, followed by a transitional passage (or *tempo di mezzo*, “medium tempo”) and the cabaletta. Only everything will be cast on a multiple scale. Rather than a cantabile/cabaletta for this character or that, we shall have a cantabile/cabaletta for the entire assembled cast. Thus *buffo* ensemble meets bel canto aria, creating a hybrid that combines features of both so as to project emotion (in a larger house, to a larger audience) more powerfully than ever.

The “recitative” in this scene (so designated in the score) is actually a fine example of extended *parlante*. Arturo asks Enrico where Lucia is; Enrico, knowing her devastated state (brought on by his own deception), warns Arturo that she may be wearing a sad look, but that is because she is in mourning for her mother. All of this takes place over an orchestral melody with a chugging, marchlike accompaniment. It can be construed in a pinch as a contredanse, which some directors actually choreograph for the assembled guests so that the exchange between the principals may be seen as unfolding in “real time.” Lucia now enters, looking just as despondent as Enrico has predicted. The music underscoring the *parlante* makes a suitable change in meter, tempo, and key—from a neutral D-major *moderato* to a pathetic C-minor *andante*. She is accompanied and supported by Alisa, her mezzo-soprano sidekick, and Raimondo Bide-the-Bent, her tutor. The number of potential soloists on stage is now five. The unsuspecting Arturo greets her ardently; Enrico, in a hissing undertone, reminds her of her duty. Bide-the-Bent utters a sympathetic aside. Lucia signs the proffered contract.

At this point the sixth main character, Edgardo, bursts upon the scene, disrupting the proceedings and causing Lucia to faint dead away. Needless to say, this forces another change of key and tempo (to D ♭ major, *larghetto*) and of course silences the hubbub of the *parlante*. The action goes into “aria time” for the famous sextet, in which we are made privy to the private ruminations and reactions of all the characters, simultaneously thunderstruck on stage. Another chugging accompaniment starts up, this time a polonaise, one of the most typical cantabile rhythms.

First Edgardo and Enrico, from their diametrically opposing perspectives, give inner voice to their emotions (the former to his enduring love come what may, the latter to remorse) in the kind of gorgeous arching melody a cantabile demands (Ex. 1-11a). As they make their cadence, Lucy (regaining consciousness) and Bide-the-Bent take up the melody, she to lament that she has only fainted, not died, he to continue expressing his pity. Enrico and

Edgardo continue as before so that now four singers are in motion, as if in a fugue. When the second stanza is done, the coda begins with Arturo expressing bewilderment, Alisa compassion, and the chorus muttering in amazement. All on stage are now singing at once, and the music moves to the inevitable climax, achieved with a crescendo, an *affrettando* (quickening), and a syncopated “stalling” high note for Lucia, reminiscent of the one for Norma at the ecstatic peak of “Casta diva.” Here of course it expresses not ecstasy but utter despair. No meaning in music is ever immanent. Everything depends on context. That is why conventions, in the hands of their best deployers, are not to be confused with stereotypes.

Just as in Rossini's comic finales, where as soon as the tempo seems to reach its very limit it is mind-bogglingly increased, here the climax is immediately repeated, louder than the first time (Ex. 1-11b). It is one of the requisite skills of fine operatic singing to be able to reach what seems like maximum power while keeping something in reserve, so that the maximum can be exceeded without falling into strain. The only difference the second time around is in the orchestration, especially the percussion punctuation at the peak.

But that is just the cantabile. Again, as in *Norma*, it is the cantabile that is generally remembered by name (in this case by Edgardo's incipit, “Chi mi frena”) rather than the cabaletta. But the cabaletta (called the *stretta* in ensemble finales) plays a very necessary role in capping off the scene, and the act. With the ending of the sextet, it is as if everyone snaps out of their paralysis into a furious *parlante*, marked *allegro*, to provide the *tempo di mezzo*. Seconded by the chorus, Arturo and Enrico furiously threaten Edgardo, who makes equally furious counterthreats, while Bide-the-Bent tries to referee. Then comes the next plot wrench: the return of the rings, with the revelation that Lucia and Edgardo had secretly plighted their troth. Perhaps the most striking aspect of this commotion is the part assigned to the utterly spent Lucia. It consists of only two notes: a single E, set to a quarter note, on which she makes response (“Si”) to Edgardo's frenzied interrogations; and a single scream, a three-measure high A, with which she responds to his curses. And yet it is (when well performed) the part that the audience remembers.

Larghetto

Edgar (*aside*)

Henry (*aside*)

Strings *pizz.*

mp *e sempre cresc.*

Cl. *sustain*

Èn.

Cl.

Chi mi fre - - na in tal mo - me - to? chi mos -
 Chi raf - fre - - na il mio fu - ro - re. e la
 cò del - ti - re il cor - so? Il suo duo - la, il tuo spa - ven - to son la
 man che al bean - do cor - so? Del - la mi - re - ra in fa - vo - re nel mio
 pro - - va, son la pro - va d'un ni - mor - so! Ma, qual ro - - si - ra - ti -
 pet - to un gri - do sot - to! È mio san - - gue! l'ho - tra -

ex. 1-11a Gaetano Donizetti, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Act II finale, beginning of sextet (“Chi mi frena”)

The curse now sets off the D-major *stretta*, in a jig (or tarantella) rhythm, marked *vivace*. Much simpler than the cantabile, it features a great deal of homorhythmic and even unison singing, and it is cast in a modified da capo form, in which the “A” stanza consists of threats from Enrico, seconded by Arturo and Bide-the-Bent; the “B” consists of defiance from Edgardo, supported by Lucia; a transition allows Alisa to add her horrified voice to the throng, urging Edgardo to leave and save himself; and the return of “A” is set in counterpoint with the opposing parts to provide a frenzied tutti. As in Rossini, the coda is a *stretta* (marked *più allegro*) in which the note values are slyly lengthened so as to allow an increase over what seemed the very limit of speed. Da Ponte himself would no doubt have found this *strepitosissimo* impressive. (It may be confusing to find both the whole fast section of the ensemble and its even faster coda designated by the same term, *stretta*. Probably the section took its name from the headlong coda, one of its most distinctive features.)

As for the mad scene, it is also based on the cantabile/cabaletta format, remodified to produce another sort of dramatic climax. The flexibility with which the basic matrix could respond to new dramatic situations and requirements shows it to be as malleable as its instrumental counterpart, the “sonata form.” If the one is a stereotype, then so is the other.

Lucy

Alice *ah!* vor - rei pian - - ge - re e non pos - - -

Edgar vi - ta; chi per lei non è com -

Arthur *ah!* son vin - - to, son com - mos - - - so,

Henry vi - - ta, chi per lei non è com - mos - so ha di

Bide-the-Bent vi - ta, ah, che spe - gne-re non

mos - - so, ha di ti - gre in

mos - - so, ha di ti - gre in pet - to il

ha di ti - - gre in pet - to il

ha di ti - - gre in pet - to il

cresc. *affret.*

so ————— m'ab - han - do — — ra il pian - to an, cor,
 moe — — — so, ha di ti - gre in pet - to il cor. ah!
 l'a — — mo in — — gra — — ta, l'a — — mo an - cor,
 ti — — — gre in pet - to il cor. ha
 pos - — to i ri - — mor - — si del mio cor,
 pet - — to il cor. il cor,
 co - — re. in pet - — to il cor,
 co - — re. in pet - — to il cor,
 co - — re. in pet - — to il cor.

ex. 1-11b Gaetano Donizetti, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Act II finale, climax of cantabile

As always, there is an opening *parlante* for Lucia, introduced by horrified *pertichini* from Bide-the-Bent and the chorus. She sings against an extended flute obbligato. (Donizetti had originally wanted to use an “armonica,” an instrument invented by Benjamin Franklin in 1761, consisting of water glasses of various sizes concentrically arranged around a spindle; ethereal or “otherworldly” pitched sounds were produced by touching wet fingers to the revolving rims.) What the flute plays is in itself significant, since it is a distorted reprise of Lucia's first aria in act I (“Regnava nel silenzio”), in which she described a ghostly visitation of a long-slain Lammermoor lass who had been haunting the castle (Ex. 1-12ab). The flute thus adds a multileveled commentary to the action, establishing itself as Lucia's demented inner voice and linking her cursed future to a cursed past. Nor is that the only reminiscence motif. When Lucia sees the ghost again, standing between her and Edgardo, the flute (now doubled by the clarinet) recalls the cabaletta of their clandestine love duet in act I (“Verrano a te”), again somewhat deformed (Ex. 1-12cd). The last reminiscence in this heartrending *parlante* is a poignantly elegant embellished reprise of the C-minor music that accompanied Lucia's entrance in the act II finale, now mauled chromatically in a way that at once boosts pathos and intensifies the portrayal of her derangement (Ex. 1-12ef).

Larghetto

5

p Reg - na - va nel — si -
[In si - lence all — lay

len - zi - o al - ta la not - te e bru - na
slum - ber - ing, Dark was the night, and o'er - cloud - ed]

ex. 1-12a Gaetano Donizetti, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Aria: “Regnava nel silenzio” (Act I)

p

ex. 1-12b Gaetano Donizetti *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Act III, scene 2, introductory flute solo

Ner - ran twi - no - a te sul l'a - u - re i
[When twi - light sha - dows lo - wer, My

miei so - spi - ri ar - den ti,
ar - dent pray'rs — a - scen ding,]

ex. 1-12c Gaetano Donizetti, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Duet: “Verrano a te” (Act I)

Allegretto

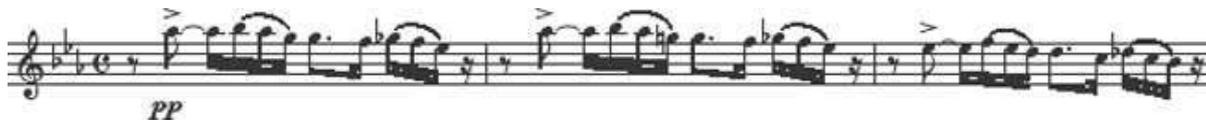
ex. 1-12d Gaetano Donizetti, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Act III, scene 2, flute and clarinet

The cantabile aria now begins, as a slow waltz marked *larghetto* and cast in the usual (albeit somewhat deranged) *aa' ba'* format—in the flute (Lucia's alter ego) rather than the voice, which continues its *parlante* for a while, disguising the beginning of the formal lyric. This smudging of boundaries between sections was likely intended as another representation of Lucia's disordered mind, but it was widely adopted thereafter as a “realistic” device. While still relying on the guidance of convention in planning their music, composers could thus give an impression of formal freedom that audiences could interpret as spontaneous emotion. Lucia's lyric entry (“Alfin son tua,” “At last I'm

yours”) comes on the “b” section, accompanied by her horrified onlookers, whose *pertichini* continue the main tune while Lucia, oblivious of them, soars in the mad empyrean. Not until the closing phrase (“Del ciel clemente”) does the prima donna sing the main tune at last, accompanied by the flute obbligato (Ex. 1-13a). But by now the tune is virtually buried in coloratura and crowned by a duet cadenza that Donizetti, relying on the taste and training of his performers, never dreamed of insulting them by actually composing. This interpolated cadenza, ironically enough (considering that Donizetti did not write it), is probably the most famous spot in the opera (although not in the score), and another *locus classicus* for earnest emulators and parodists alike.



ex. 1-12e Gaetano Donizetti, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, cello motif from Act II finale



ex. 1-12f Gaetano Donizetti, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Act III, scene 2, violin motif

Dei — ciel — clem — en — te, del

Fl.

p

cel - cle - men - te un - ni - so la - ri - ta - a - ni - sa -
 sa - la - ri - ta - a - ni - sa -
 ra - del - ciel - de - men - te, de - men - te un - ni - so la - ri - ta - a - ni - sa -
 sa - la - ri - ta - a - ni - sa -
 sa - la - ri - ta - a - ni - sa -

ex. 1-13a Gaetano Donizetti, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Act III, scene 2 (“mad scene”), Cantabile: “Del ciel clemente”

ex. 1-13b Gaetano Donizetti *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Act III, scene 2 (“mad scene”), Cabaletta, “Spargi d'amaro pianto”

The *tempo di mezzo* is a lengthy *parlante* for several soloists and chorus, touched off by Enrico's arrival on the scene. He witnesses Lucia's delirium in which, unaware of his presence, she curses his cruelty in what seems at first like the start of the cabaletta (*allegro mosso* in G \flat major: “Ah! vittima fui d'un crudel fratello,” “Ah, I was the victim of a cruel brother”). But the passage reaches a quick ensemble climax and then subsides, paving the way to the true cabaletta (Ex. 1-13b), in a quicker waltz time, marked *moderato*, accompanied as before by the flute (“Spargi d'amaro pianto,” “Shed bitter tears”). Each of its two stanzas is followed by a response from all present, the second of them including Lucia herself, who now imagines herself in heaven awaiting Edgardo's arrival, her voice alone occupying a stratospheric space almost an octave above the tessitura of the choral sopranos.

The mad scene from *Lucia* is not only an exemplary operatic number, inexhaustibly instructive to anyone who wants to understand what makes the genre tick, it also crystallizes certain aspects and paradoxes of romanticism with extraordinary clarity. The magnificent irony whereby Lucia's madness, an unmitigated catastrophe to its observers, is a balm and solace to her, is graphically realized in the contrast between the stressed musical style of the *pertichini*, the *parlanti*, and everything else that represents the outer world and its inhabitants, and the perfect harmony and beauty of Lucia's own contributions, especially as regards her duetting with the flute, which (as the audience instantly apprehends) only she can “hear.” That is already a mark of opera's special power: its ability to let us in

through music on the unexpressed thoughts and emotions of its characters, a terrain inaccessible to spoken drama (unless, like Eugene O'Neill in his dubiously experimental, much-mocked *Strange Interlude* of 1928, the author is willing to abuse the device of the "aside" far beyond the willingness of any audience to suspend its disbelief). There is far more to it, however. The beautiful harmony of voice and flute, conjuring up a better place than the one occupied by the sane characters (or, for that matter, the audience), is a perfect metaphor for romanticism's aspirations. All art—all romantic art, anyway—to the extent that it aspires to "the condition of music" (in Walter Pater's famous phrase) aspires to be a beautiful or comforting lie.

Or is it the (higher) truth? To say so is plainly utopian, but that seems to be the message many audiences have wished to draw from art. How does such a message compare with other utopian messages, including religious and political ones, and with what consequences? These are questions to keep in mind from now until the end of the book. First broached by romanticism, they have been the most pressing esthetic questions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And music, the most inherently (or at least potentially) unworldly and utopian of the arts, has been their most insistent harbinger.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 2 The Music Trance

Romantic Characterstücke; Schubert's Career

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 The Music Trance

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

THE I AND THE WE

One of the great questions stirred—or restirred—by romanticism was the question of where truth lay. Older concepts of truth had depended on revelation (as in religion) or on authority and the power of enforcement (as in social hierarchies). The Enlightenment as defined by Kant depended for its notion of truth on the assumption of an indwelling endowment (as in his categorical imperative, the “moral law within”).¹ The Enlightenment as defined by the Encyclopedists held truth to be external but universal, deducible through the disciplined (or “scientific”) exercise of reason—thus available to all and consequently “objective.”

Whether revealed, enforced, innate, or rationally deduced, all of these concepts of truth had one thing in common: they could be formulated as “the” truth (or, to recall Michel Foucault's phrase, “the uniform truth”). For this reason, the distinctions between them have proved unstable. If by the ostensible exercise of reason, for example, two equally enlightened persons reach opposite “objective” conclusions, the one with the greater power is likely to prevail, instituting one version of “the” truth by force and collapsing the difference between science and authority. Powerful churchmen, for example during the Inquisition, collapsed the difference between revelation and authority. And the only way of accepting the notion of an innate law is to rely on faith, thus collapsing the difference between the innate and the revealed. Might, ultimately, could still make right.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, history had provided sobering examples of the way the best-intentioned Enlightenment could degenerate into intolerance and dogmatism, culminating in the naked exercise of power. The most recent and chilling was the speed with which the French Revolution, which had billed itself as the triumph of enlightenment over authority, had produced the Terror. The contradiction had been prefigured in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's strange notion (expressed in his *Social Contract*) of imposing freedom by force;² and it would have an even bloodier echo in the twentieth century in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. Enlightenment and the sense of universal mission with which it endowed (or infected) its adherents would also be perverted, later in the nineteenth century, into a justification for imperialism, the forcible imposition of Western institutions on other cultures and societies in the name of reason and altruism (“the white man's burden”³), but also in the name of economic exploitation.

Romanticism provided an alternative to these notions of truth by removing the definite article. Truth (not “the” truth) is found in individual consciousness (or conscience), not decreed by public power. What was rejected was not the notion of truth but the notion of universalism. Instead, romanticism prized the particular and the unique (as proclaimed in the preamble to the same Rousseau's *Confessions*). Truth is therefore relative, at least to a degree, to the individual vantage point and therefore to some degree subjective.

The ideal became one not of uniform correct belief but one of sincerity—or, more strongly put, authenticity—of belief and utterance. Perhaps needless to say, relativism can degenerate into the law of the jungle even more easily than universalism can, since it requires little or no rationalization. If there is nothing to support my belief beyond the strength with which I hold or assert it, that strength will all too predictably translate into force if it meets with opposition. Such a view offers little prospect of community or social cooperation.

In its purest or most radical form, then, romantic individualism turned inward from public life, espousing the pessimistic social and civic passivity exemplified in the deaf and isolated late Beethoven, and finding refuge in “aestheticism” (Keats: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty”⁴). Its political impact, then, was negligible; but its impact on art—and music above all—was decisive. Romantic aestheticism is the source of the still potent belief that art and

politics are mutually indifferent if not mutually hostile terrains.

Far from politically passive, however, was another strain of romanticism—one that substituted collective consciousness for individual consciousness as the arbiter of truth claims. The human collectivity most commonly invoked for this purpose was the “nation”—a new concept and a notoriously protean (not to say a slippery) one. One thing was certain, however: a nation, unlike a state, was not necessarily a political entity. It was not primarily defined by dynasties or by territorial boundaries. Rather, a nation was defined by a collective consciousness (or “culture”), comprising language, customs, religion, and “historical experience.”

Not surprisingly, the romantic concept of nation—and its even more slippery corollaries like “national character,” “national spirit,” or “national pride”—gained maximum currency where nations were most obviously distinct from states, whether because many small states (like the principalities and dukedoms then occupying the territory of modern Germany and Italy) divided peoples who had language, etc., in common, or because a large state (like the Austrian Empire) comprised regional populations that differed in these same regards.

And not surprisingly, the various ideal or hypothetical components of national character did not necessarily work together in reality: German speakers were divided by religion, Italian coreligionists by language. (What we now call “Italian” was spoken in the early nineteenth century by only a tiny fraction—some five percent—of the population of the Italian peninsula). Nor could anyone really say for sure what constituted a shared history, or precisely what that had to do with nationhood, since the linguistically and religiously diverse subjects of the Austrian emperor or the Russian czar certainly had a history in common. There were also the related but distinguishable concepts of ethnicity (shared “blood” or biological endowment) and of race, which played roles of varying significance and volatility in conceptualizing nationhood in various parts of Europe.

Vagueness of this kind is a great stimulus to theorizing, and there have been countless theories of nationhood. So-called “modernization” theories emphasize the importance of literacy to the spread of “imagined community” over areas larger than individual cities, and identify the middle class, in its struggle for political equality with the hereditary aristocracy, as the primary historical agent of national consciousness, rather than the peasantry or the still small urban working class.⁵ Whatever the definition, the politically active phase of national consciousness arose when for political or economic reasons—that is, reasons having to do with various sorts of worldly power—it seemed desirable to redraw the map so as to make nations (“blood”) and states (“soil”) coincide. That wish and the actions to which it gave rise are commonly denoted by the word *nationalism*. Like every other human idea or program of action, it too could turn ugly. Preoccupation with “I” and “we” all too easily turned into preoccupation with “us and them”—self and other, often with dire consequences for the latter.

The ugliness, though, came later. In its early phases, romantic individualism (idealizing the “I”) and romantic nationalism (idealizing the “we”) had benign cultural effects that transformed the arts. In this chapter we will explore the musical effects of the big I; in the next, of the big We.

Notes:

- (1) Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788); in *The Philosophy of Kant* (New York: Modern Library, 1949), p. 261.
- (2) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Henry J. Tozer (New York: Pocket Books, 1967), p. 22.
- (3) Title of a poem (1899) by Rudyard Kipling, which begins, “Take up the White Man's burden—/Send forth the best ye breed—/Go bind your sons to exile/To serve your captives' need.”
- (4) From the concluding couplet in John Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (1820): “Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”
- (5) See in particular Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

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John Field

Nocturne

Jan Ladislav Dussek

Václav Jan Tomášek

PRIVATE MUSIC

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 The Music Trance

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

With its belief in the authenticity of the solitary “I,” romanticism fostered a great burst of somewhat paradoxically “private” art. The paradox in the case of music, of course, is implicit in the act of publication or performance—a public display of privacy. But of course making one's private soul known to the world was, like all art, an act of representation, not to be confused (except to the extent that the confusion served art's purposes) with “reality.” The representation of private lives in published biographies, autobiographies, and diaries (genres that boomed during the nineteenth century) was a reflection of—and an example to—the aspirations of middle-class “self-made men” and their families, who were the primary consumers of this new romantic art.

And consumption took place, increasingly, at home. The industrial revolution affected the arts by facilitating their dissemination and domestic use. Cheap editions of books for home reading, addressed to a much enlarged urban (and newly literate) public, and of music for home singing and playing, created new opportunities for authors and composers, and lent new prestige and popularity to the genres that were best suited to private consumption. In literature, this meant a new emphasis on lyric poetry—little poems that vividly expressed or evoked moods and stimulated reverie, encouraging psychological withdrawal from the world and contemplation of one's “inwardness” (from the German, *Innigkeit* or *Innerlichkeit*).

In music, where domestic consumption was further stimulated by the mass-production of pianos and other household instruments, the “inward” spirit found expression in actual settings of lyric poems or “lyrics” in an intimate style that did not require vocal virtuosity, and with manageable piano accompaniments that were often adaptable to guitar, harp, or other parlor instruments. Even more private and *innig* were the instrumental equivalents of lyric poems—short piano pieces, sometimes actually called “Songs Without Words,” that evoked moods and stimulated reverie, according to romantic thinking, with even more unfettered immediacy than words themselves could do, whether read silently or sung aloud.

The closeness of the poetic and musical genres both in content and in effect is evident in their very names: a lyric poem, after all, means a “verbal song”; and as we are about to see, the early pieces for the parlor piano were often given names that evoked poetic genres. The closeness can also be savored by comparing the ways in which poets and musicians were typically described. The critic and essayist William Hazlitt (1778–1830) wrote marvelously of his contemporary the poet William Wordsworth (1770–1850), who introduced romantic poetry to England with a volume called *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), observing that “it is as if there were nothing but himself and the universe. He lives in the busy solitude of his own heart.”⁶ And here is Franz Liszt's somewhat wordier description of another contemporary (and near countryman) of Hazlitt's and Wordsworth's, the Irish pianist-composer John Field (1782–1837):

In writing as in playing, Field was intent only on expressing his inner feelings for his own gratification. It would be impossible to imagine a more unabashed indifference to the public than his. He enchanted his public without knowing it or wishing it. His nearly immobile posture, his expressionless face did not attract notice. His glance did not rove.... It was not hard to see that he was his own chief audience. His calm was all but sleepy, and could be neither disturbed nor affected by the thoughts of the impression his playing made on his hearers.... Art was for him in itself sufficient reward for any sacrifice.... Field sang for himself alone.⁷

Notice that in the case of a performing art, a new level of representation comes into play: the artist's representation of himself to his audience. Field's meticulously crafted public impersonation of solitude (described by Liszt, another great pianist, in collusion) leaves no doubt that a state of "artistic solitude" had come to represent artistic truth. It was the way a public performer in the heyday of romanticism "did sincerity." And not only sincerity: disinterestedness had also to be simulated in the name of art "for art's sake." Also very telling is the name of the pianistic genre in which Field specialized, the genre in which Liszt had caught him, as it were, in the act of performing: it was called the nocturne—a French adaptation of the Italian *notturmo*, "night piece." The word itself was not new to music: Haydn, Mozart, and their contemporaries wrote many *notturmi*. One, by Mozart, is famous as *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, "a little night music," using the German equivalent of the term. But in the eighteenth century the *notturmo*, like the similarly named *serenata* ("evening music"), was a social genre: music for soirées, evening parties. And it was an eminently sociable music: frothy, witty, lighthearted—music to party by.

The word and its attendant music, along with the very idea of the night, had changed enormously in their connotations by the time Field wrote his Nocturnes. In his hands they became the very emblem of solitude and inwardness. To quote Liszt: "from their very first sounds we are immediately transported to those hours when the soul, released from the day's burdens, retreats into itself and soars aloft to secret regions of star and sky." Such a music is not without precedent: C. P. E. Bach (1714–88) had written many Fantasias for the tiny-voiced clavichord, midnight pieces by necessity that shared features with Field's Nocturnes as Liszt described them, especially as concerned the relationship between form and expression. Field's Nocturnes, like Bach's Fantasias, had a similar purpose: "to infuse the keyboard with feelings and dreams," to quote Liszt,

and to free music from the constraints imposed until then by regular and "official" form. Before him they all had of necessity to be cast as sonatas or rondos or some such. Field, contrariwise, introduced a genre that belonged to none of these existing categories, in which feeling and melody reigned supreme, and which moved freely, without the fetters and constraints of any preconceived form.

Again this is not entirely true, historically. Artists have always loved to rewrite history to enhance their self-image. Beethoven himself, the past master of "official" form, wrote intimate pieces for the piano. Significantly, though, he called them *bagatelles*, "trifles," pieces of no account. Now they were important. And Liszt's twin emphasis on simulated spontaneity and meticulously crafted naturalness is another reminder that C. P. E. Bach's fantasy style, known in its day as *Empfindsamkeit* ("hyperexpressivity"), was a harbinger of the later romanticism. In view of their geographical origin (Berlin) and their social (or rather, asocial) use, C. P. E. Bach's fantasias could be called bourgeois romanticism's musical debut.

Next in line after Bach as progenitor of the romantic "piano lyric" (often called *Characterstück* in German or *Pièce caractéristique* in French) were a pair of Bohemians, Jan Ladislav Dussek (or Dusik, 1760–1812) and Václav Jan Tomášek (1774–1850). Dussek, an actual pupil of C. P. E. Bach, was like Field a peripatetic virtuoso, whose career took him from the Netherlands to Germany to Russia to Paris and finally to London, where he became a regular participant in Salomon's concerts, appearing in 1792 alongside Haydn. In addition to his "official" sonatas and rondos and such, Dussek composed many pieces in a "pathetic" (pathos-filled) improvisatory style that particularly thrilled his audiences.

One of them, *The Sufferings of the Queen of France* (1793), dedicated to the memory of the recently beheaded Marie Antoinette (a former patron of Dussek's), was a runaway best-seller, appearing till the end of the decade in many editions. A fairly lengthy composition in ten sections, each with a descriptive heading, it is actually a rather old-fashioned piece in concept. It has forebears going back beyond C. P. E. Bach to his father Johann Sebastian's *Capriccio on the Departure of His Beloved Brother*, and even further back to Johann Kuhnau's so-called Biblical Sonatas (*Musicalische Vorstellung einiger biblischer Historien* or "Musical representations of several stories from the Bible"), which when published in 1700 carried a preface from the author maintaining even then that illustrative music as such was nothing new.

Kuhnau cited one especially relevant forerunner, Johann Jakob Froberger and his famous harpsichord *Tombeau* or "funeral oration" on the death of the lutenist Blancheroche, composed in Paris in 1657. Its concluding page (Ex. 2-1a) contains a graphic illustration of its dedicatee's accidental death by falling down a flight of stairs. Compare Dussek's guillotine (Ex. 2-1b), which intrudes (in C major) upon the Queen's last prayer (in E major). This harmonic relationship—the "flat submediant"—will be this chapter's *idée fixe*.

The only thing that could be called “romantic” here is the extravagance of the effect. Descriptive (or “programmatic”) music as such does not necessarily meet romantic criteria of inwardness or subjectivity. Indeed, explicit labeling, as Rousseau had pointed out long before, works against the romantic ideal (or as a romantic might say, against the nature of music) by guiding and limiting the listener's reaction. Literalism also runs a great risk of bathos: can you suppress a grin at the sight of the performance direction (*devotamente*, “devoutly”) that accompanies the notation of the Queen's prayer? (It is prefigured with even greater unintended comedy when “The Sentence of Death,” marked *allegro con furia*, is followed by “Her Resignation to Her Fate,” marked *adagio innocente*.) The somewhat younger Tomášek, who spent his entire career as a freelance performer and pedagogue in Prague, was unlike Dussek a self-confessed romantic who opposed the music of the fashionable concert stage (including Dussek's), solemnly declaring that “truth is art's only crown.”⁸ His character pieces contrast tellingly with Dussek's. Where Dussek's were explicitly illustrative, with titles to explain and justify the sometimes bizarre effects and the “formlessness” of the music, Tomášek used titles derived from classical poetic genres that did not disclose specific content but rather advertised a general “lyric” (and, from a romantic point of view, a more subjective and genuine) expressivity. Dussek represented Marie Antoinette's joys and sufferings, Tomášek his own—and, by implication, ours.



ex. 2-1a Johann Jakob Froberger, end of *Tombeau de M. Blancheroche*

ex. 2-1b Jan Ladislav Dussek, *The Sufferings of the Queen of France*, no. 9

Tomášek's main genre, associated with him as the nocturne is associated with Field, was the *eclogue*—a pastoral poem (literally a dialogue of shepherds) and one of the Roman poet Virgil's favorite forms. In Tomášek's hands it was a gentle lyric, usually cast in a simple scherzo-and-trio form, that occasionally used stylized evocations of rustic music (bagpipe drones, “horn fifths,” and so on) to evoke an air of “naivety,” of emotional innocence. (Despite the claims of the composer's later countrymen, responding to a later political agenda, these folkish effects should not be confused with Czech nationalism.) For more intense and personal expression, Tomášek invoked the ancient genres of rhapsody and dithyramb. The former comes from the Greek *rhapsoidos*, meaning a singer of epic tales, and betokens a dramatic recitation. Dithyramb, originally a song or hymn to the God Dionysus, meant for Tomášek and later composers a particularly impassioned utterance.

The Eclogues were published in seven sets of six between 1807 and 1819. The first set, op. 35, dedicated by Tomášek “à son ami J. Field,” preceded the appearance of Field's first nocturnes by five years. Some of Field's nocturnes were written earlier, however. They circulated before publication, often with titles like Serenade, Romance, or (perhaps significantly) Pastorale. In any case, the dreamy atmosphere associated with Field, and through him with the whole repertory of domestic romanticism, certainly pervades the Eclogues of his Bohemian friend.

In the very first one (op. 35, no. 1; Ex. 2-2), that atmosphere is conjured up by a harmonic wash for which the liberal use of the sustaining pedal, while not explicitly indicated in the notation, is absolutely required. Romantic piano music was preeminently “pedal music.” It is unimaginable without the sonorous “fill” that the pedal was designed to provide, and which inspired composers and performers with many of their most evocatively “pianistic” effects.

Allegro ma non troppo (♩ = 120)

ex. 2-2 Václav Jan Tomášek, *Eclogue*, Op. 35, no. 1, beginning

Equally important to the atmosphere of naive sincerity, inwardness, and “truth” are the frequent dips into “flat submediant” harmonies, like the sudden excursion to D \flat major in measure 15 (\flat VI with respect not to the original tonic but to the local one, F). This is the romantic color-chord par excellence. An important precedent for its expressive use was the Cavatina from Beethoven's B \flat -major Quartet, op. 130, where the flat submediant introduces the unforgettable *beklemmt* (“agonized”) passage for the first violin, in which the imitation of a broken voice is combined with the chromatically darkened harmony to endow the passage with the authenticity (that is, the simulacrum) of direct “heart to heart” communication.

Modulation to the flat submediant became a convention signaling that the music that followed it was just such a communication. It marked a kind of boundary between inner and outer experience and its sounding came to signify the crossing of that edge, endowing the music on the other side with an uncanny aura. The new dimension that these harmonies contributed to romantic music can best be compared, perhaps, to the goal that the great romantic diarist

Henri Amiel (1821–81) set himself in his *Journal intime*: “Instead of living on the surface, one takes possession of one's inwardness.” The sounding of the flat submediant meant taking that plunge beneath the surface.

Tomášek used the flat submediant relation most tellingly in his dithyrambs, the impassioned “Dionysian hymns” in which he gave expression to his most inward moods. In these expansive pieces, the composer no longer sought to project naivety. Their emotional pressure is high, their range of expression more copious and complex. They are stretched, so to speak, on a broad ternary frame, in which a nobly lyrical—indeed operatic—middle section is flanked by turbulence on either side, implying an island of inward repose amid life's turmoil. In two of the three dithyrambs in his op. 65 (1818), Tomášek cast the middle section in the flat submediant key, approached in both instances from the original dominant via a deceptive cadence. Ex. 2-3 shows how C major impinges on E major in no. 2; no. 3 plunges from F into D \flat . (The first dithyramb is in C minor, and its middle section is cast in the customary key of the relative major, also a mediant relationship but an expected one, and therefore not “marked” as “characteristically” expressive.)

Notes:

(6) William Hazlitt, “Observations on Mr. Wordsworth's poem, “The Excursion,” in *The Round Table*” (1817).

(7) Franz Liszt, “John Field and His Nocturnes”; for the full text (translated from L. Ramann [ed.], *Gesammelte Schriften von Franz Liszt*, Vol. IV [Leipzig, 1882]), see P. Weiss and R. Taruskin, *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Schirmer, 2008), pp. 312–13.

(8) Quoted in Adrienne Simpson, “Tomášek,” in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. XIX (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 33.

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ALTERED CONSCIOUSNESS

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 The Music Trance

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The effect of these modulations on the music's temporality, that is the audience's experience of time, is comparable to the effect of an operatic scene in which static “aria time” supervenes on the action-time of recitative. To evoke such an introspective effect in instrumental music is precisely the act whereby instrumental music becomes romantic. It was the effect against which Goethe—romanticism's most formidable opponent, sometimes misread as a romantic himself because he described what he opposed so compellingly—issued his dire warning in *Faust* (1808).

**ex. 2-3 Use of flat submediant in Václav Jan Tomášek,
Dithyramb, Op. 65, no. 2, mm. 36-58**

Faust will lose his soul to the devil Mephistopheles, the latter warns, as soon as he calls out to the passing moment, “Stop, stay awhile, thou art so fair!” (“Weile doch, du bist so schön”). That moment, the moment in which *ethos* (responsible action) is sacrificed to *pathos* (passive experience, surrender to feeling), will be the moment of damnation. That is the moment romanticism celebrates. Small wonder then that romantics were so often called *poètes maudits* (accursed poets, poets of the damned). Goethe’s famous last words were “Mehr Licht!” ([Give me] more light!). Romantics, as Liszt has already told us with reference to Field, were the poets of the night.

In his fourth “night piece” or Nocturne (1817), Field uses mediants and submediants alike to work his dark magic. The music is cast, like that of Tomášek’s Eclogues and Dithyrambs (indeed, like most character pieces), in a simple there-and-back ternary form—albeit one somewhat disguised, in keeping with Liszt’s comments on Field’s sublime “formlessness,” by the avoidance of sectional repeats and by the constant forward motion of the left-hand accompaniment. The chief articulator of form here is the harmonic trajectory, an old concept marked with new expressive associations.

The music almost palpably slips into reverie in the middle section (Ex. 2-4a), where the harmony shifts from the A

major of the outer sections into C major, and when C major gives way to its parallel minor. And when after that C minor gives way to a circle of fifths that plunges flatward as far as its Neapolitan region (D \flat major in m. 36), we can feel the deepening of the music trance (call it the composer's, the performer's, our own as we wish; distinctions become blurred with the quickening of subjectivity).

We have had occasion once before to speak of a music trance, when examining the aria “Casta diva” from Bellini's *Norma* (Ex. 1-10), the archetypical bel canto aria. And indeed, comparing Field's melodic line and flowingly arpeggiated accompaniment with Bellini's will show the source of the pianist's inspiration: not Bellini himself, who in 1817 had not yet begun to compose, but the operatic style on which Bellini himself drew—as much a performing as a composing style. Where Tomášek had taken the scherzo (or minuet) and trio as his formal template, Field took the da capo aria. The consequent evocation of the human voice served him the way it had served Beethoven, as a means of communicating his musical message that much more sincerely and urgently. The composed mimicry of spontaneous embellishment (which, as Liszt informs us, Field freely varied in true bel canto style when performing his nocturnes) was one of the features of the domestic-romantic idiom that listeners prized most of all, because it added to the music another dimension of seemingly free impulse, at once bountiful and unconstrained. It imparted to the musical experience yet another dimension of subjective truth (the only kind of truth there was).

ex. 2-4a John Field, Nocturne no. 4 in A major, mm. 24-37

The connection between trances or reveries and artistic response was much enhanced in early nineteenth-century thinking by the increasing interest just then (and the concomitant increase in understanding) of mesmerism, a practice of therapeutic trance-induction pioneered by the Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), an acquaintance of the Mozarts. It was rechristened “neurohypnotism” (from “nervous sleep”), later shortened to hypnotism, around 1840 by James Braid (1795–1860), a Scottish surgeon. Mesmer thought that the hypnotic trance was produced by the influence of an invisible magnetic fluid that passed from the soul of the doctor to that of the patient. That is why he called it “animal magnetism,” or soul-magnetism. Braid thought it was the product of eye fatigue, transmitted from the eye to the cerebral cortex in the brain, to which the eye is connected, where conscious thought processes take place. By paralyzing the functions of the cerebral cortex, Braid thought, the unconscious mind was brought in contact with external reality and could be subjected to conscious control.

What all early researchers into hypnotism believed was that it proved the existence of a level of reality that transcended the world of the senses. That level was where the true self lay. An entranced subject was more truly him- or herself than a person in the normal waking state. Any stimulus that could produce a trance phenomenon actually produced a state traditionally associated with poetic or artistic inspiration, in which—to quote Mesmer's contemporary, the Swiss esthetic theorist Johann Georg Sulzer—one “turns all one's attention to that which goes on in one's soul, forgetting the outer circumstances that surround one.”⁹ The trance state was thus associated with the state of “inwardness” so prized by the romantics, and even with a state of inspiration.

One of the prime stimuli that could produce these effects, it was long recognized, was music. Mesmer himself used the unearthly sound of music played on the armonica (or “glass harmonica”), already mentioned in the previous chapter in connection with Lucia di Lammermoor's mad scene, as an aid to trance induction. In many late eighteenth-century “magic operas” and early romantic operas beginning with Mozart's *Magic Flute* (1791), the armonica was used to accompany scenes of spell-casting or entrancement. The armonica parts in operas still in repertory—perhaps the most recent one being Glinka's *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1842)—are usually played today on celesta or glockenspiel.

So the idea of music as trance-induction, and of trance-induction as a means of “taking possession of one's inwardness” and therefore a high romantic art ideal, has (or had at first) a more concrete and literal aspect than might seem to be the case. There was a genuine aura of what romantics called “natural supernaturalism”—natural access to transcendent experience—in the romantic idea, eloquently expressed by the philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder in 1799, that “in the mirror of tones the human heart learns to know itself.”¹⁰

To return to Field's Nocturne, the harmonic “far-out point” (FOP), D \flat , is enharmonically reconfigured as C \sharp by way of retransition (Ex. 2-4b). The means of accomplishing this involves another mediant relationship: the augmented sixth chord on the last beat of measure 42, which immediately identifies its bass note, D, as the sixth degree of an as yet unstated (and, as it turns out, never stated) tonic (F \sharp), of which the C \sharp -major triad that lasts six bars in figuration is the dominant. Its status as sudden flat submediant is what gives the chord its powerful charge. A large chapter in the history of nineteenth-century harmony would recount the ways in which, over the course of the century, composers learned how to deploy and control the chord of the augmented sixth, and exploit that transcendent, hypnotic charge.

Notes:

(9) Johann Georg Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (2nd ed., Leipzig, 1792); quoted in M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 89.

(10) Johann Gottfried Herder, *Phantasien über die Kunst* (1799), quoted in Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, p. 93.

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Maria Agata Szymanowska

Frédéric Chopin

SALON CULTURE

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 The Music Trance

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

ex. 2-4b John Field, Nocturne no. 4 in A major, mm. 41-45

Like most of Field's nocturnes, the one in A major was composed, published, and for a long time chiefly performed in Russia, where Field had settled in 1803. He had come with his mentor Muzio Clementi (1752–1832), an Italian pianist who had become a major piano manufacturer, with headquarters in London. Clementi left Field behind as a kind of trade representative, who by his playing and teaching and commercial propaganda would stimulate the sale of Clementi pianos to a new clientele. Neither master nor pupil foresaw that Field would spend the rest of his life in St. Petersburg and (from 1821) in Moscow.

Field's presence in the Russian capitals, where he had numerous pupils and disciples, was among the catalysts in the process whereby, somewhat belatedly, Russia joined the nations of western Europe as a major producer of music in the tradition of which this book is a history. Perhaps the most notable musician in the Russian "Field tradition" was Maria Agata Szymanowska (1789–1831), a Polish noblewoman who, after a stellar international career as a pianist, settled in St. Petersburg in 1821, maintained a brilliant salon, and began publishing nocturnes in 1825. Mikhail Glinka (1804–57), the composer of the first internationally important Russian operas, was also (very briefly) a pupil of Field.

But the reason for dwelling a bit on Field's Russian career has less to do with burgeoning Russian nationalism (to which he, an immigrant Irishman writing in a cosmopolitan style, had little to contribute) than it has to do with the social situation in which Field, and his music, were nurtured there—a social milieu that in a sense encapsulated the special nature of Field's music (and that of many other composers), poised on a kind of cusp between the private and the public spheres.

That domain was the *salon*, a word already broached in connection with Szymanowska (and, in the previous chapter, with Rossini). The word is French (the language of high society everywhere in Europe), and literally means "a big

room,” the kind found in the large town houses of aristocrats or *nouveaux riches* (“the newly rich,” that is, those who had earned their money in trade), where large gatherings of invited guests assembled. In English it was called the drawing room, short for “withdrawing room,” the room to which the company withdrew after dinner for conversation and entertainment. By extension, the word *salon* became synonymous with the assembled company itself, especially when that company was a “big” company, consisting of social lions, leaders of public fashion, politicians, or artists, including performing artists. The latter would be there by invitation if they were big enough figures to enjoy social prestige in their own right (or if, like Rossini or Szymanowska, they were the hosts). Just as often they were hired entertainers.

To maintain a salon was to have an open house on a designated day (*jour fixe*) each week or fortnight, and to have a regular roster of important guests. There has been nothing like it as a performance venue since the mid- to late nineteenth century, but it was the chief catalyst of the “domestic-romantic” music we are now surveying. Only in such an environment does the idea of a “public display of privacy” lose its paradoxical, even faintly ridiculous mien. Salons, as exclusive gatherings, partook of both domains, and encouraged a form of music making that had high prestige but addressed relatively small elite audiences—addressing them, moreover, and in true romantic fashion, as individuals (as the historian Peter Gay wittily implied when he defined romanticism as “a vast exercise in shared solitude”).

The music a pianist like Field composed for salon performance (whether by himself or by one of his fashionable lady pupils) served the same social purpose, for both composer and audience, as the concerto had served for Mozart. A statistical survey of Field's output bears this out: he started his career as a public musician in London, with a concerto (in E ♭, 1799), made his early name in Russia with more concertos, but after 1822 composed only for solo piano or for piano intimately accompanied by a string quartet *ad libitum*. He had shifted his field of operations from the concert hall to the salon, and his music responded to the change with an ever-increasing quotient of *Innigkeit*.

To jump ahead briefly to Frédéric Chopin (1810–49), the last and most famous representative of the “Field tradition,” the fact that—after an early group of concertos and other orchestrally accompanied pieces composed in his native Warsaw—his output consisted almost entirely of works for solo piano in small forms was due not only to his personal or “disinterested” esthetic predilections, but also to the ready support his creative and performing activities were receiving from Paris “salon culture.”

The salon, in other words, was a new vehicle for the channeling of art patronage, based on a newly negotiated symbiosis between social and artistic elites. Music played at salons, much of it written to be played there, was marked by its milieu as socially elite. Reciprocally, its presence there, especially when played by its creators, marked the occasion and the assembled company as culturally elite. Each elite helped define and support the other. There were material benefits, too, for pianist-composers in social contacts that led to fashionable pupils, mainly the daughters of those in attendance. That was how Field (and later, Chopin) earned a living.

The material side of things was of course banished from the official discourse of romanticism. For the official view, consult the famous painting shown in Fig. 2-1: *Liszt at the Piano*, by the Austrian genre specialist Josef Danhauser (1805–45), a minor artist who nevertheless made a major statement here in producing what has become perhaps the most widely reproduced, and widely commented-on, depiction of early nineteenth-century musical life. It is in reality no such thing, but rather a fantasized scene that did not take place and never could have taken place. It renders a salon not as it actually was but as an artist might have idealized it, populated almost exclusively by artists (four writers and four composers) who have gathered to partake “disinterestedly” in art for the sake of art.



fig. 2-1 Liszt at the Piano (1840) by Josef Danhauser.

Seated furthest left is the French poet Alfred de Musset (1810–57), author of the famous novel *La confession d'un enfant du siècle*, one of the earliest examples of autobiographical fiction, a quintessentially romantic genre. Seated next to Musset is Amandine Aurore Lucie Dupin (1804–76), the Baroness Dudevant, who under the pseudonym George Sand was one of the most prolific novelists of the day, as well as the author of a truly immense autobiography. Her masculine pen name as well as her masculine attire and her trademark cigar (which the artist has made sure to include in the picture) identify her as a fighter for women's rights, including free love. She fought, of course, by the lights of her time, when women sought equality with men by, as it were, becoming “social men,” as if playing out the role of the operatic *musico* in real life. Inverting (but thereby nevertheless asserting) the romantic formula of “public privacy,” George Sand's private love life was quite public long before she actually wrote about it. Her most highly publicized extramarital liaisons were with Musset, as shown (thus dating the scene depicted to the early 1830s), and with Chopin.

Behind and between Sand and Musset stands Victor Hugo (1802–85), master of all genres of romantic literature, and author—in the prefaces to his historical dramas *Cromwell* (1827) and *Hernani* (1830), performing which had brought about near-riots and fisticuffs in the theater—of perhaps the most militant manifestos ever penned on behalf of romantic art. (“Living form in place of dead form,” he called it in the former; “liberalism in literature” in the latter.) To the right of Hugo are two composers. Hector Berlioz (1803–69), to whom we will be formally introduced in a later chapter, was often compared with Victor Hugo as a militant romantic; of all important contemporary musicians he was perhaps the least beholden to salon culture and its intimate media. Embracing him is Rossini, whose “purely sensuous art” Berlioz loathed and, as critic, publicly excoriated. Although he would later run a famous salon himself, in this picture Rossini is for all sorts of reasons (reasons anyone who has read the previous chapter could easily list) completely, even a bit comically, out of place. The Austrian painter, in an early version of the notorious historiographical myth described in the previous chapter, has colonized him on behalf of the big bust on the piano.

Before we get to the big bust, let us identify the remaining living figure, nestled submissively to the right of Liszt. She is the Countess Marie d'Agoult (1805–76), presumably the nominal hostess of the evening, who under the

George-Sand-like pseudonym Daniel Stern was a minor French writer, but who was best known both during her lifetime and in history for her sexual liaison with Liszt, to whom she bore three daughters, one of whom (Cosima) will figure again in our narrative. She is probably posed with her back to the viewer because the painter did not know her face and could not make her recognizable.

This painting is famous not only for its cast of characters but for its implicit (and possibly inadvertent) commentary not just on their gathering, but on the whole discourse of romanticism. It is a preeminently a portrait of shared solitude. All present are lost in a music trance, even (or especially) Liszt himself, who is sitting with his back to his hearers, eyes fixed on the big bust—none other than (who else?) Beethoven, the patron saint of creative isolation and all artistic truth. By a skillful trick of perspective, Beethoven has become a floating presence, a true divinity: although presumably supported by the pile of music atop the piano, his image can also be optically construed as resting on the distant horizon, dominating the whole landscape beyond.

And what an imposing, outsized Beethoven it is, this bust, even if confined to quarters—a barrel-chested, broad-shouldered, bullnecked Arnold Schwarzenegger of a Beethoven, a god not only of artistic culture but of physical culture as well. Why such machismo?

As usual, machismo masks nervousness, a nervousness related to the middle-class solidification of gender roles and identities noted in the previous chapter with regard to the newly “naturalized” assignment of voice types in opera. There was something feminine—uncomfortably feminine for “self-made men”—about the passivity of romantic listening. Salons, often if not usually hosted by rich or titled women (like the Countess d'Agoult and the Baroness Dudevant), where the music (unless performed by its composers) was usually performed by women, were increasingly looked upon as a women's world; and as the music historian Jeffrey Kallberg has shown, the connotation spread to the music typically played there, particularly to the nocturne, its emblematic salon genre. By 1841, one German writer unearthed by Kallberg charged the nocturne with “a twofold error” consisting, in the first place, of “dawdling,” and in the second, of “falling into the effeminate and languishing, which displeases stronger souls and altogether tires the listener.”¹¹ By 1844, another writer was complaining of the “soft, rapturous, tender, lyrical, almost womanly character of the Fieldian cantilena.”¹²

Ironically enough, then, it was precisely from the early to middle nineteenth century, the heyday of musical romanticism, that the stigma of effeminacy—and of license, too, symbolized by the libertine, transvestite figure of George Sand and the adulterous Marie d'Agoult—began to attach itself to music, making musicians uneasy in a society where conformity to standardized sexual roles (and role-playing) was becoming more and more a requirement. By 1909, a critic could warn that exposure to a certain nocturne by Chopin “bewitches and unmans” a listener who is incautious enough to “tarry too long in its treacherous atmosphere.”¹³ This unease, and the misogyny to which it gave rise, were among the factors that conspired, beginning around the middle of the century, to cast the high-prestige notion of “salon music” into disrepute—a disrepute that has grown apace, so that the phrase is most often used today as a term of abuse, dismissing a composer as shallow or a work as trivially pretty. Rossini's late career as a social lion, and the *Péchés de vieillesse* and *Quelques riens* he composed for performance at his own salon, also did their bit to recharacterize the nature of the salon (or return it to its eighteenth-century status) as a merry place where music functioned as aristocratic entertainment—a double sin for those who believed that art should have no social function beyond “disinterested” esthetic edification (that is, trance-induction). There was also the stigma of sensuality. At the soirée, described in the previous chapter, where Rossini discussed bel canto with his wealthy interlocutors, the discussion of music took place over fine cognac and imported cigars. A social milieu that put music in the category—or even the proximity—of “vicious pleasures” could only sully its reputation with a romanticism that was becoming increasingly imbued with Victorian values.

The last straw was the *petit-embourgeoisement* of the salon, its loss of social cachet. In today's French the word *salon* simply means “the living room” in any house or apartment. The change came about not through democratization, but by the ambition of middle-class households during the Victorian Age to enhance their social prestige by aping what the French called the *grande bourgeoisie*, the urban aristocracies of birth and wealth. A cynical sub-industry arose among music publishers in the later nineteenth century that catered to this pretense by supplying tacky mass-produced imitations of salon genres to grace the imitation salons in “petty bourgeois” homes. By then, moreover, the music that had inhabited the high-prestige salons of old had moved decisively into the concert hall, impelled by the canonization of some of its chief composers.

But beware: the “tackiness” of the later product has been defined from a grand bourgeois point of view unwittingly adopted by historians loyal to Field and (especially) Chopin. The tackiness imbued as much in the mass production

and the cheap dissemination as it did in any ostensive defect of the product itself. When Carl Dahlhaus, for example, speaks of “the deadly mixture of sentimental tunefulness and mechanical figuration”¹⁴ found in what he calls “pseudosalon music,” and defines the latter as “pieces that were intended to delude provincial middle-class audiences into a musical daydream of salons they were not allowed to enter,”¹⁵ it is hard to miss the note of social snobbery.

All of these bad qualities, perhaps needless to add, have been found in Field and Chopin, too, by those who have needed to find them. More often than not, what is tacky about tacky music turns out to be the people who listen to it. What really happened to salon culture in the later nineteenth century was that, by inundating the market with music that targeted the petty bourgeoisie, the music publishers of the nineteenth century managed to render the salon, and many of its musical genres, “*déclassés*” no longer capable of creating the sense of an elite occasion. Let this brief account of the salon, its culture, and its fluctuating reputation serve to remind us once again how accurately (and how often) attitudes about art encode social attitudes.

Notes:

(11) Ferdinand Hand, *Aesthetik der Tonkunst* (Jena, 1841), quoted in Jeffrey Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 33–4.

(12) Carl Kossmaly, *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (17 January 1844); quoted in Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries*, p. 34.

(13) Frederick Niecks, quoted in James M. Huneker, *Chopin: The Man and His Music* (New York: Scribner's, 1921), p. 262.

(14) Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), p. 148.

(15) Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, p. 147.

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Franz Schubert

Romanticism

SCHUBERT: A LIFE IN ART

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 The Music Trance

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The early romantic composer whose works now loom in history as the most decisive, all-transforming “crossing of the edge” into inwardness was a composer who lived his short life in relative obscurity, and whose enormous influence, both on his creative peers and on the listening habits of audiences, was almost entirely a posthumous one. In a way this is unsurprising, even fitting, since the music of Franz Schubert (1797–1828) reflected, in its exploration of the inner “I,” one of the most outwardly uneventful, essentially private lives any composer of major standing was ever destined to live.

Unlike the “Vienna classics” Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, Schubert, the son of a schoolmaster, was actually a native Viennese. At the age of eleven he was accepted, like Haydn before him, as a choirboy in the imperial court chapel. There he took instruction with Antonio Salieri, still the imperial Kapellmeister. In addition to his chapel duties, Schubert played violin in (and occasionally conducted) a student orchestra organized by the twenty-year-old Josef von Spaun (1788–1865), then studying law at the University of Vienna. Spaun, who spent his career in the civil service supervising lotteries, would be Schubert's lifelong friend and, because he survived long into the period of Schubert's posthumous fame, became the chief source of biographical information about the composer.



fig. 2-2 Franz Schubert, portrait in oils by Josef Willibrord Mähler.

After his voice broke, Schubert briefly became an assistant teacher, then a young master, in his father's school. By the end of the year 1816, however, encouraged by devoted friends whose families promised financial support, Schubert had renounced steady employment for full-time composition. (Nevertheless, over the next two years he would occasionally return to teaching at his father's request, and he twice briefly accepted employment as music tutor to the children of a minor member of the Eszterházy family, famous for its patronage of Haydn.) By the age of nineteen he was the author of six operas (mainly singspiels, short comic works in German with spoken dialogue), five symphonies, sixteen string quartets (composed for family recreation), dozens of dances for piano or small chamber ensemble, and literally hundreds of songs set to verses by contemporary poets. The latter included some early masterpieces, never to be surpassed, including *Gretchen am Spinnrade* ("Little Margaret at the spinning wheel"), to a passage from Goethe's *Faust*, composed at seventeen, and *Erlkönig* ("The Elf King"), to a ballad or narrative poem by Goethe, composed the next year. Small wonder that he inspired reverence among his friends, and appeared to their wealthier parents to be a good investment.

In the autumn of 1817 Rossini conquered Vienna and Schubert, hearing him for the first time, was liberated by the experience. Until then (as seems inevitable for a Viennese) he had considered Beethoven the only possible model for composition in large forms, and a daunting one. This constraint is most obvious in his Fourth Symphony, composed

early in 1816; it is cast in the “Beethoven key” (C minor) and subtitled “Tragic.” (This subtitle, unlike most, was actually the composer’s.) Schubert’s reputedly “Mozartean” Fifth Symphony, in B ♭ major, composed later the same year, is as clearly modeled on Beethoven’s Fourth Symphony (in the same key) as his Fourth Symphony had been modeled on Beethoven’s Fifth. To Spaun he confided, “I hope to be able to make something out of myself, but who can do anything after Beethoven?”¹⁶



fig. 2-3 Stadtkonvikt in Vienna, the monastery school where Schubert lived while he was a choirboy at St. Stephen's cathedral (drawing by Franz Gerasch).

The works he composed soon after his brush with Rossini—notably two overtures “im italienischen Stile” (in the Italian style) and the Sixth Symphony in C major, all completed between October 1817 and February 1818—show a new face. The symphony, in particular, incorporated a vein of Italianate melody that was no longer customary in such works (often played, à la Rossini, by solo winds). The long tunes loosened up the structure and began to impart to Schubert’s large-scale compositions the discursiveness (or “heavenly length,” as Robert Schumann called it¹⁷) that so enraptured the later romantics who discovered them upon their posthumous publication.

Beginning around 1817, Schubert began to find some public champions, mainly singers (one of them a nobleman) with whom the composer began appearing as song accompanist in fashionable Viennese salons. In March 1818, he had a “concert debut” of sorts when one of his Italian overtures was performed by a restaurant orchestra. In 1820, one of his singspiels ran for five performances at the same Vienna theater where *Fidelio* had its premiere, and Schubert was engaged thereafter to write some incidental music to other shows. A breakthrough occurred in 1821 when, thanks to a subscription undertaken by the composer’s friends, a number of songs (including *Erkönig*, which thus became his “opus 1,” and *Gretchen am Spinnrade*) were published.

Their sales earned the twenty-four-year-old composer an income that, however meager at first, was nevertheless connected with his creative work. From then on, as the Viennese music historian Otto Biba has established,¹⁸

Schubert managed to eke out a living from the products of his pen, and was the only composer in Vienna at the time who was officially classified as a *freischaffender Komponist*—a “freelance composer” who neither gave lessons nor worked at a civil service sinecure nor enjoyed aristocratic patronage in support of his musical vocation. He was, albeit in a small way, a commercial success, and a bit of an economic pioneer.

From 1822, the list of Schubert's major works begins to accumulate: the Mass in A \flat major, the unfinished Symphony in B minor that even as a two-movement torso has become a repertory staple, and the “Wanderer” Fantasy for piano which, published in 1823 as op. 15, was the first of Schubert's larger works to be printed during his lifetime. It is named after the song that provided the theme for variations in the second of its four connected movements; there are similar song-variation movements in Schubert's Quintet in A major (“The Trout,” 1819) and his Quartet in D minor (“Death and the Maiden,” 1824).

Eighteen twenty-two was also the year of his first serious illness, a bout of syphilis that incapacitated him for several months and forced him to return to his paternal home. His financial resources depleted, Schubert was forced to accept lump sums rather than royalty contracts for the publication of some of his most popular songs. By the middle of 1823, he had been moved to the Vienna municipal hospital and was expected (at the age of twenty-six) to die. At this low point he produced one of his greatest works, the song cycle *Die schöne Müllerin* (“The beautiful miller maid”), a kind of novel-in-lyrics that ends with a lovelorn suicide.

From this point to the end of his woefully truncated life, which ended at the age of thirty-one (some say from typhus or typhoid fever, others say alcoholism, still others tertiary syphilis), Schubert's health would be precarious. But apart from the intermittent physical sufferings of the last years, and the unexpectedly grim finale, his life was no romantic scenario but a placid existence devoted almost entirely to creative work. To recount it is basically to offer a chronicle of composition, as one of his friends, the painter Moritz von Schwind (1804–71), already hinted in mock-exasperation in 1824: “If you go to see him during the day, he says, ‘Hello, how are you?—Good’ and goes on writing.”¹⁹ It was seemingly a life lived almost entirely inside the heart and head—and yet what could be more romantic than that? The inner life was the only life, according to romantic doctrine; and Schubert's music was of a sort that seemed to give access to it, making the composer, despite the absence of outward personal drama (or indeed of any intense personal intimacies, at least reliably recorded ones), the subject of intense human interest and vicarious personal identification.

The access, of course, is illusory, but such is the abiding influence of romanticism on today's conventional thinking about the arts that we need constantly to remind ourselves that they deal in representations, not realities. The memoirs of his friends show Schubert to have been far from reclusive (except, as Schwind found out, in the afternoon). Musicological research has revealed him not to have been without worldly ambition, nor was he devoid of social recognition. Medical history assures us that his life span was neither as short nor his illnesses as egregious within the conditions and expectations of his time as they would be in ours. But nothing will prevent those affected by the music from creating its composer in its image. That is an integral part of the romantic experience: the beautiful lie (or higher truth) of a supreme fiction. As the critic Alex Ross has written, “The man is not quite there; the music is another thing altogether. Its presence—its immediacy—is tremendous,”²⁰ and creates for us a sense of its creator's presence that the mere facts of his life will not efface.



fig. 2-4 Schubert singing with his friends, as drawn by one of them, Moritz von Schwind.

The masterpieces, meanwhile, continued to mount: the “late” piano sonatas and character pieces, the “late” quartets, the dark and troubled song cycle *Die Winterreise* (“The winter journey”). The last year of Schubert’s life produced an astonishing series: the C-major Symphony (later nicknamed “the Great” to distinguish it from the “Little” C-major Symphony of 1817), the two piano trios, the Mass in E \flat major, the C-major String Quintet, the last three piano sonatas, the F-minor Fantasie for piano duet, fourteen of his greatest songs collected in two volumes for publication—posthumous publication, as it turned out, under the title *Schwanengesang* (“Swan song”).

Whether measured by quantity or by quality, the list (which could be augmented by a slew of minor works) strains belief, as indeed does Schubert’s output overall. His earliest known compositions are dated 1810, so that his whole career as a composer lasted no more than eighteen years, during which—by the reckoning of Otto Erich Deutsch (1883–1967), the compiler of a thematic catalogue of Schubert’s works modeled on Ludwig von Köchel’s *Mozart-Verzeichnis*—he amassed a total of 998 works, “an outburst of composition without parallel in the history of music,”²¹ in the provocative yet unchallengeable words of his biographer, Maurice Brown.

Notes:

- (16) Joseph von Spaun, notes prepared for Ferdinand Luib in 1858; quoted in Otto Erich Deutsch, ed., *Schubert: Memoirs by His Friends*, trans. Rosamond Ley and John Nowell (London: A & C Black, 1958), p. 128.
- (17) Robert Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*, ed. Konrad Wolff, trans. Paul Rosenfeld (New York: Norton, 1969), p. 110.
- (18) See Otto Biba, "Schubert's Position in Viennese Musical Life," *Nineteenth-Century Music* III (1979–80): 106–13.
- (19) Moritz von Schwind to Franz Schober, 6 March 1824; Otto Erich Deutsch, *The Schubert Reader* (New York: Norton, 1947), p. 331.
- (20) Alex Ross, "Great Soul," *The New Yorker* (3 February 1997), p. 70.
- (21) Maurice J. E. Brown, "Schubert," in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* Vol. XVI (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 754.
- Citation (MLA):** Richard Taruskin. "Chapter 2 The Music Trance." *The Oxford History of Western Music*. Oxford University Press. New York, USA. n.d. Web. 27 Jan. 2011. <<http://www.oxfordwesternmusic.com/view/Volume3/actrade-9780195384833-div1-002005.xml>>.
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Schubert: Works

Printing and publishing of music

PRIVATIZING THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 The Music Trance

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Out of this near-thousand “Deutsch numbers,” some of which actually represent groups of songs or short piano pieces (so that the total of actual compositions is well in excess of 1,000), a little over 200 were published during Schubert's lifetime, of which 134 (almost precisely two-thirds) were songs. The proportion is representative: Schubert's songs total around 630, accounting for almost precisely two-thirds of the entries in the Deutsch catalogue. The remainder of the published works breaks down as follows:

22 secular choruses, including two for mixed voices, one for female voices, and nineteen for male chorus (*Männerchor*);

19 groups of dances for piano (totaling 167 individual items, most of them tiny), including waltzes, *Ländler* (a slower version of the waltz), *écossaises*, *Deutsche Tänze* (cf. Mozart's “Teitsch,” a souped-up minuet on the way to a waltz), galops (fast dances in duple time, danced in “longways sets” with couples in a line, usually the concluding number at a ball), and cotillons (a more elaborate dance performed in “squares,” which also often served as a ballroom finale);

15 publications for piano duet (four hands at one keyboard), totaling 49 individual items (mainly polonaises and marches, including the still popular *Marches militaires*, op. 51; but also an arrangement of one of Schubert's opera overtures, and one sonata);

7 works for piano solo, including three sonatas, the “Wanderer” Fantasy, a group of two Impromptus, a group of six *Moments musicaux* (soon to be republished with a corrected French title as *Moments musicaux*), and a single waltz variation published in Diabelli's famous collection of 1824;

5 liturgical settings in Latin, including one complete Mass and a *Deutsches Requiem* or *Trauermesse* (a setting of the funeral rite in German), originally published as the work of the composer's brother Ferdinand to help him with a job application;

2 full-length chamber compositions: a string quartet in A minor, published in 1824 (with a dedication to Ignaz Schuppanzigh, the famous quartet leader) as op. 29, and a piano trio in E ♭ major, published in 1828 as op. 100.

This list is very revealing of the nature of the music business at the time, and of Schubert's willingness to work within market requirements, quite belying the withdrawn image his posthumous reputation has assigned him. With few exceptions, the list is confined to utilitarian, sociable, and domestic genres—“Biedermeier” genres, as contemptuous aristocrats called them (after “Papa Biedermeier,” the proverbially obtuse paterfamilias celebrated in humorous verses and cartoons), meaning stuff that was cheap and cozy. At the time of his death, then, Schubert was no famished genius but a composer of solid, albeit largely local reputation. Within his seemingly unpretentious limits he was regarded as a *beliebter Tonsetzer*, a “favorite composer,” by an appreciative public, albeit a public largely unaware that behind closed doors he was vying with Beethoven as a composer of quartets and symphonies and (rather less successfully) with Rossini as a composer of operas.

That situation may have been on the point of changing at the time of his death. During his last year Schubert carried on negotiations with some northern German firms who showed a characteristically North German interest in “the

highest in art” (as the composer put it),²² and his largest work to see print in his lifetime, the Trio, was published by the Leipzig firm of Probst. But as long as he was writing for the local Viennese market, he was happy to meet its demands. His dances, for example, were not *Vortragsmusik* (“performance music” or “music for listening”) but convivial *Gebrauchsmusik* (“music for active use”), dances to be danced to. The *Männerchöre* (“male choruses”) were written for a lucrative market that had been created by the proliferation of Viennese *Männergesangvereine*, men’s singing clubs. These works, now among his most obscure, were the Schubert compositions most often performed in public at the time.

Piano duet playing was a convivial activity that lasted into the twentieth century, when the dissemination of sound recordings largely killed it off. Most orchestral works were published in piano four-hands arrangements to create a market for them; making them kept many hacks employed. (Schubert, however, had no access to their services, and it is quite indicative of public taste that of all his orchestral music it was the overture to the opera *Alfonso and Estrella*, an imitation of Rossini, that was chosen for publication in this form.) Even the large-scale works, the three piano sonatas and the two chamber pieces, were of a kind that could be enjoyed at home, whether in solitude or in company.

None of Schubert’s compositions in large public media had any circulation to speak of during his lifetime. One singspiel (a farce of mistaken identity called *Die Zwillingsbrüder*, “The twin brothers”) made it briefly to the stage, as we have seen, in 1820. None of the other dozen stage works was ever produced until after Schubert’s death (sometimes very long after: *Der Spiegelritter*, the earliest one, had its first production in 1949). The only tune from a Schubert opera that musicians or music lovers are likely to know today is that of a duet in the singspiel *Die Freunde von Salamanka* (“The friends from Salamanca”), and only because Schubert used it for a set of variations in his Octet in F major for winds and strings. (The six-movement octet, a sort of suite, was first published complete in 1889, although the variations movement had already appeared in 1853 as part of a four-movement “sonatafied” version; the opera remained unperformed until the Schubert centennial celebrations of 1928.) Nor did Schubert ever hear one of his symphonies performed in public, although (as Biba discovered) the first five, with the perhaps significant exception of the “Tragic” Fourth, were performed by a band numbering about thirty at the salons of Otto Hatwig, a wealthy amateur who led the violin section (with Schubert himself sitting among the violas). The first Schubert symphony to be published was the “Great” C-major, in 1840; the “Unfinished” had to wait until 1867.

Only one full-evening’s concert of Schubert’s works was ever given during his lifetime. It took place on 26 March 1828 in a small concert room owned by the Vienna Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde (Society of Friends of Music), one of the city’s three municipal concert bureaus, which since 1818 had been including Schubert’s works in its so-called *Musikalische Abendunterhaltungen* (“Evening musical entertainments”). But even on this occasion the program consisted of works in domestic and sociable genres: a quartet movement, the E \flat -major Trio, a *Männerchor*, and seven songs, most of them performed by the baritone Johann Michael Vogl (1768–1840) with the composer at the piano. The little hall was packed with friends. The composer took in a respectable “gate.” But the Italian violin virtuoso Niccolò Paganini (1782–1840), a public sensation even greater than Rossini, had picked that very week to make his Vienna debut, and garnered all the press notices.

Perhaps the best measure of Schubert’s lack of affinity for the public concert stage is the fact that he never wrote a concerto, despite receiving a commission in 1818 to write one. Later on, when he had become a posthumous “classic” and good box office, Liszt made a concerto arrangement of the “Wanderer” Fantasy, Schubert’s showiest piano composition. Similar salvage operations have been attempted on the two string sonatas. The one for violin and piano, in three movements without pause, is also titled *Fantasie*; and like the “Wanderer” Fantasy it has a slow movement based on one of Schubert’s songs, *Sei mir gegrüsst* (“Loving greetings”). The other, now played by cellists, was composed for *arpeggione*, a briefly popular, soon obsolete instrument resembling a bowed guitar.



fig. 2-5 Schubert making music with Josephine Fröhlich and Johann Michael Vogl (pencil sketch by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller, 1827).



fig. 2-6 A “Schubertiad” (Schubert evening) at the home of Joseph von Spaun (drawing by Moritz von Schwind, 1868).

But there is little in Schubert that sustains a “concerto” mood. His works flourished best within the private circle of his friends, in the “shared solitude” of what they called “Schubertiads,” gatherings that fell somewhere between domestic get-togethers and full-fledged salons (Fig. 2-6). Nor did his larger, more public concert works (at least the later ones) compromise the mood of lyric introspection, for rendering which Schubert evolved a matchless and in some ways radically innovative technique.

Quite the contrary: through Schubert the mood of lyric introspection—of privacy—invaded and suffused the public genres. Schubert's mature sonatas and symphonies rarely strike a heroic, “Beethovenian” attitude. Notwithstanding the occasional dramatic outburst, they are discursive, ruminative, luminous works that sooner induce reverie than excitement. Their peak moments more readily suggest diffusion of rapture than dramatic climax. Their tonal/thematic closures, in particular, substitute the serene satisfactions of “crystallization, of finely adjusted machinery clicking gently into place” (as the Schubert scholar Daniel Coren once eloquently put it) for the more strenuous gratifications of victory through struggle.²³



fig. 2-7 *Andante de la Symphonie en la* (Andante from the Symphony in A; i.e., the second movement—actually *Allegretto*—from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony), by Eugène Lami (1840).

Once they achieved widespread dissemination, a process that only began in the 1840s, Schubert's sonatas, symphonies, and major chamber works enabled larger audiences than ever to experience music trances and shared solitude, and “take possession of their inwardness,” the way a group of Parisian concertgoers is shown doing in Figure 2-7, a watercolor by Eugène Lami, painted in 1840, titled *Andante de la Symphonie en La*—that is, the second movement (actually marked *allegretto*) from the A-major Symphony (no. 7) by, yes, Beethoven—but an uncharacteristically “Schubertian” movement that fits the description in the previous paragraph to a T. The last two Schubert symphonies, first performed in 1850s and 1860s, had an enormous influence on composers of the generation born between the 1820s and the 1840s (from Anton Bruckner to Antonín Dvořák), helping in this way to revive their genre, which was then (as we shall see) in temporary decline.

Notes:

(22) Schubert to Bernhard Schott, 21 February 1828; *Franz Schubert's Letters and Other Writings*, ed. O. E. Deutch, trans. V. Savile (New York: Vienna House, 1974), p. 135.

(23) Daniel Coren, “Ambiguity in Schubert's Recapitulations,” *Musical Quarterly* LX (1974): 582.

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Jan Václav Voříšek

Impromptu

Schubert: Piano music

CROSSING THE EDGE

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 The Music Trance

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

To encompass a legacy as enormous and as important as Schubert's within the confines of a narrative like this requires strategy. The nature of Schubert's career, as just narrated, suggests that we begin with music published during his lifetime, which had some circulation among his historical contemporaries, and only afterward branch out into posthumous terrain. Thus we will be proceeding from the intimate domestic genres in which Schubert's unique construction of musical subjectivity was formed, into larger genres that through Schubert (quite unbeknownst to his contemporaries) became infected with the esthetic of intimacy.

We can pick up the stylistic and analytical thread exactly where we left it with Tomášek and Field, by starting with a character piece for piano. Schubert knew the works of Tomášek, and was personally friendly with one of Tomášek's pupils, Jan Vaclav Voříšek (1791–1825), a transplanted Bohemian who was Schubert's near contemporary, and who appeared as pianist at many of the same salons and *Abendunterhaltungen* as Schubert before his own almost equally untimely death. In addition to eclogues and rhapsodies, genres pioneered by his teacher, Voříšek also composed some impetuous character pieces to which he gave the name *Impromptu* (French for “offhand,” or “on the spur of the moment”). They were supposed to give the effect, prized by salon romantics and their audiences, of sudden, untamed inspiration.

Like other types of character piece that we have seen, Voříšek's *Impromptus* were usually cast in a simple there-and-back (“ternary” or “aba”) form. Schubert gave the name to eight similarly structured pieces, all written in 1827, of which two were published that same year. The second of these will remind us of Tomášek and Field in the way it “crosses the edge” from the tonic to the quintessentially romantic region of the flat submediant. But Schubert's handling of the by-now familiar maneuver is an especially bold one that links the flat-sixth technique with another tonally destabilizing technique, that of “modal mixture,” the infiltration within a major key of harmonies drawn from its parallel minor (or, more rarely, the other way round).

The sudden “*impromptu*” modulation in m. 83 that articulates the form of the piece—E \flat major to B minor—looks (and sounds) very remote indeed. But, as always, what strikes the naive ear as *impromptu* is actually the result of a crafty strategy, consisting in this case of a double mixture. The many digressions into the parallel minor during the first section—one of them (mm. 25–32) going through a complete circle of fifths that touches on D \flat , G \flat , and C \flat in addition to the signature flats—prepare the listener for the wildly accented G \flat in m. 81 that brings the first section to its precipitous close. There is even a precedent (in the circle of fifths progression) for interpreting the G \flat -major chord that follows as a dominant, furnishing a quick transition to the middle section. But when the new dominant makes its resolution to C \flat (the amply foreshadowed flat submediant key), the expected major is replaced wholesale by its parallel minor, spelled enharmonically as B minor to avoid an inundation of double flats (Ex. 2-5a).

This key, the parallel minor of the flat submediant, is sustained as an alternate home tonality much longer than its counterparts in Tomášek and Field. It is decorated with some fairly remote auxiliaries of its own—secondary dominants, Neapolitan sixths—that serve to promote its status as a stable region to the point where we can easily forget the instability of its traditional relationship to the original tonic. It is even given its own flat submediant, albeit in a context (m. 100) that temporarily identifies the harmony as the “Neapolitan to the dominant of the original flat submediant.” A mouthful like that is the equivalent of “third cousin on the mother's side twice removed.”

ex. 2-5a Franz Schubert, Impromptu in E-flat, Op. 90, no. 2, mm. 77-106

The relationship can be traced logically, and is therefore intelligible, but its distance, not the logic of its description, is what registers. The logic, while demonstrable, is beside the point. To insist on demonstrating it works against the intended effect.

So stable does the remote secondary tonality come to seem that its return “home,” signaled by the descent of the bass B to B \flat (the original dominant) in measure 159, comes not as the normal resolution of \flat VI to V, but as another jolt administered “impromptu” (Ex. 2-5b). The whole process is replayed in compressed and intensified form in the coda, where with really diabolical cleverness Schubert juxtaposes i–V progressions in B minor against V–i progressions in E \flat minor, so that the ear scarcely knows which to choose as its point of orientation. The tonic has been thoroughly destabilized in very novel fashion, and when it is finally reasserted it remains colored by its antagonist, with G \flat (the dominant of B minor) in place of G natural in the tonic triad. Another way of saying this, of course, is to say that the piece ends in the parallel minor.

ex. 2-5b Franz Schubert, Impromptu in E-flat, Op. 90, no. 2, mm. 155-70

Yet another way of saying it, one that suggests the full innovative potential of Schubert's harmonic and tonal freedom, is to say that the concept of “the key of E \flat ” now encompasses both major and minor, with all the constituent harmonies of either mode available at all times for arbitrary, “impromptu” (read: affective) substitutions. And what goes for the tonic goes for all the secondary tonalities as well, even the “key of \flat VI,” which can be interchangeably expressed as C \flat > major or as B minor. The range of harmonic navigation has been augmented exponentially.

This has been a mild example. For a richer, more radical and suggestive taste we can sample one of the *Moments musicaux*. The six pieces that make up the set, while all of them vaguely ternary in format, were not conceived as a unit. They accumulated over several years, and a couple of them were published individually in “almanacs” (albums of miscellaneous pieces assembled by publishers for holiday sale) before the set as a whole was issued. The second of them (in F minor), which retains its independent popularity and is often used as a teaching piece, was originally printed in a Vienna publisher's almanac for 1823 as “Air russe” (“Russian tune”), a banal title Schubert had nothing to do with. The sixth *Moment musical*, in A \flat major (Ex. 2-6), was also given a picturesque name by the publishers when it appeared in an album called *Guirlandes* (“Garlands”) in 1825. They called it “Plaintes d'un Troubadour” (“The laments of a troubadour”), evidently pitching it to an unsophisticated public that held fast to the older, pre-Romantic idea of music as imitation of outer reality (objects, “real things”) rather than a representation of inwardness or an expression of the inexpressible.

Allegretto

p *fp* *p*

10 *f* *pp*

20 *p* *pp*

29 *mf* *fp* *pp* *fp*

38 *pp* *cresc.* *p*

47 *f* *pp*

ex. 2-6a Franz Schubert, *Moment musical no. 6* (D. 780)

ex. 2-6b

The idea of a weeping troubadour was surely prompted by the droopy suspensions in the opening phrases, the kind of thing that had been called a *Seufzer* (sigh) since the days of Heinrich Schütz in the seventeenth century, if not earlier. That much is a cliché. What makes this piece so rare an experience has nothing to do with that, and everything to do with the idea of a “musical moment,” whether the title was Schubert’s idea or the publisher’s. The *moment* (in German, *Augenblick*—“the twinkling of an eye”) had a special meaning for romantics, as we have seen. It was the thing Faust was cautioned not to give himself up to—a stopping of time’s forward march, a subjective reverie. A piece of instrumental music called an *Augenblick* was a piece in “aria time,” or time-out-of-time. A piece that stops time is a piece that represents (or induces) the music trance.

And indeed, one can actually hear time stop (and resume) in this music, when the harmony slips out of the circle of fifths into uncannily prolonged submediant regions that interrupt and suspend its customary progressions—and then slips back again. These marvelous effects are projected against the old minuet or scherzo-and-trio form (or perhaps more to the point by now, Tomašek’s “eclogue” form) in which two “binaries” make up a “ternary.” The first sixteen-bar period encapsulates a “normal” binary procedure: eight bars out (I-V) and eight bars back (V-I). The return trip makes its customary stop along the way at a FOP, namely III, expressed as C major in keeping with Schubert’s expanded version of tonal functions that admits modal mixture on every level.

What gives the C major chord its uncustomary stability, so that it does not immediately register as the dominant of vi (which never materializes), is the way it has been introduced: by way of its own dominant seventh (in position), its constituent intervals chromatically “altered” so that the chord contains an augmented sixth—two leading tones, B and D \flat , both of them seeking resolution, in contrary motion, to C. This “altered” version of the dominant (christened “French sixth” sometime during the nineteenth century) was a favorite chord of Schubert's because of its power to change the course of harmony so unexpectedly and yet decisively. Both chromatic alterations—the use of the augmented sixth as a dominant-intensifier and the use of the modal mixture to transform a single secondary function—are fleeting harbingers of more radical harmonic transformations to come.

The second or complementary period, beginning at the pickup to m. 17, is way out of proportion with respect to the first: sixty-one measures vs. sixteen! It is the “uncannily prolonged” mediant excursions—interruptions in the normal flow of time—that so bloat its length. The period begins right off on the flat submediant (F \flat), with a chord informally called the “German sixth,” a major triad to which an augmented sixth has been added in order to mandate, through the sixth's implied resolution, another harmonic change of course. When the augmented sixth has achieved its goal (movement by contrary half steps outward to the octave), the chord produced (in m. 18) is the minor form of the tonic—and indeed, the whole eight-bar phrase thus introduced is cast in the parallel minor—the kind of shift we are learning to expect from Schubert.

The next phrase, beginning with the pickup to measure 25, is the uncanny one. At m. 28, the chord previously interpreted as i, the minor tonic triad of A \flat , and which had previously proceeded through ii to V in A \flat minor, now suddenly veers back to \flat VI and is reinterpreted as a pivot chord (iii \flat_6) to the *key* of the flat submediant. As in the Impromptu, op. 90, no. 2, the \flat VI harmony has to be enharmonically respelled (as E major) if it is to function as a tonic without a hopelessly complicated notation. But the whole passage enclosed within the new key signature (mm. 29–39) is in fact a prolongation of \flat VI, the purple color-chord of romantic introspection, now promoted to the status of a temporary tonic. It is like passing into another world, another quality of time, another state of consciousness. Nowhere does Schubert more palpably cross the edge of inwardness.

And then, just as E major is confirmed by a cadence in the eleventh measure of its reign, the key signature switches back, the enharmonic spelling is reversed, and a D-natural, insinuated (in m. 41) into what is once again spelled as an F \flat major triad, forces a re-resolution of the chord as a German sixth again, and a return from the shadow world back into the familiar surroundings of A \flat . The resumption of the original plaintive tune at the pickup to m. 54 has closure written all over it. By the time m. 61 is reached, after eight uneventful bars of recapitulation, we have confidently foreseen the end.

But instead of the anticipated perfunctory satisfaction, we are in for another sublime vagary, even more remarkably “out of time” than the first. In m. 62, Schubert introduces another modal mixture to complicate the harmony, producing a really fierce dissonance: a major seventh suspended over a minor triad. He resolves it as he did before (compare mm. 62–63 with mm. 1–2), but introduces a chromatic passing tone (C \flat) along the way that is fraught with enharmonic potential. That potential is immediately realized when the relationship between the unstable C \flat and the relatively stable B \flat (only relatively stable because the chord it belongs to, a half-diminished seventh, is so dissonant) is reversed. The B \flat moves back whence it came, but the intervening signature change, right in the middle of measure 65, recasts the C \flat as a B \sharp , and reidentifies the B \flat in retrospect as an A \sharp .

In effect, both the B \flat in the “soprano” and the D \flat in the bass at the beginning of measure 65 are resolved as if they had been appoggiaturas all along rather than the root and third of a “relatively stable” supertonic in A \flat . The chord thus landed on at the end of m. 65 is enharmonically equivalent to the augmented-sixth chord last heard in m. 41, and it will once again act as the pivot for a crossing of the edge—one that will take us even further into the interior realm than the first. The voicing of the chord in question—the “ ” position, the tensest possible—immediately reidentifies the chord not as a German sixth in A \flat but as a dominant seventh in drastic need of resolution to its tonic.

Just for that reason, of course, Schubert employs the stalling tactic we have by now observed both in Beethoven and in Bellini, reiterating the chord three times before allowing the inevitable to take place. The goal of the resolution, as of any dominant seventh in the position, is to a triad in the position. The root is A, a half step above the original tonic—so very close, one might say, and yet (by normal fifth relations) so very far. Only think of it enharmonically, as B \flat \flat , and Schubert's strategy is revealed: it is the tonicized Neapolitan sixth of A \flat further disguised by its being maneuvered, through a passing at the end of m. 68, to its root position.

But immediately after touching down in measure 69, the A-major chord is revoiced once again, through the same passing , to its first inversion, allowing its perfectly normal resolution, in measure 70, as a Neapolitan to the dominant of the original key, awaiting resolution at last. Yet once again, of course, as soon as the end has heaved into view, the composer must stave it off, lingering on the far side of the edge through one more quiet spin to the tonicized Neapolitan, and one more repossession of A \flat , this time in a resigned, indeed a spent, *pianissimo*.

Quite the most remarkable thing about the final chord is that it is not a chord at all, but a hollow doubled octave. Its hollowness has an affective significance, to be sure. (It is what prompted the words “resigned” and “spent” in the previous paragraph.) But it has another aspect as well, equally important. In a piece so rife with modal mixtures and so dependent on them for its quality of feeling an unambiguously major or an unambiguously minor concluding chord might seem too partial a resolution of its tensions.

Or perhaps the word “unambiguously” is poorly chosen. It is not that the A \flat tonality, or its quality as home, has become ambiguous. Quite the contrary. But its content, its store of possible connections and nuances, has been greatly augmented and enriched, and will no longer suffer delimitation. Expressive necessity—the need to represent new qualities of subjectivity, of inwardness—has mothered the invention of a whole range of expanded tonal relations. Any key can now be thought of as encompassing, and controlling, a double mode, and a new ambit of related keys available for “tonicization”—for setting up as alternate harmonic goals—including several that had not formerly figured among normal diatonic relations.

This little *Moment musical* has demonstrated two such—the flat submediant and the Neapolitan. In previous diatonic practice, even Beethoven's at its limits, these harmonies were always regarded and employed as “pre-dominants” or “dominant preparations”—chords “on the way” to a stable harmony rather than potentially stable harmonies in their own right. The transformation of chords that had formerly implied dynamic process and motion into potentially stable, static harmonies is what lends music that exploits the new technique the quintessentially romantic quality of timelessness or “music trance.” The implication of motion is suspended; and since (to paraphrase the Greek philosopher Zeno) time is the measure of motion and motion the measure of time, the suspension of implied motion implies the suspension of time. That is what makes “aria time” available to instrumental music, and no one ever profited more from its availability than Schubert.

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ONLY CONNECT

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 The Music Trance

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

For an example of “aria time” impinging on the progress of a more extended musical argument, we can turn to a *locus classicus*, the codetta from the first movement of the “Great” C-major Symphony, Schubert's last. This movement was Schubert's longest and most complex orchestral composition in “sonata form.”

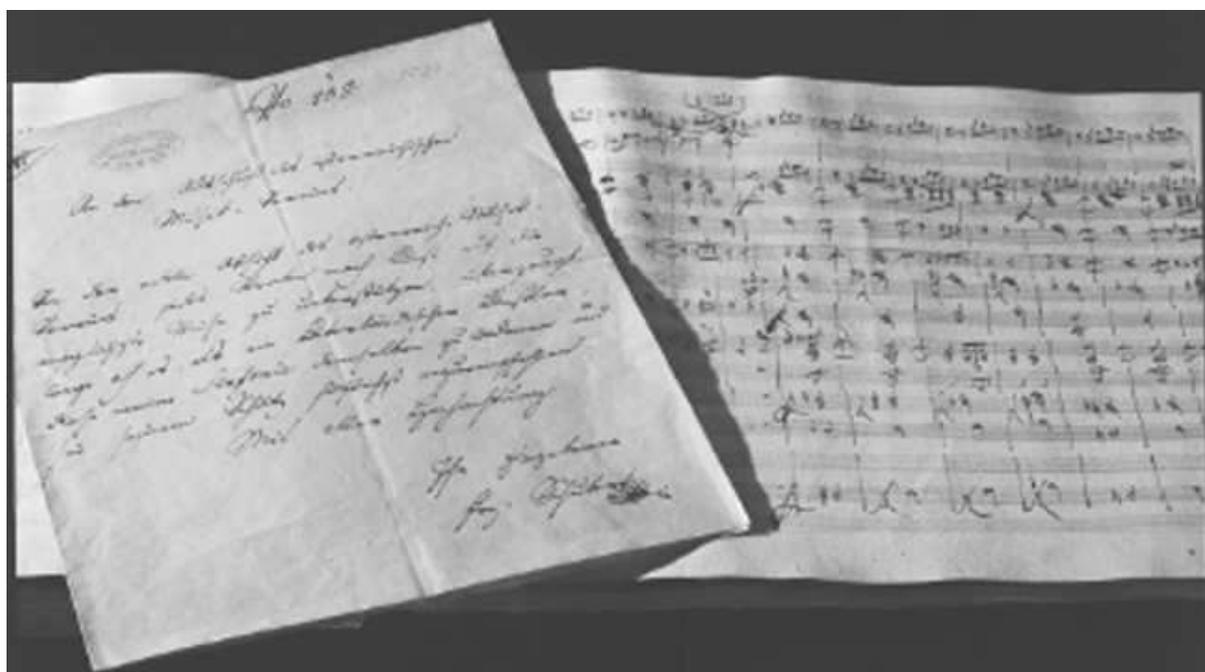


fig. 2-8 Schubert's “Great” C Major Symphony, together with his letter dedicating it to the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna (which in fact did not perform it).

But whereas we have learned from Beethoven to expect such a piece to form one single-minded, overarching trajectory through struggle to the inevitable victory, Schubert is likely to entice us—and entrance us—with islands of mysterious repose amid the hurly-burly, interrupting the forward thrust of the circle of fifths and calling out with Faust to the passing moment, “Stop, stay awhile!”

The function of a codetta is to confirm closure in the secondary key (in this case G major), and so this codetta does. But Schubert's way of establishing the key is to take an elaborate walk around it, shadowing it on both sides with mediants, B above (established through its dominant in m. 184) and E ♭ below (approached via a deceptive cadence directly from G in m. 190). The submediant tonality is prolonged for a total of thirty-eight measures, to m. 227, where it is forced back to G (in a manner recalling the *Moment musical*) by the addition of an augmented sixth. During its period of sway, it is temporarily resolved as a dominant (mm. 199–210), rocking back and forth with its tonic, characteristically expressed in the parallel minor, producing a tonality (A ♭ minor) that could be described either as the minor flat submediant of the original tonic (C) or as the minor Neapolitan of the local tonic (G).

And then the A ♭-minor triad is turned into a pivot through its C ♭ (spelled B), which is applied as a dominant to an

F \flat -minor passage (spelled E minor) that could be viewed either as the minor Neapolitan of the E \flat (the local flat submediant), or as submediant in its own right to the momentary A \flat minor. The F \flat (E) minor is treated almost exactly the same way that Beethoven treats the same tonal digression in the first movement of the *Eroica* Symphony. It is led back to the E \flat whence it sprang (soon to be resolved through the augmented sixth back to G, the reigning tonic).

ex. 2-7 Harmonic abstract of Franz Schubert, Symphony no. 9 (“Great”), I, mm. 181-240

As shown in the analytical chart given as Ex. 2-7, which may be compared with the score, the passage between the B-minor triad in measure 185 and the dominant seventh on B in measure 212 amounts to a sequence of flat submediants, creating a closed circle (enclosed in a box) that could be excised from the analytical chart without disturbing the coherence of the surrounding circle of fifths that gives the codetta its tonally functional import. But of course the really memorable and affecting music is contained precisely within the box. Most memorable of all is the A \flat -minor episode, rendered uncanny by the virtually unprecedented use of a solo trombone. It shows up in the analysis simply as a digression within a digression.

Again, it is the remoteness of the progression that appeals to the imagination, and its attendant static quality of time, rather than its logic—even though, as in the case of the *Impromptu* or the *Moment musical*, the logic of even the most remote connections can easily be demonstrated, and their relationship to the active harmonic ingredients easily understood. Moreover, and somewhat perversely if one insists on measuring Schubert's procedures by a Beethovenian standard of efficiency, the actual running time of the different harmonic areas and individual chords seems as if by design to vary inversely with their functional caliber.

Once again it should be emphasized that, contrary to what is often said about these processes, they do not render tonality—that is, the structure of key functions and relations—in any way ambiguous. Tonal coherence is not weakened or diluted by an increased range of relations and possible connections, but enormously enhanced. Departures and returns can now cover far more ground than ever, and mean more than ever. More territory is “hierarchized,” brought under the direct control of the tonic.

But while tonality itself is not rendered ambiguous, the nature and behavior of many of its constituent harmonies certainly are so rendered. Homologous chords—chords identical in intervallic structure (hence in sound) but different in function—can now be used interchangeably with marvelous effect. We have just seen how the German sixth and the dominant seventh, chords that sound the same but resolve differently, can be freely interchanged so that the effective tonic can appear to fluctuate by a semitone. (Compare once again the resolution of the German sixth of A \flat in mm. 41–43 of the *Moment musical* and the enharmonically equivalent dominant seventh of A in mm. 65–67, or the two resolutions of E \flat in the symphony extract.)

The harmonic vocabulary of romantic introspection is one in which, *as a matter of course*, any augmented sixth chord can be resolved as a dominant seventh and vice versa, any triad in first inversion can be resolved as a Neapolitan and vice versa, and any constituent tone in a diminished seventh chord can resolve as a leading tone. The whole panoply of major and minor degree functions is freely available for use and any one of them can function at

pleasure as a pivot for modulation. In all of these techniques and more, Schubert was the chief pioneer, precisely because his art was nurtured in the intimacy of domestic genres.

Pride of place is still given to mediant relations as a source of inward expressivity, especially the dusky flat submediant where, one could say, it all began. In fact, the flat submediant often functions in “late Schubert” as a constant shadow to the tonic, so that the music seems perpetually to hover on that “edge” of inwardness. Perhaps the most famous example is the opening of the first movement of Schubert's last piano sonata, in B \flat (D960), completed only a couple of months before his death in the fall of 1828 (Ex. 2-8).

The first insinuation of the flat submediant comes after the first phrase of the opening theme, in a ghostly trilled G \flat (the lowest G \flat on the keyboard of Schubert's time) that immediately falls back a semitone to the dominant. After the second phrase, the trill is repeated—only this time it is measured, and applied as a “Phrygian” half step above the tonic. The B \flat and C \flat thus sounded act as a pivot, becoming the third and fourth degrees of the scale of G \flat major. The third phrase of the melody begins on the same pitch as the previous two, but that pitch has now been reidentified as the third scale degree rather than the first, and the melody continues in the key of the flat submediant for fourteen measures in a single unbroken phrase, culminating on the fifteenth downbeat on an unexpected, but enormously strategic E \natural .

Molto moderato

pp legato

6

pp tr

12

18

pp

22

25

pp

ex. 2-8 Franz Schubert, Sonata in B-flat, D. 960, I, beginning

That E^b, of course, creates an augmented sixth against the ostensible tonic, forcing resolution by contrary semitones to F. But the F, when it comes, is treated as the bass of a tonic, capping the opening theme with a radiant return to the original tonic, comparable in its effect to the manner in which the first theme of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony had reached its climax a quarter of a century before. Schubert, in this case, was at once vying with Beethoven and updating him by adapting his strategy of reiterated, climax-driven thematic presentation to his newly subjectivized harmonic vocabulary.

Nor are we finished with the flat submediant even yet. Just at the point where the first theme should be making its long-deferred final cadence (m. 45), the tonic triad is preempted by the diminished-seventh chord that shares its third and fifth. This deceptive cadence plays the traditional eliding role. It signals the move toward the secondary key area where, since the days of the Bach sons listeners had learned to expect a lyrical “second theme.” Schubert, from what we know of him, would seem the least likely composer to frustrate that expectation.

Nor will he, but the treatment of the diminished-seventh chord introduced in measure 45 requires comment. It receives an unusual resolution that Schubert did a great deal to popularize in his published music, for it further expands the range of available harmonic connections. Normally (which is to say, traditionally) the diminished-seventh chord is built on the leading tone, and its resolution coincides with the progression of the leading tone to the

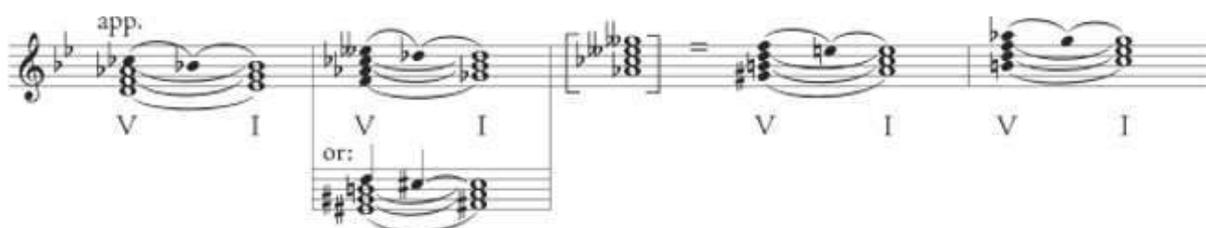
tonic. Its first use as a modulating agent came about when its other constituent tones were resolved as ersatz leading tones, as sketched (in B♭ major, the key of Schubert's sonata) in Ex. 2-9a, turning the diminished-seventh chord into a pivot that could lead to four different keys, pitched (like the tones of the diminished-seventh chord itself) a minor third apart.

In the resolution demonstrated in Ex. 2-8, one of the tones of the diminished-seventh chord is treated like an appoggiatura, resolving not up (as would a leading tone) but down, thus turning the chord into a dominant seventh which resolves the usual way, with a root progression along the circle of fifths (Ex. 2-9b). Of course the same effect can be obtained by treating the remaining three notes in the chord as appoggiaturas to a single held tone, enabling four more resolutions (Ex. 2-9c). And this last model suggests a further decorative refinement of the chord, in which, by the use of multiple neighbors, a diminished-seventh chord can embellish a single triad—normally, but not necessarily, the tonic (Ex. 2-9d).

The progression demonstrated in the Sonata (Ex. 2-8) is the one shown in the first two “bars” of Ex. 2-9b, where Schubert's enharmonic spelling shift is also illustrated.



ex. 2-9a Cyclic resolutions of diminished-seventh chords, leading tone to tonic



ex. 2-9b Cyclic resolutions of diminished-seventh chords, single appoggiatura to dominant



ex. 2-9c Cyclic resolutions of diminished-seventh chords, triple appoggiatura to dominant



ex. 2-9d Cyclic resolutions of diminished-seventh chords, neighbors to a triad

The key thus established is once again the key of the flat submediant, incarnated this time in the parallel minor as in the Impromptu, op. 90, no. 2 (Ex. 2-5). On this appearance the key is less stable; it will be dissolved the same way it had been created, through the use of a diminished-seventh appoggiatura, which leads it eventually to the expected dominant, F major. It has the quality of a mirage, or a will-o'-the-wisp.

But note that a single tonality, $G \flat / F \sharp$, has shadowed both primary functions of the key of $B \flat$, playing submediant to the tonic and Neapolitan to the dominant. This not only tinges both functions with what Romantic poets called *Doppelgänger* (ghostly or hallucinatory doubles), but also mitigates their opposition, showing that on the other side of the mysterious “edge” the tonic and the dominant share a hidden common ground. At the same time it relativizes the 150-year hegemony of the circle of fifths as sole arbiter of tonal coherence, positing two other cyclic models—thirds and semitones—as equally viable tonal administrators, the first accessible through mediant relationships, the other through Neapolitans. And finally, since the flat submediant is the “dominant of the Neapolitan,” this opposition among disparate harmonic routes—fifths, thirds, semitones—may be relativized in turn, and freely intermixed.

Never had so many routes of harmonic navigation been open to composers, so many ways of making connections, so many methods of creating and controlling fluctuations of harmonic tension. And to the extent that these fluctuations were understood as metaphors or analogues to nuances of feeling, never had there been such a supple means of recording and, as it were, “graphing” the movements of the sentient subjective self—and all, in instrumental music, without any reference to externally motivating “objects.” Never had “absolute music” been so articulately expressive of the verbally inexpressible.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Schubert: Style and influence

Whole-tone scale

NEW CYCLES

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 The Music Trance

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The alternative harmonic routes—cycles of thirds and semitones—could also function by themselves, liberated (as it were) from the dominance of the cycle of fifths, and herein lay the most profoundly subversive potential of Schubertian (and post-Schubertian) harmony. As often happens, what begins as a representational artifice can exert an independent fascination as a technical device; an expressive means can become an end in itself, pursued for the sheer pleasure of the entrancing patterns it makes available. As we have already glimpsed fleetingly in the Impromptu in E \flat , op. 90, no. 2, there was a tendency to intensify the emotionally charged flat-submediant relationship by embodying it in sequences, giving the flat submediant a flat submediant of its own. The G-major harmony in m. 100 of the Impromptu (Ex. 2-5a) stands in the same relationship to the key of the middle section as does the key of the middle section to the key of the outer sections. The three keys, in fact, could be placed in an “interval cycle” similar to the circle of fifths, that is, a sequence of moves by identical intervals that continues until the point of departure is regained: E \flat –C \flat /B–G–E \flat

This cycle of thirds is present in the Impromptu only by implication. It is stated fully and explicitly as a continuous succession in the passage from the “Great” C-major Symphony shown in Ex. 2-7. And it reaches a kind of epitome in the fourth movement of Schubert's last string quartet, in G major (1826 [D887], never performed or published during his lifetime) a dizzy whirligig of a movement in which many novel interval cycles are demonstrated and experimented with. In the context of a Haydnesque *moto perpetuo* (“perpetual motion machine”), long a source of exhilarating musical humor, the idea of harmonic cycles is not only of absorbing technical interest but poetically appropriate as well (Ex. 2-10). Just as in the symphony extract, the cycle is broken, and normal tonal “functionality” resumed, when one of the harmonies (C \flat suddenly respelled as B) finally resolves along the circle of fifths.

On a more “structural” level, Schubert used the cycle of major thirds to organize the overall key sequence in the four-movement “Wanderer” Fantasy. Its movements, all played *attacca* (without any intervening pause), end respectively in C major, E major, A \flat major, and C major. (The second movement, which ends in E, begins with a quotation of the song *Der Wanderer* in the relative key of C \sharp minor.) And on a more explicitly “affective” level, the cycle of major thirds produces a terrifying blast of eerie sublimity when geared to the text of the Sanctus in Schubert's Mass in E \flat major another product of his final wonder year, 1828. The Mass Sanctus, we may recall, is a representation of the song of the angelic hosts surrounding God's throne. Schubert's use of the cycle of thirds here was surely an attempt to render the scene in as sublime or “unearthly” a manner as possible (Ex. 2-11). Once again, as we have come to expect from Schubert, major and minor triads are freely mixed—more for the sake of unpredictability here than for that of subjective expressivity (hard to attribute with any confidence to an angel). Even the E \flat triad, when it recurs, is replaced by its minor variant to enhance its freshness—or its strangeness. (“It is the addition of strangeness to beauty,” Walter Pater said, “that constitutes the romantic character in art.”)²⁴

And now for the strangest, most unearthly touch of all: notice the orchestral bass line, in which passing tones have been inserted between the roots of all the third-related triads. These passing tones bisect each major third into major seconds, thus producing one of the earliest seriously intended whole-tone scales in the history of European music. (Mozart, had used one previously in his “Musical Joke” serenade, but only to represent out-of-tune violin playing.)

As a theoretical concept, the whole-tone scale had been known since the sixteenth century. That is, since the sixteenth century it had been known that six whole steps add up to an octave in equal temperament. Music theorists and composers had made occasional (usually jocular) references to this phenomenon. The German organist Jakob Paix, for example, in a volume of canons published in 1590, printed a canon by Josquin des Prez under the rubric *in*

hexatono (“at six whole steps”), leaving it to the reader to figure out with a chuckle that the piece was just an ordinary canon at the octave.

ex. 2-10 Franz Schubert, Quartet in G major, IV, modulatory sequence

For another example, the Roman composer Giovanni Maria Nanino (1543–1607), a pupil of Palestrina, wrote an ingenious canon in 1605 as a memorial for Pope Leo XI, who had died the same year he was installed. Subtitled “Ascendit in celum” (“He ascends into Heaven”), it consists of a phrase that is to be sung each time a whole step higher than the last (Ex. 2-12). But since there is an imitation at the fifth before the repetition at the second, the actual mechanism by which the canon perpetually ascends is the circle of fifths rather than the whole-tone scale. Before the nineteenth century nobody could find any serious musical use for a scale that did not contain any perfect intervals.

Now there was such a use, and Schubert was perhaps its earliest exponent. The earliest instance known to the present author comes from Schubert's Octet in F major for winds and strings, composed in 1824 and first performed in public at a concert put on by the violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh on 16 April 1827 (just three weeks after Beethoven's death), at which Beethoven's great advocate put Schubert forth as the great man's successor. The octet is indeed one of Schubert's most Beethovenian compositions in inspiration, although the work of Beethoven's that provided the

model for it, the Septet, op. 20, is early and relatively relaxed (Schubertian?) Beethoven. But Beethoven never wrote a passage like the one in Ex. 2-13.

Chorus

San ctus,

Bass line

p *cresc.*

3 *ff* *ff*

San ctus, San

ff *ff*

ff *p* *cresc.* *ff*

6 *fff*

ctus, Do - mi - nus De - us Sa - ba - oth!

fff

p *cresc.*

ex. 2-11 Franz Schubert, Mass in E-flat, Sanctus, beginning

① Flo - ret in cae - lo. Al - le - lu - ia.

ia. al - le - lu - ia. al - le - lu - ia.

① Flo - ret in cae - lo. Al - le - lu - ia. Al - le - lu - ia.

① Flo - ret in cae -

② Flo - ret (etc.)

ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

ia, al - le - lu - ia. ② Flo - ret (etc.)

lo. Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

② Flo - ret (etc.)

ia. al - le - lu - ia. ② Flo - ret (etc.)

etc., ad infinitum

ex. 2-12 Giovanni Maria Nanino, "Ascendit in celum" canon (1605)

ex. 2-13 Franz Schubert, Octet, VI, mm. 172-77

Although the cello plays a deceptively ascending figuration, its first notes in each measure collectively describe a descending progression of major thirds, a closed “sequence of flat submediants”—C, A \flat , E, C, (A \flat)—like the one shown in Ex. 2-11 from the Mass. Over this root progression, no fewer than three whole-tone scales descend as the violins and viola connect, with passing tones, the roots (in syncopation, to avoid parallels), fifths, and thirds of the resultant minor triads in contrary motion to the bass. All the earliest whole-tone scales functioned the way these do, as a means of connecting the roots (and, as we see, not only the roots) in a symmetrically apportioned, descending cycle of major thirds—a characteristic pattern or template that grew out of the romantic penchant for flat-submediant harmony, and now offered an alternative means of tonal navigation to the traditional circle of fifths.

Schubert eventually experimented with analogous cycles of minor thirds as well, in which the linked tonalities all lie along an implied diminished-seventh chord (as laid out explicitly, if only “theoretically,” in Ex. 2-9). Here, too, a novel scale emerges from the part writing if passing tones are inserted between the successive chord roots, as Schubert demonstrated in another passage from the vertiginous finale of the G-major Quartet (Ex. 2-14a), where the wild harmonic gyrations undergo a *stretta*—an acceleration in sheer pace and an expansion of modulatory compass.

The peculiar restlessness of the harmony is insured by the use of the position for all the nodal points in the cycle of minor thirds, implying a cadence ceaselessly deferred and lending the passage the bearing of a frenzied, unappeasable pursuit. The emergent scale can be traced in the second violin part, which connects the chord roots with passing tones. Where the scale that emerged in this way from the cycle of major thirds consisted of a descent by whole steps, the cycle of minor thirds yields a scale that descends by alternating whole steps and half steps (Ex. 2-14b).

First system of a musical score, featuring four staves (treble, alto, tenor, and bass clefs). The music includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *ff*, and *p*, and a *cresc.* marking. The notation includes various rhythmic values and articulation marks.

Second system of the musical score, continuing the four-staff arrangement. The notation is dense with rhythmic patterns and includes some slurs and ties.

Third system of the musical score, featuring vocal lines with lyrics. The lyrics include the words "scen" and "do" repeated across the staves. The notation includes slurs and ties.

Fourth system of the musical score, continuing the four-staff arrangement. It includes a *cresc.* marking and features more complex rhythmic and melodic lines.

ex. 2-14a Franz Schubert, Quartet in G major, IV, another modulatory sequence

ex. 2-14b Franz Schubert, Quartet in G major, IV, demonstration of the scale that emerges from the interpolated passing tones

Like the whole-tone scale, it proved extremely suggestive to the composers who became acquainted with Schubert's posthumously published instrumental works at midcentury—particularly Liszt, who passed it along in turn to many other composers. One of them, the Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908), confessed in 1906 that Schubert, in his view, was the fountainhead of what he considered to be modern music, “the first composer in whom one can meet such bold and unexpected modulations.”²⁵ (And, in saying this, he gave valuable testimony to the nineteenth century's primary criterion of musical modernity.) Owing to the delayed publication of his works, the implications of Schubert's tonal and harmonic experiments were still being worked out (albeit in entirely different technical and expressive contexts) almost a century after his death.

Notes:

(24) Walter Pater, *Appreciations, with an Essay on Style* (1889; rpt. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1987), p. 246.

(25) Vasiliy Vasiliyevich Yastrebtsev, *Nikolai Andreyevich Rimskiy-Korsakov: Vospominaniya, 1886–1908*, Vol. II (Leningrad, 1960), p. 374.

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B-MINOR MOODS

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 The Music Trance

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

As promised earlier, an extended look at one of Schubert's larger, more public works will confirm the influence of the private genres in which he so excelled. That influence—an influence Schubert absorbed from his environment and then transmitted to his posthumous posterity (curiously skipping a generation, as we have seen, owing to delayed publication)—is what produced the ultimate “romanticization” of the larger instrumental forms, as practiced by German composers (and others in the Germanic orbit) in the later nineteenth century. The obvious starting place is Schubert's fortuitously emblematic “Unfinished” Symphony of 1822. The following discussion should be read with score in hand.

This famous work has few precedents in the symphonic literature—not for being unfinished (for which there are precedents within every composer's legacy, including five other unfinished symphonies in Schubert's own) but for being cast in the key of B minor. Associated with the darkest, grimmest, most “pathetic” moods, the key had been pretty well avoided by earlier composers of symphonies, which fully accords with the history of a genre that had originated in theatrical and convivial milieus. The only previous B-minor symphony by a major composer was one of the set of six (for strings only) that C. P. E. Bach had written for (and dedicated to) Baron van Swieten in 1773. Haydn had written a symphony in B major in 1772, and cast its second movement, a plaintive siciliana, in the parallel minor. Both of these symphonies had partaken of the “stormy stressful” style of their decade, associated (explicitly in Bach's case) with the idea of *Empfindsamkeit*, “hyperexpressivity.” Schubert's symphony breathes a similarly special atmosphere, equally far from the traditional symphonic air of public celebration. It is usually referred to as number 8 because it was first published in 1866, a quarter of a century after the “Great” C-major symphony, which was actually written three years later. When another unfinished symphony (just a sketch in E major) was completed by an editor and published in piano score in 1884, it was given the number 7, and the “Great” Symphony was promoted to the magic Beethovenian number 9. The “Unfinished” retained its position as number 8, even though it was the seventh performable symphony in order of composition.

No one knows why the piece remained unfinished. The manuscript full score breaks off after two pages of the Scherzo. A more complete piano sketch showing the whole Scherzo and a melodic outline of the Trio has enabled several scholars to “finish the Unfinished,” opportunistically tacking on the B-minor entr'acte from Schubert's incidental score to *Rosamunde* (a play that ran for two performances in 1823) by way of finale.²⁶ There is no real evidence that this was Schubert's intention, and the idea of a torso that consisted of two pathos-filled movements and ended with a slow movement (and in the “wrong key”) appealed powerfully to romantic sensibilities, enhancing the symphony's popularity and making it, with Beethoven's Fifth and Ninth, one of the symphonies that most haunted the memories and imaginations of later composers. Its reach extended at least until 1893, when the canonized torso may have suggested to the Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Chaikovsky (who had already recalled the “Unfinished” Symphony in his ballet *Swan Lake*) the striking idea of ending his Sixth Symphony—also cast in rare B minor, and subtitled “Pathétique”—with a slow movement.

Both the impulse to emulate Beethoven and the distance that separates Schubert from his older contemporary are evident from the symphony's very outset. As early as his op. 1, a set of piano trios, Beethoven often preceded the first theme in a sonata movement with an assertive “preface theme” to take over the function of a slow introduction and command the audience's attention. Often, especially when in a minor key as in the Trio, op. 1, no. 3, or the Fifth Symphony, the preface theme achieves this objective by being played in a peremptory unison. Schubert begins the first movement of his B-minor Symphony with a patently Beethovenian preface theme *all'unisono*—indeed at first it almost seems a paraphrase of the one that opens the Trio—but its character is the very opposite of assertive (Ex.

2-15). For such a mysteriously ill-defined beginning in Beethoven there is only one precedent: the Ninth Symphony—no precedent at all because Schubert's symphony was composed before the Ninth was performed.



ex. 2-15 Franz Schubert, Symphony no. 8 (“Unfinished”), mm. 1-8

On closer examination, this quintessentially romantic opening gesture turns out to be an embellished plunge from tonic to dominant—the descending-tetrachord motif that ever since the seventeenth century has functioned (in the words of Ellen Rosand) as “an emblem of lament.” We should not be surprised to find Schubert refurbishing an ancient convention; conventions, after all, are what make communications intelligible. But neither should we be surprised to find him investing it with a personal, “subjective” stamp in the form of a deliberately skewed phrase rhythm, its eight bars divided as asymmetrically as possible (2+3+3), with the last segment consisting of a single sustained tone (the equivalent of a “composed fermata”—another inverse reference to Beethoven's Fifth?). The effect is less to stun the audience than to draw it in, to allow its members to “take possession of their inwardness.”

The tremulous accompaniment figure that starts up in m. 9 to introduce the “first theme” is reminiscent—perhaps deliberately reminiscent—of the opening of Mozart's G-minor symphony, K550. The texture of the theme itself, however, in which the string section accompanies the wind section, is one we have not seen in a Mozart symphony, nor any symphony. That texture was Rossini's specialty (as we observed in the overture to *The Barber of Seville* Ex. 1-4), and it was Schubert's peculiar historical mission as a writer of symphonies (though one studiously ignored, unless hotly contested, by German historians) to reconcile a new brand of Italian theater music with the Austro-German concert symphony, as if refreshing the genre with a new infusion from its original historical source.

(For another example of pure Rossini in Schubert, see the rhapsodically dilated second theme in the first movement of the String Quintet in C major [mm. 58–138], scored first for the two cellos and then the two violins: it is a Rossinian operatic ensemble in every respect, even down to the chugging accompaniment, except insofar as it embodies a characteristically Schubertian mesmerizing pass into the local flat submediant, and its serenely radiant reversal. At the very end, moreover, just as in a Rossinian ensemble, the characters regroup, first cello and first violin—leading man and leading lady?—doubling at the octave [mm. 127–138] for perhaps the most soaringly Italianate melodic passage Schubert ever wrote.)

Even less like a concert symphony and more like a Rossini overture is the way the first theme in the “Unfinished” proceeds to the second. Never in the symphonies of Haydn, Mozart, or Beethoven—not even in the piano sonatas of the Bach sons!—had a first theme made a full cadence in the tonic, as Schubert's does so demonstratively in measure 38. The whole point of a “sonata allegro,” as practiced by its pre-Schubertian masters, was to elide that cadence (dramatically in symphonies, subtly in chamber music) into a modulatory bridge, and not allow a full cadence in the tonic until the very end of the movement. Schubert not only allows the first theme to finish, but follows it with an obviously “patched-in” four-bar linkup (mm. 38–41) to an equally stable second theme, as if almost defiantly to advertise a lack of interest in “transitions.” For such a seemingly perfunctory linkage of themes we again have to look to the overture to *The Barber of Seville*; and even there it had taken place in the truncated “recapitulation” rather than the more exacting “exposition.”

But here the resemblance to Rossini ends, for Schubert's procedure is anything but perfunctory. Notice the peculiar structure of the four-bar link, played by the horns and bassoons. It has the same rhythmic skew as the “preface theme,” dividing not 2+2 but 3+1. And the “3” consists of the same sort of long-held unison pitch as the last three measures of the preface. It is another “composed fermata,” or time-out-of-time, and its purpose, like that of all fermatas, is to interrupt the rhythmic momentum. Whereas a Beethoven fermata either comes on a rest or is followed by a rest, thus compounding the forward thrust with suspense, Schubert's is on a quiet continuous sound that has the opposite effect. It neutralizes the thrust, replacing suspense (which quickens consciousness) with relaxation, deepening the music trance.

Neither in Mozart nor in Beethoven nor in Rossini, moreover, have we ever encountered a second theme that is more than twice the length of the first theme. It too comes to a full cadence (m. 104) before being replaced by another

long-held unison to initiate a quickie transition. And that unison is a B, the cadence note of the first theme. The whole second theme, for all that it is the longest sustained span in the movement so far, could be snipped right out with no loss of tonal coherence. It is an island of repose, a fair and fleeting *Augenblick* magnified into what philosophers call a “specious present”—a considerable duration that nevertheless represents instantaneousness. It is, in short, a *moment musical*.

And as befits that status, it is cast not in the expected key of a second theme in the minor—that is, the mediant (III)—but in the romantically charged submediant. (Again, the only Beethovenian “precedent” comes in the as-yet-unheard Ninth Symphony.) The theme (Ex. 2-16a), as was so often the case in Schubert's impromptus and *moments musicaux*, is redolent of domestic music: it has even been associated with a specific Viennese popular song (Ex. 2-16b), the rhythm of which also permeates the theme of the posthumously published Impromptu in A \flat major, op. 142, no. 2 (Ex. 2-16c).



ex. 2-16a Franz Schubert, *Symphony no. 8* (“Unfinished”), I, second theme



ex. 2-16b A possible source for the second theme of Schubert's *Symphony no. 8* (“Unfinished”), I

Allegretto
sempre legato

ex. 2-16c Franz Schubert, *Impromptu*, Op. 142, no. 2, beginning

The theme is even constructed a bit like an impromptu or a *moment musical*, in something like a miniature aba form of its own. Its middle section is approached in a radically romantic, psychologically “realistic” way: the theme trails off right before its implied cadence (m. 61) in simulation of a mental vagary, and after a measure's unsettled pause resumes in what seems a neurotically distorted form, the melody transferred to the massed winds supported by a unanticipated switch to the minor subdominant harmony in the abruptly *tremolando* strings and the suddenly roused trombones. The interval is wrong—a descending fifth (mistakenly recalling the first theme?) instead of a fourth; the right interval, sounded on the next try, is seemingly not recognized. A third stab brings the chord without which a romantic vagary is not complete: the flat submediant (E ♭)—with respect to the original tonic the submediant's flat submediant, completing an implied cycle of major thirds, Schubert's as yet unpatented specialty.

The chord picks up its augmented sixth in m. 68, but its resolution is delayed by a whole series of feints, most strikingly (m. 71) to a diminished seventh chord that resolves two bars later according to the pattern illustrated in Ex. 2-9b, and in so doing initiates a little development section in which a motive derived from the third measure of the theme is put through a series of attempted, then frustrated, circles of fifths. The storm and stress having been dissipated by the cadence in m. 93, the theme is resumed in a stable but asymmetrically phrased (five-bar) variant, providing the closure of double return, and also providing reconciliation between the formerly opposed winds and strings.

The actual development section, famously, is based throughout on the preface theme—the one theme that had been originally presented in a harmonically open-ended form requiring closure on the tonic. (Beethoven had used the preface theme similarly, albeit less single-mindedly, in op. 1, no. 3.) Never had an augmented sixth been more evocatively employed than in the uncanny beginning of the section (mm. 114–127), and never had it been more unconventionally handled: prepared as the submediant of E minor, it proceeds as the Neapolitan (!) of the original key, leading to the original dominant, expressed in its most dissonant form replete with minor ninth and prolonged earsplittingly, it could even seem sadistically, over a span of twelve measures (mm. 134–145).

Of course the resolution of this grating dissonance is going to have to be deceptive—otherwise the development section will have achieved its harmonic purpose so prematurely as to make its continuation redundant. And so another series of feints is in the offing far more dramatic because the scale is so much greater and the stakes are so much higher. The first of these feints (mm. 145–146) will involve an even more unconventional placement and conduct of an augmented sixth, producing one of the most violent deceptive cadences Schubert ever attempted.

What makes the dominant ninth so tense is the extraordinary pressure of the ninth itself (the G in the present context) to descend to the root. And so, by moving the bass up to an A-natural (already a violent move because it creates a false relation with the A♯ in the dominant chord), and then resolving the dominant seventh thus created against the G as if it were a German sixth (in the hypothetical key of C♯), Schubert manages to force the G to resolve in measure 146 as if it were an F upward to G♯ rather than downward to the long-awaited dominant root. The resolution that had been insisted upon, or pled for, over the preceding twelve bars is not only thwarted but preempted, leaving the properly mesmerized listener, who had been programmed to identify with the G and its desires, exhausted and disoriented.

The diversionary ploy has its price: an unwanted cadence on C♯ now looms. It too must be frustrated. So Schubert preempts the arrival of its tonic with a diminished seventh chord, screamed out by the whole orchestra (m. 154), that reharmonizes the G♯ and directs it still further up, to A, presaging resolution to D. This time resolution is forestalled by precisely reversing the feint employed in measure 73, now transforming the dominant of D into a diminished seventh chord that is given an unconventional “outward” resolution of the kind more usually associated with augmented sixths. The resolution redirects the harmony back to E minor, the development's point of departure and the subdominant of the original key.

This time it takes Schubert forty-four measures to regain the dominant ninth (the only unusual harmonic effect along the way being the strangely voiced augmented Neapolitan in mm. 194–197, in the “wrong” inversion and again tinged with an augmented sixth), and its resolution finally brings closure to the preface theme, initiating a fairly placid recapitulation. Here the most noteworthy touch is the rerouting of the first theme (by means of some poignant stabs of harmony in mm. 229–231 and 238–240) so that it cadences in the dominant (where it “should” have cadenced in the exposition). But however unconventional this may appear, it is done for the sake of conformity to convention, for it enables the recapitulation of the second theme in the customary mediant key (D major). The coda (mm. 328 ff) rounds the movement off with a very demonstrative closure of the preface theme (with a few nostalgic nods at the subdominant, where the theme had spent so much time in the development).

The first movement of the “Unfinished” Symphony, then, is a virtual textbook of submediant relations—many of them unprecedented in symphonic writing and astonishing in their assured virtuosity—and how they can be used to create both mood and form. In this way the symphony becomes a study of how the intimate and domestic forms (“lower” forms in the conventional, covertly social hierarchy of genres, to which Schubert outwardly subscribed) in which Schubert chiefly made his reputation, and in which he acquired his submediant skills, could affect the “higher” forms and infect them with *Innerlichkeit*, assimilating them to the mood music of the urban bourgeoisie.

Notes:

(26) See Gerald Abraham, “Finishing the Unfinished,” *Musical Times* CXII (1971): 547–8.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Schubert: Style and influence

CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDENTITY

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 The Music Trance

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The key of the second movement, *Andante con moto*, bears an unusual but thoroughly Schubertian relation to that of the first: it is cast in the subdominant of the parallel major, projecting the concept of modal mixture from the level of local harmonization to that of “macrostructure,” the relationships that give coherence to the whole multimovement sequence. Where the first movement had been a study in submediant relations, the second admits a much wider spectrum of third-relations to its purview. In part this is because its form is more loosely sectional, less “teleological,” than that of the first. Rather than a goal-directed sonata design, organized around a single overriding progress to closure, the movement is put together very much like the slow movement of Mozart's E \flat -major Symphony, K. 543, which could very well have been its model: a slow rondo (or, alternatively, a slow minuet or *Ländler* with two trios) in which both episodes are based on the same melodic material but contrast radically in key, both with the framing sections and with each other.

Even if we ignore for the moment the many strongly colored “local” harmonies that attract our ear (beginning with the unconventionally “inverted” German sixth in measure 14 whose many recurrences will be a major point of reference) and take note only of chords that are “tonicized” by cadences and so contribute to the articulation of the movement's form, we encounter an amazingly diverse and wide-ranging assortment, beginning with the brief excursion from the tonic E to the “parallel mediant” G (the mediant of the parallel minor, tonicized in m. 22) and back, which defines the shape of the opening section.

The first episode (beginning with the four-bar unharmonized preface at m. 60) starts out in that Schubertian rarity, the ordinary diatonic submediant or relative minor. Remaining true to our plan and ignoring the beautifully executed (but cadentially unconfirmed) excursion to the parallel mediant (F major) at m. 74, we arrive at a mode switch at m. 83, immediately followed by the enharmonic recasting of C \sharp major as D \flat . (Note that we have had cadences by now on three members of a cycle of minor thirds encircling the tonic: E major, G major “above”, D \flat major “below.”) Parenthetically we might note that the clarinet and flute exchange that takes place during this excursion into D \flat major (mm. 90–95) removes any doubt that we are dealing here with a *Ländler*, an adapted (and locally Viennese) ballroom dance—that is, a Mozartean device updated by a composer who, unlike Mozart, “speaks Viennese like any other Viennese” (in the words of the poet August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben).²⁷

A return to C \sharp minor provides a pivot to the submediant, A, at m. 109, suitably equipped with what sounds like an augmented sixth, just as, knowing Schubert, one might expect. But the chord is spelled as a dominant seventh, with G-natural instead of F, and so it resolves, into a remarkable “flat side” circle of fifths that touches down on D, the Neapolitan (m. 111); G, the parallel mediant of the original key (m. 121); and finally C, the parallel or “flat” submediant (m. 129), preparing the retransition to E major for the medial return of the “rondo” theme.

The section that now begins (m. 142) is identical to the first section as far as m. 186, where it is suddenly rerouted to the subdominant to prepare for the second episode, which begins (m. 201) in the parallel subdominant, A minor, soon to be replaced by A major at m. 223. This key may be unremarkable with respect to the original tonic; but compared with its counterpart in the first episode, it is in the magical flat submediant key. At m. 244 the parallel tonic is briefly sounded as a pivot to the same “flat side” excursion along the circle of fifths as we heard in the first episode, only this time it moves much more quickly than before, because it is zeroing in on the original tonic from C, the original flat submediant (m. 250), to F, the Neapolitan (m. 252), which makes its conventional resolution to the dominant, and thence home.

The final section is not a full recapitulation or rondo frame; rather it is a coda based on the original thematic material, with some enharmonic interplay between diatonic and chromaticized mediants that is at once witty and

touching. First G # minor (III) is emphasized by an ordinary dominant embellishment (mm. 270–271, repeated in 277–278), then the four-bar violin preface is extended by an extra pair of measures that takes it (where else?) to C, the flat submediant, which then pivots ear-tinglingly to *its* flat submediant, A b (m. 286), completing a cycle of major thirds, perhaps the earliest one in all of Schubert to have been explicitly enunciated in direct succession. And finally, in another characteristically Schubertian move, the violin preface, now adapted to the key of A b major, is converted at the end to the parallel minor, by replacing the expected C with a C b. This is an especially disorienting move, since it involves an unaccompanied arpeggio (mm. 292–295) that describes an augmented octave. But of course it is also an especially strategic move, since that disorienting C b, reinterpreted enharmonically, turns out to be the original dominant. Its resolution secures the final closure (Ex. 2-17).

This quick return from seemingly remote parts once again resonates with Mozart; one famous example is slow movement of his G-major Piano Concerto, K. 453, which has been given contradictory interpretations. Some have interpreted the distance as real, in which case the pleasing artifice by which it is so quickly traversed seems an ingratiating mask worn by violence; others have interpreted the distance as illusory, in which case the harmonic sleight-of-hand comes off as irony. The former interpretation casts the music as tragic, the latter as comic.

The image displays a page of a musical score, numbered 280 at the top left. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with ten staves. From top to bottom, the staves are labeled: Flute, Clarinet, Bassoon, Horn, Trombone, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The music is written in G major (one sharp) and 2/2 time. The score shows a complex harmonic structure with various dynamics including *ppp*, *pp*, and *arco*. The music features a prominent violin preface in measures 286-295, which is converted to the parallel minor at the end.

ex. 2-17 Franz Schubert, Symphony no. 8 (“Unfinished”), II, mm. 280-300

The interpretation of Schubert's harmony is beset with similar differences of opinion; but the stakes have seemed greater with him, and the disagreements have been more heated. Perhaps that is because his music, constructing a more emphatically private and personal space than Mozart's, claims a greater personal investment from listeners. That would certainly be in keeping with romantic ideals, and to that extent, perhaps, the controversy has been a measure of Schubert's artistic success. But the grounds of Schubertian contention have been no more confined (or confinable) to artistic matters than in the case of Mozart. With Mozart, aesthetic debate is connected with social issues. With Schubert, again very much in the spirit of romanticism, it is connected with issues of personal identity.

The latest controversy began with what scholars call “external” evidence—the interpretation of facts about Schubert's life, not the interpretation of his scores. In 1989 Maynard Solomon, a highly respected biographer of Beethoven and Mozart, published an article in which he interpreted certain passages in diaries and letters, both Schubert's and those of his friends, as coded references to the composer's participation in what Solomon called the “male homosexual subculture” of the Austrian capital.²⁸

Solomon's most compelling piece of evidence was a diary entry in which one of Schubert's friends wrote that Schubert, being “out of sorts,” is in need of “young peacocks, like Benvenuto Cellini.” (Cellini, the great sixteenth-century sculptor and goldsmith, used references to game birds in his autobiography as a euphemism for the young boys he pursued for erotic purposes.) Later, a younger scholar, Kristina Muxfeldt, noted that among the song texts Schubert had set were poems by Count August von Platen, in the style of Persian love lyrics known as ghazals, that were full of transparent references to homosexual love. Schubert's settings of these poems, she observed, were unusually intense in harmony, even for him.²⁹

These readings and findings, while original and unwontedly specific, were not really news. Schubert's venereal disease, which may have hastened his death, had long since led to speculations concerning what one writer, as early as 1857, called *passions mauvaises*, “evil passions.”³⁰ The judgment implied by the word *mauvais* reflected the moral standards of 1857 well into the Victorian age, when sexual roles, as observed in the previous chapter, were

hardening. The judgment also obviously partook of the mythology of the *poète maudit*, equally anachronistic for Schubert. In Schubert's time imputation of homosexual tastes or activities carried less stigma than they did at midcentury (here, many would contend, our own time is in agreement with Schubert's), and were less bound up with issues of identity (but here our time differs profoundly from his). In any case, it is doubtful whether these matters would have excited as much controversy as they have, had some critics not begun to find corroborating "internal" evidence—that is, evidence in "the music itself."

Those who believed they had found such evidence claimed to locate it precisely in the novel harmonic and tonal relationships that we have been investigating, the very aspects of Schubert's style that historians have prized as his signal contribution to the art of music, and on which many music lovers have founded their special sense of intimacy with the composer. In an essay entitled "Constructions of Subjectivity in Schubert's Music," Susan McClary, a versatile and imaginative scholar, made a direct connection between Schubert's special genius for musically representing the romantic "I" and his alleged homoerotic leanings. Where Solomon's prize exhibit had been a journal entry and Muxfeldt's had been a song text, McClary's was the second movement of the "Unfinished" Symphony, the composition we have just surveyed.

McClary interprets the freewheeling mediant relationships and sleight-of-hand modulations that we have been tracing as analogous (or more exactly, homologous) to promiscuous personal relationships. Mediants are to fifths, she argues, as gay is to straight—in both cases (to simplify a bit) what is represented is pleasurable deviance from a socially mandated norm. "On some level," she writes, "centered key identity almost ceases to matter, as Schubert frames chromatic mutation and wandering as sensually gratifying." In Schubert's "enharmonic and oblique modulations," as McClary interprets them, "identities are easily shed, exchanged, fused, and reestablished, as in the magical pivot between E and A \flat major near the end."³¹ Finally, pursuing homologies between her description of Schubert's musical behavior and recent descriptions of gay male behavior, she quotes a literary critic who, while employing a nearly impenetrable professional jargon, seems to be making a similar point about the pleasures of promiscuity: "Subjectivity within male coupling is episodic, cognized and recognized as stroboscopic fluctuations of intense (yet dislocated, asymmetrical, decentered) awareness of self-as-other and self-for-other."³²

Whether this argument holds up depends primarily on how much evidentiary weight an analogy can be made to bear. (Analogies and homologies are partial similarities that have been singled out for the purpose of comparison. If the motivating premise is embraced a priori, as it is here, an analogical argument becomes dangerously liable to the trap of circularity.) But the controversy in which this argument participates is little concerned with the fine points of rhetoric. Rather, it has served as a diagnostic of contemporary attitudes toward sexual deviance. Those made uneasy by the thought of it have been quick to label the argument as an "assault" on Schubert, as one scholar has put it,³³ or an attempt to appropriate his name and reputation on behalf of a political agenda.³⁴

What all sides to the debate agree upon, however, is that profound and possibly "subterranean" matters of personal identity are at stake, and that Schubert's music has the power of representing them. The very thought was a product of Schubert's time. Except in a few late works, not even Beethoven is so interpreted by anyone, but Schubert is so interpreted by everyone. That is the continuing triumph of romanticism.

Notes:

(27) Deutsch, ed., *Schubert: Memoirs by His Friends*, p. 285; quoted in *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert*, ed. Christopher H. Gibbs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 37.

(28) Maynard Solomon, "Franz Schubert and the Peacocks of Benvenuto Cellini," *Nineteenth-Century Music* XII (1988–9): 193–206.

(29) See Kristina Muxfeldt, "Schubert, Platen, and the Myth of Narcissus," *JAMS* XLIX (1996): 480–527.

(30) Alexandre Oulibicheff, *Beethoven: Ses critiques et ses glossateurs* (Leipzig, 1857); quoted in Maynard Solomon, "Franz Schubert and the Peacocks of Benvenuto Cellini," *19th-Century Music* XII (1988–89): 193.

(31) Susan McClary, "Constructions of Subjectivity in Schubert's Music," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Lesbian and Gay Musicology*, eds. P. Brett, E. Wood, and G. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 223.

(32) Earl Jackson, Jr., "Scandalous Subjects: Robert Gluck's Embodied Narratives," quoted in McClary, "Constructions of Subjectivity in Schubert's Music," p. 224.

(33) Susan Kagan, *Fanfare* XIX, No. 2 (November/December 1995), p. 362.

(34) See V. Kofi Agawu, "Schubert's Sexuality: A Prescription for Analysis?" *Nineteenth-Century Music* XVII (1993–94): 79–82.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 3 Volkstümlichkeit

The Romantic Lied; Mendelssohn's Career; the Two Nationalisms

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Volkstümlichkeit

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

THE LIED IS BORN

Although German-speaking composers have been prominent in the last several chapters (and will remain so for several chapters to come), and despite the frequent claim that their prominence raised the German “art music” tradition in the nineteenth century to the status of general standard and model (at least within the instrumental domain), the fact is that only two important musical genres were actually German in origin, and one of them was vocal.

The romantic *Charakterstück* for piano (to call it by its German name) was one of these, and the other was the romantic *Lied* (plural *Lieder*), the setting of a lyric poem for solo voice accompanied by the piano or (at first) some other “parlor” instrument, a genre so German that it has retained its German name in English writing. Both the character piece and the lied have cognate genres in other national traditions. The romantic character piece is in some obvious ways comparable to the fancifully titled harpsichord *pièces* by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French *clavécinistes* like François Couperin. But there were two important differences. The French genre was “imitative” while the German one was “expressive,” in keeping with the great change in esthetic sensibility that the word “romantic” declares. And the French genre descended from the dance suite while the German one descended from the fantasia. The two genres, it thus transpires, were not genetically linked. The one did not lead to the other, and so the romantic *Charakterstück* is entitled to be considered an independent genre, as indigenously German as the romanticism to which it gave form and expression.

Similarly, the lied can be superficially compared with many previous forms of accompanied solo song, going all the way back to the monodies of the early seventeenth-century Florentines, or the English “lute ayres” of the same period. (The latter may look even more closely akin to the lied, since it had a fully composed accompaniment rather than a figured bass.) Indeed, the at times intense and personal expressivity of those earlier genres does seem to prefigure the primary esthetic aim of romantic lyricism. But again, the lineages were dissimilar. The monody and ayre descended respectively from the madrigal and the recitation of epic poetry. They were court genres, not domestic ones, and they were both quickly subsumed into the nascent opera. There is no genetic link between them and the lied.

Like the *Charakterstück*, the romantic lied originated in Berlin, the Prussian capital, and once again that curious protoromantic C. P. E. Bach (who wrote some two hundred lieder) played a crucial role in its birth. From the very beginning, moreover, the lied was associated not only with the idea of *Empfindsamkeit* or personal expressivity, but also with the idea of *Volkstümlichkeit* or “folklikeness.” The two ideals may seem at first incongruous, since the simplicities of folk song may not seem on the face of it the likeliest channel for the expression of a unique personal psychology. But in fact, as already hinted in the previous chapter, German romanticism saw personal and collective expression as mystically linked, each depending on the other for authenticity. It was in the lied that the romantic “I” bonded musically with the romantic “We.” Accordingly, the earliest lieder were in effect imitation folk songs with simple melodies that, while reflecting the mood of the poem, could be easily sung by nonprofessionals at home. The accompaniments were also kept simple and were (in theory, anyway) regarded as optional. The person chiefly responsible for the theory was a Berlin lawyer named Christian Gottfried Krause (1719–70), who first described the lied in a book published in 1752 under the title *Von der musikalischen Poesie* (“On poetry for music”), and then got several of his friends, including C. P. E. Bach, to furnish examples of it. Thus, rather unusually, the description of the genre actually preceded its earliest specimens. It was decidedly a cultivation, a “hothouse growth.”

The first book of actual lieder was published in 1753 under the title *Oden mit Melodien* (“Odes with melodies”). An ode, which means a poem of praise sung to the lyre (whence lyric), was a time-honored classical genre that could be either public (choral) and grandiose, addressed to an assembled audience (as in the Greek drama or the odes of Pindar), or personal and intimate, addressed to a loved one (as in the odes of Sappho, or, in Roman times, of Horace and Catullus). It was the latter type, of course, that furnished the German romantics with their model. The model of models was Anacreon, a Greek lyric poet of the sixth century bce, whose widely imitated “Anacreontic” verses celebrated the joys of wine and love.

Americans may know about Anacreon because the drinking song that (in Francis Scott Key's *contrafactum*) became “The Star-Spangled Banner” was originally called “To Anacreon in Heaven.” It was the more personal, amorous side of Anacreon that inspired the verses by Karl Wilhelm Ramler (1725–98) that (chosen by Krause and set at his instigation to suitably “*Volkstümlich*” melodies) laid the foundation for the romantic lied. *Amint* (Aminta), one of C. P. E. Bach's contributions to Krause's *Oden mit Melodien*, will give an idea of that foundation (Ex. 3-1). Its simple melody returns with every verse in the manner of a folk song. The simple three-part texture, completely written out even though it could easily be “realized” by a skilled continuo player, is additional evidence that the song is meant for home consumption by the relatively unskilled. The performance direction, *Mit Affekt* (“emotionally”), connoting an urban, sophisticated, self-aware manner seemingly at odds with the rustic simplicity of the tune, is a perfect paradigm of what we might call the “lied sensibility” with its unique crossbreeding of the I and the We.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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C.P.E. Bach

Folk music

Johann Gottfried Herder

THE DISCOVERY OF THE FOLK

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Volkstümlichkeit

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Mit Affect

Sie flie - het fort! Es ist um mich ge - sche - hen.

ex. 3-1 C. P. E. Bach, *Amint* (Wotquenne 199, no. 11)

This crossbreeding, which implied the impossibility of a particular “I” without a particular “We,” was in large part the brainchild of a Prussian preacher named Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), who provided the main intellectual bridge between the *Sturm und Drang* movement of the 1770s and the later German romanticism. His basic idea may seem all too obvious to us, heirs as we are to two centuries of romantic thinking; but in its day it was a revolutionary notion. Very simply, Herder contended that there was no universal human nature and no universal human truth, no “sensus communis” as posited by his one-time mentor Kant. Rather, he argued, each human society, each epoch of human history, each and every human collectivity was a unique entity—and uniquely valuable. Human difference was as worthy of study and respect, and could be as morally instructive, as human likeness.

This idea has been given various names, among them historicism, particularism, and relativism. Herder did not invent it out of whole cloth; parts of it were actually derived from the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the *philosophes*, who were among the most ardent upholders of Enlightenment and its gospel of universality. But the specific emphases Herder gave his eclectic intellectual compound, and the consequences he drew from it, mark his thinking as particularly romantic, and particularly German. Through him, paradoxically enough, aspects of German particularist thinking became universal. They provided the necessary philosophical foundation for all nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalist thought.

It seems only natural and right that human particularity and diversity should have appeared natural and right to a German thinker. The German-speaking lands were then, and to some extent remain even now, a political and religious crazy quilt. And the idea of valuing particularity and diversity arose in reaction to the universalist, Enlightened assumption that progress lay in political consolidation and uniformity. To a French thinker, the politically fragmented German scene looked not only backward but weak; and shortly after Herder's death Napoleon would prove the point by force of arms. Herder's particularism and the German nationalism that grew out of it were in part an expression of resentment against French condescension, to say nothing of the French military threat.

Looking for the bedrock of irreducible human difference, Herder fastened on language. In his influential tract *Über den Ursprung der Sprache* (“On the origin of language,” 1772), he argued that without language a human being

would not be human. But language could only be learned socially, that is, in a community. Thus human singularity had its limits. A human was human only in the society of other humans, and the natural definer of societies was language. Since there could be no thought without language, it followed that human thought, too, was a social or community product—neither wholly individual nor wholly universal. Thus to view humanity only as a totality was to miss the very specifics that made people human. These were to be sought in language communities, each of which (since it had its own language) had its own characteristic mode of thought, its own essential personality.

An Enlightened thinker might conclude that each language was merely a particular way of expressing universal truths. Herder insisted, rather, that each language manifested or (to put it biblically) revealed unique values and ideas that constituted each language community's specific contribution to the treasury of world culture. Moreover (and this was the most subversive part of all), since there is no general or a priori scale against which particular languages can be measured, no language, hence no language community, can be held to be superior or inferior to any other.

When the concept of language is extended to cover other aspects of learned behavior or expressive culture—customs, dress, art—those aspects will be seen as essential constituents of a precious collective spirit or personality. That spirit embodies a truth separate from but equal to the truths embodied by all other spirits. In such thinking the concept of “authenticity”—faithfulness to one's essential spirit—was born. It became an explicit goal of the arts, not just their inherent nature, to express the specific truth of the community they served.

These ideas put an entirely new complexion on the whole concept of folklore. Until the late eighteenth century, folklore, or local vernacular culture, was associated chiefly with the peasantry, and was therefore assigned a low cultural or intellectual prestige. Now folklore was seen as embodying the essential authentic wisdom of a language community or *nation*. Its cultural stock soared. It was zealously collected and studied, both for the sake of defining national characteristics and for the sake of comparing them. The brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, philologists (students of language) by training, compiled their epoch-making collections of folktales (*Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, “Children's and household tales,” 2 vols, 1812–15) under the direct influence of Herder's teachings. They followed up on these with an even more ambitious two-volume collection of German folk myths and legends, *Deutsche Sagen* (“German sagas,” 1816–18). By the middle of the nineteenth century their efforts had been duplicated in almost every European country.

The great explosion of published folklore and its artistic imitations did a great deal to enhance the national consciousness of all peoples, but especially those in two categories: localized minority populations (like the Latvians or Letts, the original object of Herder's collecting interest) whose languages were not spoken across political boundaries, and (at the opposite extreme) large, politically divided groups like the Germans, whose languages were widely dispersed across many borders. The boundary between the collected and the created, or between the discovered and the invented, was at first a soft one, easily traversed. It was not always possible to distinguish between what was collected from the folk and what was contributed by the editors, most of whom were poets as well as scholars, and did not distinguish rigorously between artistic and scholarly practice.

The most illustrative case was that of the *Kalevala* (“Land of heroes”), the national epic of the Finns, who in the early nineteenth century lived under Swedish and, later, Russian rule. First published in 1835, it was based on lore collected from the mouths of peasants but then heavily edited and organized into a single coherent narrative by its compiler, the poet Elias Lönnrot (1802–84). It never existed in antiquity in the imposing form in which it was published, and which served to imbue the modern Finns—that is, the urban, educated, cosmopolitan classes of Finnish society—with a sense of kinship and national cohesion. Nor do the ironies stop there. The distinctively incantatory trochaic meter of the poem (the result of the particular accentual patterns of the Finnish language), when translated into English, provided the model for Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha* (1855), which purported to provide the United States of America, a country of mixed ethnicity and less than a century old, with a sort of borrowed national epic that would lend it a borrowed sense of cultural independence from Europe.

In the area that concerns us most directly, Herder himself made one of the earliest fundamental contributions, with his enormous comparative anthology of folk songs from all countries, *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (“Voices of the peoples in Songs,” 2 vols., 1778–79). In it, he actually coined the term *Volkslied* (folk song), now universally used to denote what had formerly been called a “simple” or “rustic” or “peasant” song. His collection was followed, and so far as Germany was concerned superseded, by the greatest of all German folk song anthologies, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (“The youth's magic horn”), brought out by the poets Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano in three volumes between 1807 and 1808. Verses from this book, which contained no original melodies, continued to be set

as lieder by German composers throughout the century and far beyond.

In some ways this “discovery of the folk” was a mere recycling of an ancient idea, that of “primitivism,” the belief that the qualities of technologically backward or chronologically early cultures are superior to those of contemporary civilization, or more generally, that it is those things that are least socialized, least civilized—children, peasants, “savages,” raw emotion, plain speech—that are closest to truth. The most recent and dogmatic upholder of primitivistic ideas had been Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose *Social Contract* begins with the unforgettable declaration that “man was born free and is everywhere in chains.” No one had ever more effectively asserted the superiority of unspoiled “nature” over decadent “culture.”

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

KULTUR

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Volkstümlichkeit

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

But the Herder/Grimm phase did contain a new wrinkle, namely the idea that the superior truth of unspoiled natural man was a plural truth. The next step in the romantic nationalist program was to determine and define the specific truth embodied in each cultural community. Here is where the motivating resentment or inferiority complex finally began to break the surface of German nationalism. Not surprisingly, the values celebrated in the German tales—the “Prince Charming” values of honesty, seriousness, simplicity, fidelity, sincerity, and so on—were projected onto the German language community, which in its political fragmentation, economic backwardness, and military weakness (its primitiveness, in short) represented a sort of peasantry among peoples, with all that that had come to imply as to authenticity. It alone valued *das rein Geistige*, “the purely spiritual,” or *das Innige*, “the inward,” as opposed to the superficiality, the amorality, the craftiness and artifice of contemporary civilization, as chiefly represented by the hated oppressor empire, France.

The word “culture” itself—or rather *Kultur*, to incorporate the special resonance the word had for the Germans—began to symbolize the values through which the German romantics set themselves apart from other peoples. As the German social historian Norbert Elias has put it,

The concept of *Kultur* mirrors the self-consciousness of a nation which had constantly to seek out and constitute its boundaries anew, in a political as well as a spiritual sense, and again and again had to ask itself: “What really is our identity?” The orientation of the German concept of culture, with its tendency toward demarcation and the emphasis on and detailing of differences between groups, corresponds to this historical process.¹

The answer to the question “What is German?” (*Was ist deutsch?*) arose most clearly in the romantic lied, a genre that was inspired, one is tempted to say, by that burning question of national identity. In the light of contemporary philosophy and politics (and the links between them), the mission of the lied to unite the “I” and the “We” takes on a newly clarified sense of purpose.

The rediscovery of the folk and the consequent fever of collecting had an enormous impact on German poetry as well as the music to which it was set. Many poets, led by Goethe (a close friend, as it happens, of Herder's), began writing in a calculatedly *volkstümlich* style so as to capture some of the forgotten wisdom that *das Volk* had conserved through the ages of cosmopolitanism, hyperliteracy, and Enlightenment. It was a neat switch on the concept of “the Dark Ages.” The dark, especially in its natural forest habitat, was in its mystery and intuitive “second sight” now deemed light's superior as teacher of *lore*—that is, nation-specific, orally transmitted, traditional knowledge.

Notes:

(1) Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners*, trans. E. Jephcott; quoted in Sanna Pederson, “On the Task of the Music Historian: The Myth of the Symphony after Beethoven,” *Repercussions* II, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 13.

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Romanticism

The Romantic lied

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Ballad

LYRICS AND NARRATIVES

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Volkstümlichkeit

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The imitation folk poetry of German romanticism came in two main formal types: lyrics and narratives. The lyrics were often cast as “dance songs” that resemble the stanza-and-refrain forms used in medieval poetry, and not by accident: next to contemporary “folk” or oral culture, the expressive culture of medieval times, precisely because they were the Dark Ages, was newly valued by romantics as a storehouse of unsullied lore.

Goethe's most famous song-with-refrain, owing to the large number of musical settings it attracted, was *Heidenröslein* (“Heath rose”), one of his earliest lyrics, first published in 1773. It was reissued in 1794 in a book of *Lyrischen Gedichte* (poems for music) set by his musical collaborator Johann Friedrich Reichardt (1752–1814), the first great figure in the history of the lied, with more than fifteen hundred to his credit (Ex. 3-2). The text, a sustained metaphor for the “deflowering” of a maiden, consists in fact of a narrative; but the actual narrative genre (a matter of form as well as content) was something else:

Sah ein Knab' ein Röslein stehn,	A boy saw a rose growing,
Röslein auf der Heiden,	a rose upon the heath.
war so jung und morgenschön,	It was so young and morning-fresh,
lief er schnell, es nah zu sehn,	he quickly ran to look at it up close.
sah's mit vielen Freuden.	He looked at it with much joy.
Röslein, Röslein, Röslein rot,	Rose, rose, red rose,
Röslein auf der Heiden.	Rose upon the heath.
Knabe sprach: Ich breche dich,	The boy said, I'll pluck you,
Röslein auf der Heiden!	Rose upon the heath!
Röslein sprach: Ich steche dich,	The rose said, I'll prick you
dass du ewig denkst an mich,	so that you'll always think of me,
und ich will's nicht leiden.	for I won't suffer it.
Röslein, etc.	Rose, etc.
Und der wilde Knabe brach	And the savage boy picked
's Röslein auf der heiden;	the rose upon the heath;

Röslein wehrte sich und stach, the rose, defending itself, pricked away,
 half ihr doch kein Weh und Ach, but its aches and pains availed it not;
 musst' es eben leiden. it had to suffer all the same.

Röslein, etc.

Rose, etc.

Lebhaft

1. Sah' ein Knab' ein Rös - lein stehn, Rös - lein auf der Hei - den,
 2. Kna - be sprach: ich bre - che dich, Rös - lein auf der Hei - den!
 3. Und der wil - de Kna - be brach's Rös - lein auf der Hei - den;

war so jung und mor - gen - schön, lief er schnell es
 Rös - lein sprach: ich ste - che dich, daß du e - wig
 Rös - lein wehr - te sich und stach, half ihm doch kein

nah zu sehn, sah's mit vie - len Freu - den. Rös - lein, Rös - lein,
 denkst an mich, und ich wills nicht lei - den. Rös - lein, Rös - lein,
 Weh und Ach, muß' es e - ben lei - den. Rös - lein, Rös - lein,

Rös - lein rot, Rös - lein auf der Hei - den.
 Rös - lein rot, Rös - lein auf der Hei - den.
 Rös - lein rot, Rös - lein auf der Hei - den.

ex. 3-2 J. F. Reichardt, *Heidenröslein*

The change from setting neoclassical or “Anacreontic” verses, as in Ex. 3-1, to setting *volkstümlich* poetry like this produced the mature German romantic lied. The change is often described as one between two generations of composers, or between a first and a second “Berlin song school.” The real change, however, was in the nature of the words they set.

The main narrative genre of *volkstümlich* romantic poetry was called the *ballad*, another term with medieval (or pseudo-medieval) roots: compare the Italian *ballata* or its prototype, the *balada* of the troubadours (called *chanson balladé* in northern France). The German term obviously reflects a faulty etymology, since a *chanson balladé* is, quite literally, a “danced song” rather than a narrative. The Germans were not responsible for the mix-up, however; the term *ballad* was first used in England, as early as the fourteenth century, to designate a sung narrative poem, often one that included dramatic dialogue between humans and supernatural beings, and that typically ended in disaster.

As a folk genre the ballad flourished mainly in the British Isles and Scandinavia, lands of mist and frost that fascinated the German romantics. The earliest German romantic ballads were in fact translations from English and Scandinavian originals—or rather, imitations of Herder's translations in his *Volkslieder*—and had no “true” German folk prototype at all. In this they resembled the *Kalevala*: they were contemporary creations manufactured to supply a desired ancient heritage. Far and away the most famous German ballad of this kind was Goethe's *Erlkönig* (“The elf king”), written hard on the heels of Herder in 1782 and first published as part of a singspiel libretto called *Die Fischerin* (“The fisherman's wife”). It achieved fame when republished, again in a setting by Reichardt, in the *Lyrischen Gedichte* of 1794 (Ex. 3-3 shows the grisly end):

Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind?	Who rides so late through night and wind?
Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind:	It is the father with his child.
er hat den Knaben wohl in dem Arm,	He holds the boy in his arms,
er fasst ihn sicher, er hält ihn warm.	he clasps him firmly, he keeps him warm.
—Mein Sohn, was birgst du so bang dein Gesicht?	“My son, why do you hide your face so fearfully?”
—Siehst, Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht?	“Father, don't you see the Elf King?
Den Erlenkönig mit Kron' und Schweif?	The Elf King with his crown and train?”
—Mein Sohn, es ist ein Nebelstreif.	“My son, it is a patch of mist.”
“Du liebes Kind, komm, geh mit mir!	“Come dear child, go with me!
Gar schöne Spiele spiel ich mit dir;	I will play beautiful games with you;
manch' bunte Blumen sind an dem Strand;	many are the bright flowers on the shore,
meine Mutter hat manch' gülden Gewand.”	my mother has many robes of gold.”
—Mein Vater, mein Vater, und hörest du nicht,	“My father, my father, and do you not hear
was Erlenkönig mir leise verspricht?	what the Elf King softly promises me?”
—Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind:	“Be calm, keep calm, my child:
in dürren Blättern säuselt der Wind.	in dry leaves the wind is rustling.”
“Willst, feiner Knabe, du mit mir gehn?	“Will you go with me, brave boy?
Meine Töchter sollen dich warten schön;	My daughters shall tend you nicely.

Meine Töchter führen den nächtlichen Reihn und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich ein.”	My daughters will lead the dancing each night and will lull and dance and sing for you.”
—Mein Vater, mein Vater, und siehst du nicht dort Erlkönigs Töchter am düstern Ort?	“My father, my father, don't you see over there the Elf King's daughters in that deserted spot?”
—Mein Sohn, mein Sohn, ich seh es genau: es scheinen die alten Weiden so grau.	“My son, my son, I see it perfectly, the old willows look so gray.”
“Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöne Gestalt; und bist du nicht willig, so brauch ich Gewalt.”	“I love you, I am charmed by your good looks, and if you are not willing, I shall have to use force.”
—Mein Vater, mein Vater, jetzt fasst er mich an! Erlkönig hat mir ein Leids getan!	“My father, my father, he's clutching me now! The Elf King has hurt me!”
Dem Vater grauset's, er reitet geschwind, er hält in den Armen das ächzende Kind, erreicht den Hof mit Müh' und Not: in seinen Armen das Kind war tot.	The father shudders, he rides apace; in his arms he holds the groaning child. Sweating and straining he reaches the courtyard; in his arms the child lay dead.

Though very elaborately and effectively disguised with specifically Germanic and romantic surface features, Goethe's pseudo-folkish ballad belongs to an ancient mythological tradition with origins going back at least as far as the Greeks: the “siren song” or song of fatal seduction, usually addressed by supernatural women to natural men, and most often given a maritime setting, as in the *Odyssey* (or in the form of another German romantic nature being, the *Lorelei* or Rhine mermaid). Goethe's immediate model was Herder's translation of a Danish folk ballad in which Herr Oluf, a knight, riding at night to summon guests to his wedding, meets up not with the Elf King himself but with one of the Elf King's daughters, who tries to lure him in a lethal dance but, failing, mortally curses him along with his bride and mother.

pp
 „Ich lieb' dich, mich reizt dei - ne schö - ne Ge - stalt; und
coll' 8va.
pp
 bist du nicht wil - lig, so brauch' ich Ge - walt.' Mein
 Va - ter, mein Va - ter, jetzt faße er mich an! Erl - kö - nig
 hat mir ein Leids ge - tan! Dem Va - ter grau - set's, er
p coll' 8va.
 rei - tet ge - schwind, er hält in Ar - men das äch - zen - de
 Kind, er - reicht den Hof mit Mü - he und Not; in
 sei - nen Ar - men das Kind war rot.

ex. 3-3 J. F. Reichardt, *Erlkönig*, ending



fig. 3-1 Moritz von Schwind, *Erlkönig*.

Goethe's variation ostensibly removes the element of sexual allure (but perhaps only succeeds in displacing it interestingly), while surrounding the horse and rider with a whole syllabus of Germanic nature mythology, according to which the forest harbors a nocturnal spirit world, invisible to the fully mature and civilized father, but terrifyingly apparent to his unspoiled son. The father thinks he "sees perfectly" and is in control of things. He is powerless, however, against the spirits, who flaunt their ascendancy by taking the child. Thus the romantically nostalgic or neoprimitivist themes of hidden reality, invisible truth, the superiority of nature over culture (in none of which, incidentally, did Goethe really believe) are clothed in the imagery and diction of folklore to lend them supreme authority.

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Carl Friedrich Zelter

Lied: c1740–c1800

THE LIED GROWS UP: HAYDN, MOZART, BEETHOVEN

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Volkstümlichkeit

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Until the end of the eighteenth century, and even a bit beyond, the lied was considered a lowly genre, the province of “specialist” composers (i.e., hacks) like Reichardt and his “Second Berlin School” contemporaries Johann Abraham Peter Schulz (1747–1800) and Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758–1832), Goethe's favorite, who as director of the Berlin Singakademie played a leading part in the Bach revival, another manifestation of burgeoning German nationalism.

What Goethe liked about Zelter's settings was their modesty and true *Volkstümlichkeit*. (He broke with Reichardt a year after the *Lyrische Gedichte* were published because, as he put it, Reichardt had a “forward and impertinent nature” and thought himself Goethe's artistic equal.)² What he disliked in the settings of others (emphatically including Schubert) was the oversensitive, overcomplicated response to each successive line in a poem that “smothered” the words in musical artistry. Far from showing him musically insensitive, though, the fear shows how easily distracted (or to put it positively, how strongly attracted) Goethe was by music. He wrote to Zelter in 1809 that however wary he may have felt, as a poet, toward music carelessly applied, no lyric poem was complete without it. Only when set and sung, he wrote, is a poem's inspiration released into “the free and beautiful element of sensory experience.” In a wonderful formulation, he concluded that, when listening to beautiful words beautifully set and sung, “we think and feel at once, and are enraptured.”³

But the lied nevertheless remained a low-prestige affair, which is why Schubert's Viennese forebears, whose careers were oriented toward the aristocracy for support, cultivated it so little. Aristocracy, as ever, stood for cosmopolitan “civilization,” not particular *Kultur*. Between 1781 and 1803, Haydn composed no more than three dozen lieder with keyboard accompaniment in the style, more or less, of the “first” Berlin song school. (Compare that with fifteen “canzonettas” to English texts composed in London in 1794–95, and a walloping four hundred British folk song arrangements with obbligato strings, commissioned by publishers in London and Edinburgh.)

One of Haydn's most *volkstümlich* songs, though, has become exceedingly famous: *Gott, erhalte Franz den Kaiser!* (“God save the Emperor Franz!”), better known as the *Kaiserhymne* (“Emperor's hymn”), which with various words and at various times has seen duty as national anthem for three countries (Ex. 3-4). The first was Austria, from the year of its composition, 1797, until 1918, when the last Habsburg emperor (Karl I) was deposed. Next came Germany, from 1922 to 1950, sung to a poem by Hoffmann von Fallersleben that dates from 1841 and begins “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles” (“Germany above all else”). Since 1950 the melody has served the Federal Republic of Germany (“West Germany” until 1990), sung to the words “Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit” (“Unity, Justice, and Freedom”).

Haydn's hymn was composed under the inspiration of “God Save the King,” the earliest of all national anthems in the modern sense (first used in 1745 but, like the British “unwritten constitution,” never formally adopted). Equally to the point, it was composed in direct “rebuttal” to *La Marseillaise*, the French revolutionary hymn that was officially adopted as the anthem of the Directory government in 1795 and has been in continuous use ever since. True, Haydn's hymn celebrated an imperial dynasty rather than a nation in the modern sense. But the concept of nationhood had developed by the late 1790s to the point where the “folklike” style was the only way one could embody a national sentiment that aspired to cross-cut all social classes. Later, in a gesture that found a number of echoes, as we have seen, in Schubert, Haydn cast the slow movement of his Quartet in C major, op. 76, no. 3, as a set of variations on “Gott, erhalte Franz den Kaiser!” so that the quartet is now known as the “Emperor” Quartet.

Mozart, who composed some sixty freestanding (or “insert”) arias with orchestra (all but five in Italian, the operatic lingua franca), left only half that many songs with keyboard accompaniment (all but four in German, his native tongue). One, at least, is a masterpiece—or so Goethe thought. The text of *Das Veilchen* (“The little violet”), Mozart's only Goethe setting (composed around 1785), was extracted, like *Erkönig*, from a singspiel libretto (*Erwin und Elmire*, 1775). Curiously reversing the sexual roles in *Heidenröslein*, the flower is cast this time as the spurned male lover, trampled underfoot.

Langsam.

Gott er - hal - te Franz den Kai - ser, un - sern gu - ten Kai - ser Franz!
Lan - ge le - be Franz der Kai - ser. in des Glü - ckes hell - stem Glanz!

Ihm er - blü - en Lor - beer - rei - ser, wo er geht zum Eh - ren - kranz!

Gott er - hal - te Franz den Kai - ser Un - sern gu - ten Kai - ser. Franz!

ex. 3-4 Joseph Haydn, *Kaiserhymne* (*Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser!*)

Mozart's setting sports an appropriately *volkstümlich* opening theme, first given by the piano in the form of a ritornello, then repeated by the voice; and it makes some nicely restrained illustrative use of the piano (to paint, for example, the maiden's “carefree step”). But it is really a miniaturized aria, with an opening section that modulates to the dominant, a middle section in the parallel minor with a poignant far-out point on \flat VI, and a return to the original key “doubled” by a final thematic and textual reference (Mozart's idea!) to the opening stanza for the sake of a proper da capo closure.

Beethoven's involvement with the lied was about as deep as Mozart's: in a composing career that lasted twice as long, he composed about twice as many lieder (not counting 168 purely mercenary folk song arrangements, mostly at the instigation of the same British publishers who tempted Haydn). His song output does contain one major work, however: *An die ferne Geliebte* (“To the distant beloved”), op. 98, completed in 1816 and published with a dedication to his patron, Prince Lobkowitz. Rather than a single song, it is a set of six, all linked by composed transitions and ending with a thematic recollection of the first, thanks to which it bears the subtitle *Liederkreis*, literally a “circle of songs.” In English the term is *song cycle*.

Beethoven's, though not quite the first, is the earliest song cycle to survive in active repertory. The cyclic idea seems originally to have been an English one, as befits the land where the modern novel had its birth. For at its most elaborate a song cycle could be compared with a novel in songs, just as the earliest English novels, like Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), were cast in the form of letters—discrete utterances between which the reader or listener was left to infer the connections that produced the plot.

The poems Beethoven set, by Alois Jeitteles, an obscure Jewish medical student in Vienna (later a famous physician), interweave nature imagery with personal pathos. There is a lot of rustic imagery in the music—echoes off the mountainside, birdsong, and the like. Though written out for the sake of the changing, often illustrative accompaniments, the individual songs conform (allowing for a bit of ornamental variation) to the stanzaic (or “atrophic”) structure of folk songs, with a single melody repeated for every verse unit.

Beethoven's songs, in other words, are still *Lieder im Volkston* or *volkstümliche Lieder* (folklike songs) but with a much stronger admixture of personal sentiment than we have seen in previous lieder. Song no. 2, the most rustic in the set, also has the most “pathetic” harmonies where the text refers to “inner pain.” The very fluid tempo also serves to instill a sense of subjective sentiment into the music. Even when not specified by the composer, a fluctuating tempo, called *tempo rubato* or “stolen time,” suggesting spontaneity of feeling, would become an essential component of “romantic” performing style.

Joseph Kerman has pointed out that “the lied grew up in reaction to the ‘art music’ of Italian opera, cantata, and canzonet,” just as the *Kultur* of German romanticism was a reaction to the artifices of “civilization.” Therefore, he adds, the English term “art song,” which is sometimes used as a translation for “lied,” is “miserably confusing.”⁴ But Beethoven succeeded, while maintaining the unaffected “natural” tone without which lieder are not lieder, in reweighting the scales on the side of art. With him, art and nature, craft and spontaneity, are brought into a more traditional equilibrium. Not surprisingly, Goethe hated his songs; Beethoven was the “smotherer” supreme.

Ex. 3-5 samples the first, second, and last songs from *An die ferne Geliebte*, including the transition into no. 6 as a reminder that the individual songs are connected by the piano. The general style is not all that far removed from that of Reichardt: indeed, the middle stanza of the second song (Ex. 3-5b), in which the voice chants a monotone while the piano takes over the tune, was probably modeled on Reichardt's effective (hence widely imitated) “transcription” of the Elf King's insinuating whisper in Ex. 3-3. Like Mozart, Beethoven tampered with the ending of the text, planting a “pre-echo” of the final lines at the end of the first song so that the cycle can “come full circle” with wistful hopes of vicarious union through shared song.

The ending of the cycle resonates powerfully, of course, with Beethoven's well-publicized loneliness, well known to every listener. Here the composer's “I” decisively preempts the traditional “We,” but forges a new We (and, in its subjective sentimentality, an equally German one) by enlisting the listener's sympathy. And yet it is still important, whenever biographical resonances impinge on the way we interpret romantic art, to distinguish the “persona” embodied in the art from the person who lived the life. From what we know of his life, the actual Beethoven (as often observed) sang most readily “to the *safely* distant beloved.” The da capo effect that unifies the cycle operates on several levels. There is the literal musical quotation at the end (where, ironically, it is actually the poet who is “quoting” the extra stanza that the composer had planted earlier, not that a listener would know), which involves a change of meter and tempo (Ex. 3-5d). And there is a coda suffused with motivic reminiscences, culminating in a striking reminiscence of the first phrase in the final cadence, forcing one last poignant retrospect. But upon examination, the main tune of the sixth song turns out to be a variation of the opening melody in anticipation of its literal return. It retains the contour up to E \flat , down to F, and up again to C (see Ex. 3-5e).

Ziemlich langsam und mit Ausdruck

Auf dem Hü - gel sitz' ich spä - bend in das blau - e Ne - bel
land nach den fer - nen Trif - ten se - hend, wo ich dich, Ge - lieb - te, fand.

ex. 3-5a Ludwig van Beethoven, *An die ferne Geliebte*, no. 1, mm. 1-9

Dort im ru - higen Thal schweigen Schmer - zen und Qual. Wo im Ge - stein still die

Nach und nach
stringendo

Pri - mel dort sinnt, webt so lei - se der Wind, möch - te ich sein! möch - te ich sein!

pp *pp* *pp* *pp* *pp*

ex. 3-5b Ludwig van Beethoven, *An die ferne Geliebte*, no. 2, middle stanza

Andante con moto, cantabile.

Nimm sie bin denn, die - se Lie - der, die ich dir, Ge - lieb - te, sang.

sin - ge sie dann A - bends wie - der zu der Lau - te sü - ssem Klang!

ex. 3-5c Ludwig van Beethoven, *An die ferne Geliebte*, no. 6, mm. 1-16

Allegro molto e con brio.

und ein lie - bend Herz er - rei - chet, was ein

lie - bend, ein lie - bend, ein lie - bend Herz ge - weiht!

p

cresc.

p

ex. 3-5d Ludwig van Beethoven, *An die ferne Geliebte*, cyclic return

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Franz Schubert

Lied: Schubert

SCHUBERT AND ROMANTIC IRONY

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Volkstümlichkeit

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Yet for all the structural excellence and expressivity of *An die ferne Geliebte*, the lied remained for Beethoven a minor genre. The first major composer for whom it was a major genre—hence the composer through whom the lied became a major (and an indispensable) genre in any history of European “art” music—was Schubert, as already implied in the previous chapter. A full understanding of Schubert’s romanticism is impossible without understanding how his lieder newly negotiated the relationship of “I” and “We.”

In investigating them, we shall reencounter many of the same devices (particularly harmonic devices) that we have already associated with the subjective and spiritual side of romanticism, only this time they will be approached by way of *Volkstümlichkeit*. To attempt to assign priority here—to decide whether Schubert’s songs “influenced” his instrumental music or the other way around—would be fruitless, and it would miss the point. Take, for a first example, *Lachen und Weinen* (Ex. 3-6), composed in 1823 to a poem by Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866). In overall form and character it is simple, sincere, and as *volkstümlich* as you please, but the antithesis at the heart of the poem—“Laughing and Crying,” apparently unmotivated but of course motivated by love—is expressed by artful modal mixtures of a kind that eventually became absolutely basic to Schubert’s harmonic idiom. Compare, for example, the beginnings of the exposition (Ex. 3-7a) and recapitulation (Ex. 3-7b) in the first movement of the G-major String Quartet, which we already know to be one of Schubert’s harmonically most adventurous compositions.

Mor - gens lacht' ich vor Lust,

und wa - rum ich mir wei - ße bei des Abendes Schei - ne
 ist mir selb nicht be - wußt, ist mir selb nicht be - wußt.
 A - bends weinf ich vor Schmerz,
 und wa - rum da er - wachen kannst am Mor - gen mit La - chen,
 muß ich dich fra - gen, o Herz, muß ich dich fra - gen, o Herz.

decres. *dimen.*

a tempo

a tempo

cresc. *f*

ex. 3-6 Franz Schubert, *Lachen und Weinen*, D. 777

a. Allegro molto moderato.

Vln. I. *p* *f* *ff* *p*

Vln. II. *p* *f* *ff* *p*

Vla. *p* *f* *ff* *p*

Vc. *ff*

p *f* *ff* *p*

p *f* *ff* *p*

p *f* *ff* *p*

f *ff*

b.

pizz. *p* *arco* *p* *pp*

arco *pp* *arco* *p* *pp*

arco *pp* *arco* *p* *pp*

pizz. *p* *arco* *p*

ex. 3-7a Franz Schubert, Quartet in G, D. 887, I, mm. 1-10

pizz. *arco* *p*

arco *p*

arco *p*

pizz. *arco* *p*

ex. 3-7b Franz Schubert, Quartet in G, D. 887, I, analogous spot in recap

The quartet shows the same reversal as the song: the initial switch from major to minor comes back as minor-to-major. Nor is the switch in either case just a static exchange. The initial mode switch in the song sends the melody off into an asymmetrical pair of phrases that include an “affective” dominant-ninth chord and an “entranced” flat submediant. The corresponding reversed switch in the second half of the song sends the melody off into an equally asymmetrical phrase that cadences on the subdominant, approached by a “V of IV” that thoroughly destabilizes the tonic. At these points subjectivity (the “I”) comes graphically to the fore, but in a way that can only be appreciated in dialectical, even ironic opposition to the folkish “We” with which each stanza begins (and ends). When absorbed into the “absolute” medium of the string quartet, these effects retain their expressive potency, but are no longer limited in their connotation to the simple emotional opposites defined by the poem.

Or take the opening of “Am Meer” (“By the sea”), a song composed for the *Schwanengesang* collection in 1828 to words by Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), the most outlandishly subjective and ironic of all romantic poets (Ex. 3-8a); or else take the opening of *Die Allmacht* (“The Almighty”), a majestic hymn composed in 1825 to words by the composer's friend Johann Ladislaus Pyrker (Ex. 3-8b). These songs give off an aura of the sublime—in Wordsworth's unimprovable lines, “The sense of God, or whatsoe'er is dim/Or vast in its own being”⁵—obtained by juxtaposing the tonic in brusque unruly fashion with chromatic chords of a kind that normally precede the dominant.

Approached this way, such chords, in the words of the famous music theorist Heinrich Schenker, “plunge into the very midst of spiritual experience.”⁶ Indeed, in “Am Meer,” a song of truly bizarre imagery (the lover's tears, a metaphor for sexual intercourse, when imbibed become a deadly soul poison), the uncanny chord comes first, so that the song begins with a shiver of uncanny subjectivity. It evokes or exposes *Innigkeit* in a spectacularly violent way, suggesting (in Kerman's words now) “everything in the world that is inward, sentient, and arcane.”⁷ More literally, perhaps, but also more chillingly, the unprepared augmented sixth chord in *Am Meer* might seem to symbolize the poisoned kiss itself.

Without the eccentric context provided by the poem, one thinks, such a progression could have no meaning at all. But then one hears the very opening of the Quintet in C major (Ex. 3-8c), composed the same year as “Am Meer,” and one has to think again. The same kind of uncanny juxtaposition materializes—even uncannier, because the diminished seventh proceeds not to the dominant, as in *Die Allmacht*, but circles right back to the tonic, the oscillations of E and E ♭ hair-raisingly evoking modal mixture of the most destabilizing kind, with all its emotional implications intact. Yet it materializes in an imaginatively open-ended context, all the more arcane for its being wordless.

In which context did such arcane eloquence originate? Impossible—tantalizingly, blessedly impossible—to say. The combination of an extreme subjective expressive immediacy and an unspecified or “objectless” context is what gave rise to the sublime romantic notion of “absolute music”—one of the most potent, but also one of the most widely misunderstood, of all romantic concepts. Schubert's opening gesture in the quintet, more vividly than almost any other single idea that could be quoted in an example, gives an inkling of what one later composer (Richard Wagner) would mean when he spoke of music as “saying the unsayable,”⁸ or what another later composer (Felix Mendelssohn) would mean when he said that the meaning of music is not too indefinite for translation into words, but far too definite.⁹

Molto lento.

Voice

Be - fore us glanc'd the wide - spread sea, With
 Das Meer er - glänz - te weit hin - aus im

Piano

p *pp*

eve's last rays in - vest - ed, We sat in the des - o - late
 letz - ten A - bend - schei - ne, wir sa - ssen am ein - sa - men

fish - ing hut A - lone, and si - lent - ly rest - ed.
 Fi - scher - haus, wir sa - ssen stumm und al - lei - ne.

pp

ex. 3-8a Franz Schubert, *Schwanengesang*, opening of “Am Meer”

What these admittedly extreme examples also show is that by the end of his career, Schubert no longer distinguished between the possibilities of the lied and those of the more “artistic” genres against which the lied, as Kerman reminds us, had originally rebelled. This is not to say that Schubert did not share the general views of his time where the relative importance of genres was concerned. One of his most frequently quoted letters is the one to his friend Franz von Schober (30 November 1823) in which, with reference to the song cycle *Die schöne Müllerin* (“The beautiful miller maid”), now regarded as one of his masterpieces, he complained that “since my opera I have composed nothing but a few songs to Müller.”¹⁰ (The poet of the cycle, Wilhelm Müller, was probably moved to write it by the implied pun on his own name, which means “miller.”) The opera (*Fierabras*) has been forgotten, but at the time it seemed to Schubert the more important work by far.

Langsam, feierlich.

Singstimme.

Pianoforte.

p *ff* *p*

cresc. *f* *p*

Gross ist Je - ho - vah, der Herr, denn Him - mel und

Er - de ver - kün - den sei - ne Macht,

ex. 3-8b Franz Schubert, opening of *Die Allmacht*

Allegro ma non troppo

ex. 3-8c Franz Schubert, opening of Quintet in C

Still, there was nothing in the realm of harmonic invention, formal experiment, psychological nuance or even keyboard virtuosity, that was “too good” for a Schubert lied—with one conspicuous exception. Vocal (or “operatic”) floridity remained forbidden to the genre. Occasional cadential ornaments aside, there is never a hint of coloratura. On the rare occasions where Schubert allots more than two notes to a syllable of text, it is almost always for the sake of invoking some “preverbal” form of vocal expression—like the moan of pain that accompanies the word “Weh” (woe) in “Wasserfluth” (“The water current”), the fifth song in that gloomiest of song cycles, *Die Winterreise* (Ex. 3-9). The basic vocal idiom is always that of the *Volksweise* (folk tune), the “natural” music representing the “We,” inflected by eccentric details of melody, harmony, or accompaniment that at extreme moments allow the “I” to intrude.

Lento

Piano

1. Man - y a tear - drop slow - ly sink - ing From my eyes has wet - the
 2. Snow, thou know - est well - my yearn - ing, Tell me, whith - er dost - thou

1. Man - che Thrän' aus mei - nen Au - gen ist ge - fal - len in - den
 2. Schnee, du weisst von mei - nem Sch - nen, sag', wo - hin dort geht - dein

snow, Chill and ea - ger flakes are drink - ing
 go? Fol - low where my tears are turn - ing,
 Schnee, Sei - ne kal - ten Flo - cken sau - gen
 Lauf? Fol - ge nur nach mei - nen Thrä - nen,

From its fount my burn - ing woe, _____ From its fount my burn - ing
 To the brook thou soon shalt flow, _____ To the brook thou soon shalt
 dur - stig ein das hei - sse Weh, _____ dur - stig ein - das hei - sse
 nimmt dich bald das Bäch - lein auf, _____ nimmt dich bald das Bäch - lein

woe.
 flow.
 Weh.
 auf.

ex. 3-9 Franz Schubert, “Wasserfluth” (from *Die Winterreise*, no. 5), mm. 1-14

The only exceptions to this rule are for the sake of irony, a sake that can justify the suspension of any rule. Irony—saying one thing and meaning another—is sometimes regarded (especially by poets who specialize in it) as being somehow inaccessible to music. W. H. Auden, one of the great poets of the twentieth century, writing in collaboration with Chester Kallman, once permitted himself to assert that

since music, generally speaking, can express only one thing at a time, it is ill adapted to verses which express mixed or ambiguous feelings, and prefers poems which either express one emotional state or successively contrast two states.¹¹

Beginning with Schubert, though, there is scarcely a composer of song (or opera) who did not contradict this blunt dictum on practically every page, for irony (with its stronger relative, sarcasm) is one of the romantic artist's most indispensable tools. Even if Auden and Kallman's basic premise were true, that music “can express only one thing at a time,” music in conjunction with a text can easily express “mixed or ambiguous feelings,” or downright contradictory ones, with breathtaking and often heartrending effect. But of course we have already seen that Auden and Kallman's basic premise is untrue. Just recall all the harmonic “puns” encountered in the previous chapter—for example between the dominant-seventh chord, which resolves straightforwardly by fifth progression, and the “German sixth,” which resolves obliquely by half step—and the ways in which Schubert is able to exploit such ambivalences in order to express an enormous range of ambiguous feelings even in the absence of words.

In “Der Müller und der Bach” (“The miller and the brook”), the next-to-last song in *Die schöne Müllerin*, irony works on a number of levels that together make this ostensibly pretty song an agonizing heartbreaker. This cycle is an especially “novelistic” one. It follows one of the stereotypical novel plots: boy meets girl; boy gets girl; boy loses girl to a rival. The denouement is tragic: thwarted in love, the hero kills himself; and “The Miller and the Brook” records the very moment when the fatal decision is made.

Like Goethe's *Erkönig*, the poem features the folkloric device of nature-made-animate: the journeyman miller and the brook engage in a dialogue. Only this time the device is not “naive.” The poet does not affect belief in the reality

of the brook's voice; it is clearly delusional, turning the song into a typically novelistic interior dialogue. That is the first, purely textual, irony. The second irony consists in the unusually florid (=“pretty”) style of the setting, with its decorative melodic curlicues at cadences that do not always carry particularly charged words. Clearly, the youth is putting on tragic airs, at least at first (Ex. 3-10a).

The youth sings of his broken heart; the brook offers consolation (Ex. 3-10b), not only in its cheery babbling (the pianist's right hand!), but by a typical mode switch into the major. At the youth's reentry the mode switches back, but the brook's babbling continues: a synthesis. When the youth takes up the brook's major mode at the very last line, however, it marks no return to a solaced mood, but marks instead the moment at which his will to live is vanquished by his grief, which must find relief at any cost (Ex. 3-10c). And this, of course, is the third, most poignant irony. Comparison with *Lachen und Weinen* (Ex. 3-6) will drive the point home. In that song, as in “The Miller and the Brook” up to the last stanza, the mode symbolism is straightforward: major is happy, minor is sad. At the end of “The Miller and the Brook,” however, minor is sad and major is sadder. As before (for example, in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, discussed in chapter 1), as always, the irony comes about through a mastery of conventional codes that is so sure as to permit their idiosyncratic manipulation.

Mäßig

Der Müller

Wo ein treu-es Herz ze in Lie-be ver-

geht, da wel-ken die Li-lien auf je-dem Beet.

ex. 3-10a Franz Schubert, *Die schöne Müllerin*, “Der Müller und der Bach,” mm. 1-10

Der Bach

Und wenn sich die Lie-be dem Schmerz ent-ringt, ein Sternlein, ein neu-es, am
Him-mel er-blinkt, ein Sternlein, ein neu-es, am Him-mel er-blinkt.

ex. 3-10b Franz Schubert, *Die schöne Müllerin*, “Der Müller und der Bach,” mm. 29-40

Ach, un-ten, da un-ten, die küh-le Ruh! Ach, Bäch-lein, lie-bes Bächlein, so
sin-ge nur zu, ach, Bäch-lein, lie-bes Bächlein, so sin-ge nur zu.

ex. 3-10c Franz Schubert, *Die schöne Müllerin*, “Der Müller und der Bach,” mm. 71-82

That mastery of irony, coupled with an unparalleled capacity to find the psychological or “interior” dimension in the poems he put to music, set Schubert apart from his songwriting contemporaries from the very beginning of his songwriting career. At first, like most composers of *lieder*, he worked within the limits of the *volkstümlich* lyric as established by Goethe. Two of his early hits, both written during his teens, were settings of the very poems given above as Goethean models together with their settings by Reichardt.

Schubert's *Heidenröslein* and his *Erkönig* were both composed in 1815, when he was all of eighteen years old. They are a perennial classroom pair. The former illustrates the “strophic” type of setting favored by Goethe and his chosen

musicians, in which only a single model musical stanza is composed and reused, just as in a folk song, as many times as the poem has stanzas, fulfilling the romantic ideal of naturalness. The latter exemplifies the more artistic kind of setting that Goethe claimed to despise, in which the musical setting follows the poem's meaning rather than its form, proceeding straight through without regular internal repetitions, each verse inspiring its own musical counterpart. There is no good single term to cover this kind of setting, since as a type it is defined basically by what it does *not* do, namely set the text “strophically.” What it does do has to be separately described each time or else presented without comment, since part of the point of avoiding the strophic style was to make the setting *sui generis*—that is, constituting a class of its own. This, too, was a romantic ideal: Herder himself was obsessed with the notion of being *sui generis* to the point of inventing a German equivalent, *urwüchsig* (roughly, “growing from scratch”), from which he derived the rather monstrous abstract noun *Urwüchsigkeit* to define the quality of uniqueness that he valued above all. He applied these terms first of all to languages and language communities, of course, rather than to individuals. For *urwüchsig* lied settings “nonstrophic” would be as good (or bad) a term as any. What has in fact become standard is the equally clumsy and uninformative “through-composed,” a direct translation of the German *durchkomponiert*.

While it is customary to say that the strophic form is “natural” and the through-composed is “artistic” (and while we are following custom here), there is no reason why strophic settings could not be artistic in the highest degree. Schubert's *Heidenröslein* (Ex. 3-11) seems as natural (or “artless”) an imitation folk song as could be desired, distinguished above all by the memorable perkiness of its thrice-repeated strain. But Goethe's poem (see above) has a booby-trap in the form of an asymmetrical five-line stanza (rhyme-scheme ab/aab). Schubert found a wonderful solution to the problem of making the melody reflect the parallelism of the two unequal half verses and at the same time making the three-line group (terzet) as coherent a unit as the two-line group (couplet).

The couplet does what comes “naturally.” Its two lines each occupy two measures, and each of the four measures contains a single harmony, the whole describing a perfect cadence: . The “artistic” challenge comes with the terzet, where it becomes necessary to invent a three-stage harmonic design. First, by inflecting the C (the third of the ii chord) to C# on its second appearance (m. 6), Schubert turns it into a of V, a more restless harmony; next, by ending the second line of the terzet with a deceptive cadence (iii instead of V, the expected resolution), Schubert makes a third phrase (=line) necessary. Moreover, the five-line verse now ends with a half cadence on V, and it is left to the two-line refrain (mm. 11–14) to route the harmony back to the tonic. Thus the three cadences (couplet-terzet-refrain) together comprise an unshakably stable I-V-I progression, imparting a like shapeliness and stability to the stanza despite its asymmetry.

But now take an even closer look, at the placement of the harmonies not only with respect to one another, but also with respect to the words. In the second and the third stanzas (the ones supposedly left “to chance” or “to take care of themselves” in strophic settings), the tensest (most chromatic and dissonant) harmony—the “ of V”—coincides with the promise and then the delivery of the rose's painful retaliation (“Ich steche dich,” “... und stach”). Formal strategy and poetic meaning have thoroughly interpenetrated, as in only the most “artful” poems and songs. The eighteen-year-old Schubert was already a past master of art-concealing art.

Con tenerezza. (♩ = 69)

Sah ein Knab' ein Rös - lein... steh'n, Rös - lein auf der Hai - den,
 war so jung und mor' genschön, lief er schnell, es nah' zu... seh'n, sah's mit... vie - leu...
 Freu - den. Röslein, Rös - lein, Rös - lein... roth, Röslein auf der Hai - den.
 Kna - be sprach: 'ich bre - che... dich, Rös - lein auf der
 Hai - den! Rös - lein sprach: 'ich ste - che... dich, dass du e - wig denkst an... mich.

pp
ritard. *a tempo*
pp rit. *a tempo*
cresc.
cresc.

und ich... will's nicht lei - den. Röslein, Rös-lein, Rös-lein... roth. Röslein auf der
 Hai - den. Und der wil - de Kna - be... brach
 Rös-lein auf der Hai - den. Rös-lein wehr - te sich... und... stach... half ihr doch kein
 Weh... und... Ach... muss er... e - ben... lei - den. Röslein, Rös - lein,
 Rös - lein... roth. Röslein auf der Hai - den.

ex. 3-11 Franz Schubert, *Heidenröslein*, model stanza

Notes:

(5) William Wordsworth, *Prelude* (1805), XIII.

(6) Heinrich Schenker, *Der Tonwille* (1921), quoted in Joseph Kerman, "A Romantic Detail in Schubert's *Schwanengesang*," *Musical Quarterly* XLVIII (1962): 36.

(7) Kerman, "A Romantic Detail," p. 40.

(8) *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, Vol. III, trans. W. Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1907), p. 96.

(9) Felix Mendelssohn to Marc-André Souchay, 15 October 1842; Felix Mendelssohn, *Letters*, ed. G. Selden-Goth (New York: Vienna House, 1973), p. 314.

(10) O. E. Deutsch, ed., *Franz Schubert's Letters and Other Writings*, trans. V. Savile (New York: Vienna House,

1974), p. 75.

(11) W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman, "Introduction," *An Elizabethan Song Book*, ed. Noah Greenberg (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), p. xvii.

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Schubert: Songs

Heinrich Heine

REPRESENTATIONS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Volkstümlichkeit

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Heidenröslein was written in August 1815, *Erlkönig* in December. In between came sixty other songs, three choruses, a piano sonata, a set of twelve dances, a cantata, and an opera. By then Schubert was a seasoned composer of dramatic ballads; *Erlkönig* was his seventeenth essay in that genre. His earlier settings had relied a great deal on operatic devices, particularly the use of recitative for the narrator's lines. In *Erlkönig*, recitative has shrunk down to just a single line: the horrifying final one in which the child's death is revealed. Elsewhere the momentum is maintained at considerable cost to the poor pianist's right arm, to which the horse's incessant hoofbeats are assigned. (That triplet pulse, although never before so boldly rendered, was already traditional in setting this poem: compare Reichardt in Ex. 3-3.)

Besides the horse, there are four “roles” in this narration, each characterized in relief against the unremitting gallop—the increasingly distraught child, the desperately consoling father, the grimly deadpan narrator who sets the scene and tells the outcome, and, of course, the sinisterly beguiling title character. It is when the Elf King sings that the pianist gets a bit of relief, owing to Schubert's uncanny knack for ironic characterization. The sweet crooning of the sprite—sweet, that is, until he loses patience at the end of his third speech—so occupies the attention of the terrified but fascinated child that the hoofbeats fade into the background, only to return with redoubled force at each panicked outcry from child to father. That insidious ironic sweetness—experienced, as it were, from the threatened child's perspective—is much scarier than any conventional spookiness (like Reichardt's monotone chant) could be.

What keeps the dramatic pressure so high is not just the relentless (and potentially monotonous) rhythm, but also the tonal scheme. The Elf King, of course, always sings in major keys, in contrast with the horror music surrounding his interventions. They are, first, the relative major (B ♭), then the subdominant major (C), and finally the inevitable submediant (E ♭), poised strategically for a return to the tonic. In the long horrific middle of the song, however, from the Elf King's first appeal to the child until his last, successive cadences are pitched hair-raisingly on ascending half steps. Using capital letters to represent major keys and lower case for minor, the unprecedented progression of tonics is B ♭ –b–C–c♯–d–E ♭.

Also perhaps unprecedented is the level of dissonance at the boy's outcries, “Mein Vater! Mein Vater!” At these points the harmony could be described as a dominant ninth chord with the root assigned to the pianist's horsey right hand. The voice has the ninth, pitched above, and the left hand has the seventh, pitched below. The result is a virtual “tone cluster” (D against E ♭ and C the first time; E against F and D the second time; finally F against G ♭ and E ♭). Ex. 3-12 shows the end of the Elf King's first appeal (in B ♭), the child's dissonant recoil to the sound of hoofbeats, and the modulations to B minor (father) and C major (the Elf King's second try). As in the case of the cycles of thirds investigated in the previous chapter, the harmonic logic of these progressions, within the rules of composition Schubert was taught, can certainly be demonstrated. That logic, however, is not what appeals so strongly to the listener's imagination; rather it is the calculated impression (or illusion) of wild abandon. The mark of a successful innovation, on the terms of the game as Schubert and his contemporaries played it, was to be at the same time novel and intelligible. That is a difficult assignment, here carried off by the eighteen-year-old Schubert seemingly at the prompting of a spontaneous (hence effortless) inspiration.

mach' ihn - zu Blü - men - kraut, in - den
 Sand - mei - ne Mut - ter hat - mach' gilt - den Ge -
 wand." Mein Vater, mein Vater und hü - rest du
 nicht, was Er - le - be - rig' mich lei - ne ver - spricht? "Bei
 ru - big - lie - be - ru - big' mein Kind, in - di - ren Blü - men - saut - der
 Wind." "Wilt, fri - ser - Kraut, du mit mir ge - bre'

ex. 3-12 Franz Schubert, *Erlkönig*, mm. 66-85

Even Goethe, finally, was impressed with this song. Schubert sent him a copy in 1816 with a request for permission to dedicate the song to the poet, but received no reply. The poet was no doubt offended by the young composer's impudent failure to respect the poem's stanza structure—just the thing we post-romantics tend to value most highly in the song today. Fourteen years later, and two years after Schubert's death, a young singer, Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient (1804–60; soon to become the most famous dramatic soprano in Europe), sang it in the aged Goethe's presence and bowled him over. "I had already heard this song, and it meant nothing to me," Goethe's literary assistant and biographer Johann Peter Eckermann recorded him saying, "but sung like this, it conjures up a great picture before my eyes."¹²

Another song that ineluctably conjures up a picture is *Gretchen am Spinnrade* ("Little Margaret at the spinning wheel"), a famous set piece extracted from Goethe's dramatic poem *Faust*. Schubert's first masterpiece, it was written over a year earlier than *Erlkönig*, in 1814, when the composer was only seventeen. It is not a "still" but a "moving picture" that is conjured, a dramatic scene. On one level of motion, the "micro" level, we have the spinning wheel, rendered in wonderful detail: the oscillating right hand figure, marked *sempre legato*, shows the wheel turning; the left hand thumb, marked *sempre staccato*, suggests its clicking; and the occasional pickups in the bass represent Gretchen's foot on the pedal (Ex. 3-13a). But this static representation turns dynamic, and we come to the

“macro” level of depiction, when Gretchen, remembering Faust's kiss, momentarily forgets to spin, and the piano falls silent, only to start up again with the foot-on-pedal figure (Ex. 3-13b).

As in *Erlkönig*, what really keeps this scene in motion, far beyond the mechanism of mere scenic description, is the fluidly mobile tonal scheme, more an aspect of narration—and then? and then?—than depiction. The music begins and ends stably in D minor—or so it seems. On closer inspection, we notice a significant lack. The initial D-minor chord, whose figurations establish the picture of the spinning wheel, is never confirmed as tonic by a cadence. (The apparent V–I progressions in the bass, representing the working of the foot pedal, are not accompanied by changing cadential harmonies; they take place entirely within the continuously sounding tonic.)

In fact, the first chord that follows the tonic is a chord that destabilizes it: C major (m. 7), relative to which the first chord is not *i* but *ii*. The ostensible key of C is confirmed (albeit very weakly) by a cadence in m. 11, but slips back to the original tonic by m. 13. Still, though, there has been no strong cadence to D minor; the dominant harmony on the weak beat of m. 12 that pulls the music back toward D is lacking its crucial third, that is, the leading tone. The key of D minor is more solidly established than before, but still very weakly.

The original tonic is reestablished in m. 30 to accommodate the textual refrain (“Meine ruh ist hin...”), and only now is the chord of D minor preceded (in m. 29) by its fully expressed dominant. From here to the end of the song the key of D minor will return only with the refrain. Each time, moreover, Schubert will exploit the refrain's tonally open-ended character to launch anew modulation as Gretchen's memory ranges back over the events she is reliving. Most of the next section, in which she recalls Faust's physical presence and his kiss, moves as before through A minor to F major, but at m. 55 begins an intensifying progression similar to the one noted in the middle of *Erlkönig*, in which tonicizing cadences occur on successive steps of a scale—here G, A \flat , and B \flat , the last finally enhanced with an electric G \sharp and resolved as an augmented sixth to the original dominant (enhanced with a shocking ninth) for the culminating recollection of the kiss.

All during this passage, the representation of the spinning wheel has been losing definition. The first thing to go (beginning in m. 51) is the click-click-click of the left thumb; later (m. 66), as we know, the turning figure itself is stilled. As Charles Rosen observes, the actual object of Schubert's representation “is not the spinning but Gretchen's consciousness of it,” just as the actual object of representation in *Erlkönig* was not the Elf King “as he really is” (there is, after all, no such thing—or so we think) but the child's consciousness of him.¹³

In both cases, consciousness of the “objective” surroundings (spinning wheel, hoofbeats) recedes as the “subjective” vision grows more vivid. The representation of “inwardness” as it interacts with and triumphs over the perception of external reality is the true romantic dimension here, the source of the music's uncanny power. “Objective” representation, whether of spinning wheels or horses' hooves, was old hat, esthetically uninteresting in itself; its “subjective” manipulation is the startling new effect, prompted in Schubert's imagination by those “inward” aspects of the poem to which he was uniquely attentive.

To return to Gretchen: after the next refrain (mm. 73 ff), the music goes off on another “intensifying progression,” with successive cadences on E \flat (m. 86), F (m. 88), G (m. 90), and finally—after a long digression over a dominant pedal—on A (m. 97), treated immediately as the dominant of the original key, which allows the song to end with a final tonic refrain. What we have gone through (along with Gretchen, so to speak), is an extended “stream of consciousness” represented by the widely ranging harmony, its cadential processes and goals kept weakly defined on the surface (but, of course, at all times firmly directed and controlled from behind the scenes). A deliberately attenuated tonal coherence serves the purposes of psychological realism. The generic language of tonal harmony, one often hears it said, has been subverted in the interests of specific portraiture.

But of course that's only how things look. In fact, nothing has been subverted. Rather, a new task, that of representing a unique human exercise of memory in musical terms, has given rise to a new technique, a new way of using an existing vocabulary. Indeed, it was a musical need (tonal closure), one that no poet has reason to heed, that prompted Schubert to end his setting with a final refrain, absent in the original poem. Schubert's use of a refrain shows the way in which “strophic” and “through-composed” procedures, often presented as mutually exclusive stances or alternatives, actually work in harness, allowing individual lieder to assume a great variety of shapes, and turning the tension between the “shapely” (*ontic*) and the “dynamically progressing” (*gignetic*) aspects of form to expressive account.

From this earliest Schubert lied masterpiece let us jump to one of the latest—*Der Doppelgänger* (“The double,” from

the *Schwanengesang* cycle)—for a last look at Schubert's transformation of the genre (Ex. 3-14). It is one of the few songs in which Schubert tackled the burgeoning “urban” romantic theme of mental disintegration, presented by poets of a post-Goethe generation without the sugar-coating of nature painting or folklore, and by composers who set their work without a reassuring veneer of *Volkstümlichkeit*. Without that veneer, which leaves open an interpretive escape hatch (was it really the Elf King? was it the child's delusion? was it marsh gas after all?), psychological realism—the reality of psychological disturbance brought about by the stress of urban living—is confronted head-on.

Allegro non troppo. (♩ = 72)

Mei - ne Ruh' ist
hin, mein Herz ist schwer, ich fin - de, ich
fin - de sie nim - mer und nim - mer - mehr.

sempre legato.
pp
sempre stacc.
cresc.
decresc.
pp

ex. 3-13a Franz Schubert, *Gretchen am Spinnrade*, mm. 1-17

The image shows a musical score for Franz Schubert's 'Gretchen am Spinnrade' (mm. 63-75). The score is in B minor and 3/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part has a prominent ostinato in the bass line. The lyrics are: "sein Hän - de-druck, und ach sein Kuss! Me-i-ne Ruh' ist hin, mein Herz ist schwer, ich".

ex. 3-13b Franz Schubert, *Gretchen am Spinnrade*, mm. 63-75

The poet most closely associated with the depiction of extreme or neurotic mental states triggered by thwarted desire was Heinrich Heine, Schubert's exact though much longer-lived contemporary. More precisely, as the Schubert scholar Richard Kramer points out, Heine ruminates ironically on the "bitter aftertaste"¹⁴ of love, rather than on the more familiar romantic theme of ecstatic anticipation, as for example in Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte*. *Der Doppelgänger*, from Heine's *Buch der Lieder* ("Songbook," 1827), the only book of his that Schubert lived to see, opened up a theme that would haunt romantic artists to the end of the century, and indeed beyond, as a metaphor for existential loneliness: the theme of dissociation, "out of body" experience. The poet, returning to the scene of an unhappy love, encounters a stranger who turns out to be himself, endlessly replaying the futile exertions of the past.

The mood of the poem is obsessional, to say the least, and so it may not completely surprise us that, just this once, Schubert chose the old-fashioned ground-bass form for his setting (Ex. 3-14). Here it functions not only as formal unifier but as metaphor. The four notes outlined by the outer voices in the chords played before the voice enters contain a very unstable interval, the diminished fourth A#-D, that perpetually forces an obligatory resolution of the D (only "hearable" in B minor as an appoggiatura) to C#. The motive, turned into an ostinato that continually forces the same resolution, figures the compulsively repetitive behavior the poem describes. Running through the song like an *idée fixe*, an incessant thought, it provides a frame for the voice's breathless phrases in quasi-recitative. (Schubert reused the motive, which he seems to have derived, diminished fourth and all, from the subject of the C#-minor fugue in Book I of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, to evoke a sense of uncanny awe in the Agnus Dei from his Mass in E♭ major, also the product of his last year, in which the motive modulates terrifyingly from the relative minor to the frightful, flat-filled parallel minor.)

There are two fixed and two variable notes in the ostinato. The B and the D are unalterable, whereas the A# and C#, once their functions have become accustomed and predictable, are often lowered from their normal positions in the

scale of B minor—the A \sharp to a “modal” A \flat and the C \sharp to a “Phrygian” C \flat —to enhance the effect of weirdness and abnormality. It is on one of the eerie Phrygian alterations, of course, that the singer recognizes his own horrifying image in the stranger—a German sixth (m. 41) that if normally resolved would lead out of the tonic key to its subdominant (as *almost* happens at the very end: one could, if one tried, hear the last two measures as a half cadence on the dominant in E minor). The chord does not proceed normally, however, but rather (in m. 42) resolves as an appoggiatura to a French sixth chord that serves as an altered dominant of B.

But now, in a fashion that anticipates one of the bedrock tenets of Freudian psychoanalysis, confrontation with—and acknowledgment of—the specter from the past brings relief (albeit temporary) from the obsessional pattern: the basso ostinato is replaced in mm. 42–54, corresponding to the lines addressed directly to the uncanny double, by another pattern that first rises by semitones and then briefly escapes to the major mediant. (The psychoanalytic resonance should neither disconcert nor be discounted as anachronistic; Freud repeatedly confessed his debt to the psychological insights of the romantic poets.)

Notes:

(12) Otto Erich Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1946), p. 906.

(13) Charles Rosen, “Schubert's Inflections of Classical Form,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert*, ed. C. Gibbs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 77.

(14) Richard Kramer, *Distant Cycles: Schubert and the Conceiving of Song* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 126.

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Carl Loewe

Schubert: Style and influence

ROMANTIC NATIONALISM

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Volkstümlichkeit

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

With this thoroughly urbanized and neurotic song we have strayed pretty far from the state of nature, as did the lied itself in the generations after Schubert. The solo song became increasingly a site for subjective lyric expression, the more intense or even grotesque the better, leaving collective subjectivity to the larger, more literally collective choral and dramatic genres. The traditional *volkstümliches Lied* became once again the domain of specialist composers, like Carl Loewe (1796–1869), who, though actually a couple of months older than Schubert, is usually thought of as belonging to a later generation since he lived so much longer. He remained faithful to the ballad and other genres of story-song into the 1860s, and also, in the spirit of Herder, set Slavic and Jewish folk texts in addition to German ones.

Molto Andante.

Still ist die Nacht, es ruhen die Gassen,
 in die - sem... Hau - se wohn - te mein... Schatz;
 sie hat schon längst... die Stadt ver - las - sen doch steht noch das
 Haus... auf dem sel - ben Platz. Da steht auch ein
 Mensch... und starrt in die Hö - he, und riegelt die Hän - de vor Schmer -

pp

poco a poco cresc.

mf

32
 zu-ge-walt, mir graut es, wenn ich mein Ant-litz se-he

38
 der Mond zeigt mir mei-ne eig-ne Ge-stalt. Du Dop-pel-

44
 gin-ger, du bleicher Ge-sel-le! was äf-fic-ir-est du nach mein Lie-bes-leid, das

48
 mich ge-quäl-t auf die-ser Söl-le, so mach-ete Nach-richt

54
 al-ter Zeit?

ex. 3-14 Franz Schubert, *Der Doppelgänger*

Loewe's setting of *Erlkönig* (Ex. 3-15) was one of his earliest ballads. It was composed in 1818, a year later than Schubert's, but before Schubert's was published. By the time Loewe published his setting in 1824, however, Schubert's had been in print for three years and was already famous. So Loewe's version has to be seen as a competing setting, justified by its difference from its predecessor. The differences, as it happens, all point in the direction of a greater nature mysticism, a more naive romanticism. Like Schubert (or, for that matter, like Reichardt), Loewe uses a compound meter that reflects the strong hoofbeat iambs and anapests of Goethe's poem. But his rhythm is less relentless than Schubert's; he seems more interested in the evocation of a static, atemporal sphere—the Elf King's supernatural domain—into which the horse and its riders have intruded.

The evocation of timelessness through tremolos—an essentially orchestral device (based on a bowing effect) and something of a rarity in piano music—pervades the song from beginning to end, and palpably surrounds the child whenever the Elf King speaks (Ex. 3-15a). At these moments the horse and its headlong charge pass into oblivion, and the music is even more insidiously sweet and inviting than Schubert (who never gives up the human perspective entirely) had made it. Perhaps most significantly, the Elf King's appeals to the boy are set to melodic phrases reminiscent of horn signals. Not only does that lend them a harmonic immobility that deepens the boy's music trance, so to speak, but the timbre of the hunting horn—in German, *Waldhorn* or “forest horn”—had long since become the primary tone color of supernatural timelessness for German romantics, evoking the “forest primeval” as

Longfellow would later put it in his romantic poem *Evangeline*.

Another “anti-Schubertian,” anti-ironic touch comes at the very end (Ex. 3-15b), where Loewe eschews the distancing operatic manner to which Schubert still made recourse. He allows the rhythmic motion to come to a stop in the middle of the last line, to create a proper storyteller's suspense, but then accompanies the final word, “*tot*” (dead), with a horror-harmony rather than Schubert's recitative-punctuating formal cadence (the musical equivalent of a deadpan “throwaway”). Loewe clearly “believes” more in the supernatural content of the poem than Schubert did. That folkish naivety (or “faux-naivety”) characterized Loewe's ballads to the very end.

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THE LITURGY OF NATIONHOOD

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Volkstümlichkeit

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Otherwise, the *volkstümliches Lied* was fast transforming itself into the frankly and literally patriotic *Vaterlandslied*, sometimes called the *Rheinlied* after the symbolically charged river Rhine, the quintessential emblem of Germany. Such songs were composed in quantity as the idea of German cultural unity, primed by anti-Napoleonic resentment and sparked by Herderian folk-romanticism, was transformed into a political agenda. A “textbook” example of the genre is *Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland* (“What is a German's fatherland?”), a famous poem by Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769–1860), a professor of history and a fierce publicist in the cause of German nationalism, set to music in 1825 by Gustav Reichardt (no relation to Johann), a Berlin conductor and singing teacher.

The poem, drafted in 1813 at the very height of Napoleonic resistance, is basically a long list of German-speaking territories, each offered as an answer to the title question and resoundingly rejected with the same refrain: “Oh no, no, no! His fatherland must be greater than that.” The last two stanzas, musically set off from the rest, contain the true (that is, politically correct) answer.

Komm, lie - bes Kind; komm, geh mit mir, gar
schö - ne Spie - le. spiel ich mit dir, manch bun - te Blu - men sind an dem Strand, mei - ne
Mut - ter hat manch gül - den Ge - wand.

ex. 3-15a Carl Loewe, *Erlkönig*, mm. 27-34

Hof mit Mü - he und Not, in sei - nen Ar - men
das Kind war tot.

ex. 3-15b Carl Loewe, *Erlikönig*, ending

142. Des Deutschen Vaterland.
Ernst Moritz Arndt. (1813.)

Mit Feuer. Gustav Reichardt. (1825)

1. Was ist des Deutschen Va - ter - land? ist's Preussenland? ist's Schwabenland? ist's,
 2. Was ist des Deutschen Va - ter - land? ist's Bai - er - land? ist's Stei - er - land? ist's,
 3. Was ist des Deutschen Va - ter - land? ist's Pommer - land? West - fa - len - land? ist's,
 4. Was ist des Deutschen Va - ter - land? so nen - ne mir das gro - sse Land! Ist's
 5. Was ist des Deutschen Va - ter - land? so nen - ne mir das gro - sse Land! Ge -

1. wo am Rhein die Re - be blüht? ist's, wo am Belt die Mü - ve zickt? O nein, nein,
 2. wo des Mar - sen Rind sich streckt? ist's, wo der Mär - ker Ei - sen rekt? O nein, nein,
 3. wo der Sand der Dü - nen weht? ist's, wo die Do - nau brausend geht? O nein, nein,
 4. Land der Schweizer, ist's Ty - rol? das Land und Volk ge - fiol mir wohl doch nein, nein,
 5. wiss, es ist das Oe - ster - reich, an Eh - ren und an Sie - gen reich? O nein, nein.

1-5. nein! sein Va - ter - land muss grösser sein, sein Va - ter - land muss grö - sser sein.

6. Was ist des Deutschen Va - ter - land? so nen - ne end - lich mir das Land! So

weit die deut-sche Zün - ge klingt und Gott im Him - mel Lie - der
 singt: Das soll es sein, das soll es sein! das wack'rer Deutscher, nen-ne
 dein, das nen-ne dein! 7. Das gan-ze Deutschland soll es sein! o
 Gott vom Himmel, sieh da-rein, und gib uns rech-ten deut-schen Muth, dass wir es
 lie-ben freu und gut. Das soll es sein, das soll es sein, das ganze Deutschland soll es
 sein! das soll es sein, das gan-ze Deutschland soll es sein!

fig. 3-2 *Des Deutschen Vaterland* as published in Ludwig Christian Erk's *Deutscher Liederschatz* (Treasury of German Songs, 1859–1872).

Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?	What is a German's fatherland?
so nenne endlich mir das Land!	Tell me its name at last!
So weit die deutsche Zunge klingt	As far and wide as the German tongue resounds
und Gott im Himmel Lieder singt:	and God in Heaven sings lieder:
Das soll es sein,	That it must be!
das, wack'rer Deutscher, nenne dein!	That, gallant German, call thine own!
Das ganze Deutschland soll es sein!	All of Germany must it be!
o Gott vom Himmel, sieh' darein,	O God, look down from Heaven

und gib uns rechten deutschen Muth, and give us true German spirit,
 dass wir es lieben treu und gut. so that we love it truly and well.

Reichardt's setting is only one of many settings the famous poem received. For the most part a rather ordinary if spirited *volkstümlich* march, it nevertheless contains a stroke of true German genius when, at the mention of God singing lieder (!), and again at the plea for "rechten deutschen Muth," the music takes a turn toward the Schubertian visionary terrain of mediants and submediants to inspire a music trance of nationalist fervor. As a result, according to Ludwig Erk (1807–83), the latter-day Herderian from whose posthumous collection *Deutscher Liederschatz* ("Treasury of German songs") Fig. 3-2 is taken, "this song was in the decades 1830–70 one of the German songs in most widespread use, and had great political significance." No less significantly, he adds that "since the ideal of a united German empire has become a reality, our song has begun to be forgotten." Mission accomplished.

But it was also the original mission of a great deal of music that did not pass so quickly into oblivion. Under the impetus of romantic nationalism, choral music came back into its own. It enjoyed a rebirth that can only be compared with its original "birth" for European music history as the continent-uniting music of the medieval Christian church, the first music deemed important enough to be recorded in notation. That implied trajectory, from chant to lied and from church to folk, testifies to the transformation romanticism wrought not only in the way one thought about nation, but also the way one thought about art. Both concepts were sacralized, made holy, in the process of their romantic redefinition.

Romantic choral music was associated not only with *Gemütlichkeit*, the conviviality of social singing, celebrated in the *Männerchor* texts for which Schubert had supplied such a mountain of music, but also with mass choral festivals—social singing on a cosmic scale that provided European nationalism with its very hotbed.

These affairs had originated in the aftermath of the French Revolution as an explicit attempt to put the nation-state in the place formerly occupied by God and king in the popular imagination. Beginning in 1794 (Revolutionary Year III), the Cult of the Supreme Being—code for the revolutionary State—was established. Significantly enough, this cult replaced an earlier cult of the Goddess of Reason, which proved musically barren. The new cult inspired a rich liturgy, some of it actually modeled on that of the Catholic church. Its exercises culminated in the singing of revolutionary hymns by *choeurs universels*, choirs embracing all present. The men's choral societies that flourished in the German-speaking countries, and the choral festivals that brought them together in monster assemblies, were echoes, so to speak, of the French "universal choirs"—albeit adapted, after the post-Napoleonic restoration, to a political sentiment that was literally counter-revolutionary.

The Swiss educator Hans Georg Nägeli, one of the leaders of the "Liederkrantz" or singing-society movement, frankly confessed the aspirations that motivated its growth and spread. For a Swiss like Nägeli, such aspirations were best described as civic, concerned with social order. For Germans, they were better described as nationalistic in the most literal sense of the word: concerned with nation-building. No matter how the political cause may be described, what served and sustained it musically was ever the same. "Take hordes of people," Nägeli wrote in 1826,

take them by hundreds, by thousands, bring them into human interaction, and interaction where each is at liberty to express his personality in feelings and words, where he receives at the same time like-minded impressions from all the others, where he becomes aware in the most intuitive and multifarious way possible of his human self-sufficiency and camaraderie, where he radiates and breathes love, instantly, with every breath—and can this be anything other than choral singing?¹⁵

One could hardly hope to find a better illustration of romantic nationalism—the "I" finding fulfillment in the "We." But now let us recall some memorable words by St. Basil, the founder of Christian monasticism, dating from the fourth century CE. For him, too, choral music was first of all a means of promoting fellowship: "A psalm forms friendships, unites those separated, conciliates those at enmity.... So that psalmody, bringing about choral singing, a bond, as it were, toward unity, joins the people into a harmonious union of one choir."¹⁶

But where Basil saw choral singing as bringing harmony to a monastic community of perhaps hundreds, Nägeli and his contemporaries saw it as uniting whole nations numbering perhaps millions, the sort of "imagined community" that had no way at all of being imagined in St. Basil's time, or for many centuries thereafter.

Notes:

(15) Hans Georg Nägeli, *Pestalozzische Gesangbilder*; quoted in Ulrich Asper, *Hans Georg Nägeli: Réflexions sur le chœur populaire, l'éducation artistique et la musique de l'église* (Baden-Baden & Bouxwiller: Éditions Valentin Koerner, 1994), p. 114.

(16) Commentary on Psalm I, quoted in P. Weiss and R. Taruskin, *Music in the Western World*, 2nd ed., p. 21.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Oratorio

Bach Revival

THE ORATORIO REBORN

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Volkstümlichkeit

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Not that modern concepts of nationhood could not be projected on the ancient past. Indeed, such projections—to be blunt, such figments of imaginary history—were the inevitable product and propagator of modern nationalism wherever it appeared. The Biblical Hebrews were enthusiastically cast as protonationalists by Handel and his English oratorio librettists in the mid-eighteenth century for the benefit of an audience now regarded as the first true European nationalists in the modern sense of the word. And it was the spread of modern nationalism in the aftermath of Napoleon's defeat that mainly accounted for the nineteenth-century rebirth of the “Handelian” oratorio in Germany, where it had never thrived before, alongside the nationalistic “Bach revival,” which also began with an oratorio, albeit of a different sort: the *St. Matthew Passion*, performed in Berlin under the twenty-year-old Felix Mendelssohn, a pupil of Carl Friedrich Zelter (Goethe's intimate), in 1829.

That event was a tremendous watershed in the growth of German choral music. In its wake, literally hundreds of German oratorios were composed for performances at summer choral festivals that, first organized in 1814, had reached grandiose proportions by the 1830s, with throngs of performers holding forth before even bigger throngs of spectators, all hungry for nationalistic edification.

In keeping with the nature of the venue, festival oratorios nominally followed the Handelian rather than the Bachian model: secular works on (usually) sacred themes, rather than actual service music. But just as in Handelian times, the sacred was interpreted metaphorically, as a stand-in for the national. Indeed, one German critic was even moved to reclaim Handel (suitably re-umlauted as Händel) for a German sensibility that Handel never knew, declaring that the score of *Judas Maccabeus*, just revived in translation for a music festival on the Rhine, “breathes the deep seriousness of the German spirit and expresses the most joyful *volkstümlich* enthusiasm.”¹⁷

In keeping with the old genre's new purposes, a new theme was added to the traditional biblical and Apocryphal subject matter on which Handel's oratorios had drawn: legendary plots from the history of the Christian church, many of them based on episodes from Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (“Jerusalem delivered”), a sixteenth-century epic poem set at the time of the First Crusade. One such oratorio, *Die Zerstörung Jerusalems* (“The devastation of Jerusalem”), first performed at a festival in Leipzig (Bach's city) in 1832, was the work of Carl Loewe, already familiar to us for his *volkstümlich* ballads.

Loewe's lifetime fame came not only as balladeer but also as the most prolific composer of nation-building festival oratorios. His work thus provides a link between the *volkstümlich* and the *feierlich*—between the folkish and the sacred—and makes all the more obvious the nationalistic subtext behind the “Jerusalem” theme. Just as Handel's audiences recognized themselves in his choruses of Israelites, so German nationalists read a parallel between Jerusalem's fate (sacked but then delivered) and the one they wishfully predicted for their own country, first disunited and devastated but then united and triumphant.

Later Loewe oratorios featured legendary figures from German history. *Gutenberg*, first performed in Mainz, the great printer's city, in 1836, celebrated the four-hundredth anniversary of his first experiments with moveable type. *Johann Hus*, first performed in Berlin in 1842, commemorated the fifteenth-century religious martyr. Loewe even composed an oratorio called *Palestrina* (1841) that recounted the legend of the Pope Marcellus Mass through which the great religious composer was reputed to have saved the art of music. Because his work was “inspired” rather than “correct,” *Palestrina* counted as an honorary romantic—and, it followed, an honorary German.

Quite the most remarkable aspect of Loewe's oratorios, from the historical if not the artistic point of view, is the way they managed to hybridize one exclusively Bachian element into the otherwise Handelian mold. Like the Bach Passions and cantatas, almost all of them (even *Palestrina!*) incorporated the traditional Protestant German-language *geistliche Lieder* (spiritual songs) popularly known as “chorales” into the musico-dramatic proceedings, both in simple four-part harmonizations (*Cantionalsätze*) and in more elaborate fugal or cantus-firmus settings.

What may seem at first surprising about this is the chorale's association with actual worship services. There were those, in fact, who thought the use of chorales inappropriate for festival rather than actual service use. They were in the minority, however. Chorales were retained for the same reason that Martin Luther had originally sponsored them: their use, whether sung by a congregation or merely heard by an audience, furthered *Gemeinschaft*, the sense of community that could as easily foster nationalism as Protestantism.

What is truly remarkable, though, and remains so even on reflection, is the fact that Loewe was a devout Catholic, who advertised his religion as his main artistic inspiration. Equally remarkable is the fact that the most important of the German choral festivals, for Loewe as much as anyone else, was the Lower Rhine Festival (*Niederrheinisches Musikfest*), inaugurated in 1817 with gala performances of Haydn's oratorios, and by the 1830s the site of music pilgrimages from near and far. Its main site was Düsseldorf, with subsidiary performances in the neighboring cities of Cologne, Wuppertal, and Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle), the French border city that had once been Charlemagne's capital. Although these cities had passed from the Holy Roman Empire to Prussia in the post-Napoleonic settlement of 1815, their historical ties were to the Rhineland, and their dominant religion remained Catholic.

The assignment to Lutheran Prussia of historically Catholic territories was an enormous spur to German unification, which eventually happened in 1870 under Prussian hegemony. (And the assignment to a post-Napoleonic, militant Prussia of territories bordering on France, it has been frequently observed with benefit of hindsight, made two world wars inevitable.) As a result of these political changes, and as a further cultural spur to unification, Catholic composers now felt free and even called upon to incorporate Lutheran chorales into works that were then performed by largely Catholic assemblies of musicians for largely Catholic audiences. In other words, the Lutheran repertory of chorales was now, in apparent defiance of a sometimes bloody history, considered the common property of all Germans irrespective of creed. A religious repertory was in effect co-opted in the name of a nation.

There could be no greater testimony to the ascendancy of the national—and eventually the nationalist—ideal and its transformatory power in post-Napoleonic Europe. Now nation trumped even religion as a definer of human community, and the chorale became for all intents and purposes a brand of spiritual folklore—*Volkstümlichkeit* made holy. This revolution in the meaning of the chorale was explicitly recognized—indeed proclaimed—in 1819 by the same Ernst Moritz Arndt whose celebrated patriotic poem *Des Deutschen Vaterland* gave rise to all those enthusiastic musical settings. In a Herder-inspired pamphlet entitled *Vom dem Worte und dem Kirchenliede* (“On language and church song”), Arndt called for the revival of the chorale and its enshrinement in a common songbook for the use of all Christian Germans.

“Such a project,” one historian has dryly observed, “was of course a liturgical impossibility.”¹⁸ But by the 1820s it was no longer a cultural impossibility, as culture became increasingly identified with nation rather than faith. Near the end of his life, Ernst Ludwig Gerber (1746–1819), a great musical lexicographer and the first scholarly historian of German music, pled for the recognition of chorales as the closest thing modern Germany had to genuine folk songs. Later Herder-inspired research, as we know, revealed that Germany actually had a rich surviving folk heritage; but Gerber's idea, however mistaken, was nevertheless symptomatic of the way chorales were now being understood.

Like folk songs, chorales were ancient (or at least “historical”) artifacts of nationhood, bearers of the national spirit. Along with the folk song revival, the chorale revival might help reverse the universal spiritual decline of modern Europe that wore the sheep's clothing of Enlightenment. As Glenn Stanley, a historian of the German oratorio, has put it, the chorale came to be seen as “an image of a former, better time,” in which the nation's spirituality was as yet “a culture unperverted by secular influences.”¹⁹ More colorfully, the German romantic poet Novalis, writing as early as 1802, saw the salvation of all music in the chorale revival, if it succeeded in counteracting “the hatred of religion that came with the Enlightenment and reduced the infinite creative music of the universe to the monotonous rattling of an infernal mill.”²⁰

Notes:

(17) "Gottschalk Wedel" (Anton Wilhelm Florentin von Zuccalmaglio), "Deutsches Volkslied," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 13 May 1842; quoted in Cecelia Hopkins Porter, *The Rhine as Musical Metaphor: Cultural Identity in German Romantic Music* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), p. 13.

(18) Glenn Stanley, "Bach's *Erbe*: The Chorale in the German Oratorio of the Early Nineteenth Century," *Nineteenth-Century Music* XI (1987–88): 144 n6.

(19) Stanley, "Bach's *Erbe*," p. 123.

(20) Novalis, *Die Christenheit oder Europa* (1802); quoted in Stanley, "Bach's *Erbe*," p. 144 n10.

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Mendelssohn: Oratorios and sacred works

MENDELSSOHN AND CIVIC NATIONALISM

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Volkstümlichkeit

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

To see the chorale in action in its new and highly fraught cultural context, we can survey the way it is employed in *Paulus* (“St. Paul”), an oratorio by Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47), composed between 1832 and 1836 and performed to great acclaim in Düsseldorf under the twenty-seven-year-old composer's highly experienced baton at the 1836 Lower Rhine Music Festival. Choosing this piece will offer a further perspective on the relationship between religious and national culture in Germany as mediated by the oratorio, since the composer was by birth neither a Protestant nor a Catholic, but a Jew.

The plot of Mendelssohn's oratorio, assembled from scripture by the composer with the assistance of his friend, the Lutheran theologian Julius Schubring, concerned the career of the Apostle Paul of Tarsus, born a Jew, who, after an early career as a persecutor of Jewish heretics (i.e., Christians), received a divine revelation on the road to Damascus and devoted the rest of his life to preaching the Gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. As the story of a convert, a Jew turned Christian, it was the story of Mendelssohn as well. By choosing to write an oratorio, moreover, the composer was acting exactly in the Apostle's footsteps, turning away from his own former community and preaching the Gospel to the gentiles. The autobiographical component ran deep, and surely helped motivate the choice of subject.

Jakob Ludwig Felix Mendelssohn was the grandson of Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), the famous Jewish philosopher and apostle of eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Yet despite descent from what might be called the German-Jewish aristocracy, the future composer's father Abraham Mendelssohn, a banker, had his children baptized in 1816 to facilitate their assimilation, as “emancipated Jews”—Jews who enjoyed full civil rights—into German society. (Abraham himself and his wife converted to Protestantism in 1822 and signaled the fact by adding the Christian surname Bartholdy to the family name; the composer is sometimes called Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy.) Mendelssohn's oratorio thus became in its way an allegory not only of the composer's own career, but of the family history as well.

Yet like the genre to which it belonged, it was also an allegory of the German nation, thanks to the chorales. Nor was this the first time chorales had played a symbolic role in a work by Mendelssohn. In 1829, right after his epochal *St. Matthew Passion* performance, he had accepted a commission for a symphony, now known as the “Reformation” Symphony, to be performed the next year in commemoration of the three-hundredth anniversary of the “Augsburg Confession,” which marked the official beginning of German Protestantism as a genuine “ism” and a national church. Traditional Lutheran music figures in various parts of the symphony.



fig. 3-3 Felix Mendelssohn, pencil portrait by Johann Joseph Schmeller (1830).

The slow introduction to the first movement, for example, made the Lutheran response formula known as the “Dresden Amen” familiar to concert audiences. (It was first used in a *Passio germanica*—German Passion oratorio—by a sixteenth-century Dresden cantor named Joseph Schlegel, who possibly composed it; but it quickly became “traditional.”) The finale was an impressive chorale fantasia on Luther’s hymn “Ein’ feste Burg” (“A mighty fortress”), in which the “episodes” outlined a concurrent symphonic-binary (“sonata form”) structure. In its combination of novelty and antiquarianism, virtuosity and spirituality, all in the name of a national religious commemoration that presaged a national regeneration, the symphony was an apt symbol of a moment in the life of the German nation, and put its twenty-one-year-old composer at the forefront of the nation’s musical establishment.

Or would have, had the celebration for which the work was commissioned not been called off. Mendelssohn did eventually reach the pinnacle of German civic music life, albeit a bit more slowly than at first predicted, but it was *Paulus*, rather than the “Reformation” Symphony, that proved the breakthrough composition.

The oratorio was conceived in the wake of the eventual first performances of the symphony, which took place in Berlin and London, under the composer’s baton, in 1832. Where *Ein’ feste Burg* had been the inevitable choice to symbolize the Reformation itself, the chief chorale in *Paulus* is “Wachet auf ruft uns die Stimme” (usually translated

“Sleepers, wake! a voice is calling”), on which J. S. Bach had based one of his most famous cantatas (BWV 140). It was an equally inevitable choice for an oratorio that is all about receiving God's call and spreading God's truth.

The Overture is in effect a prelude and fugue for a traditionally brass-heavy “festival” orchestra (updated with trombones and “serpent” or S-shaped proto-tuba) in which the chorale melody is heard first, straightforwardly harmonized, in the prelude and then, stripped down to its first line, as a motto-style cantus firmus sounding in proclamatory counterpoint, mainly in the winds, against the working out of the fugue, mainly in the strings. The climax comes with the regaining of the prelude's major mode and the full statement of the chorale in massed winds against continuing rushing figuration in the strings.

This is Mendelssohn at his most retrospective or “historical.” But it is important to keep in mind the primary purpose or function of this stylistic retrospectivism, and the reason why it was so highly valued by audiences: it furthered the agenda of cultural nationalism by creating the conditions through which—to quote Ernst Moritz Arndt yet one more time—“history enters life and life itself becomes part of history.”²¹ Such music advanced the high ethical cause of public edification. Its style as such was a function of its purpose.

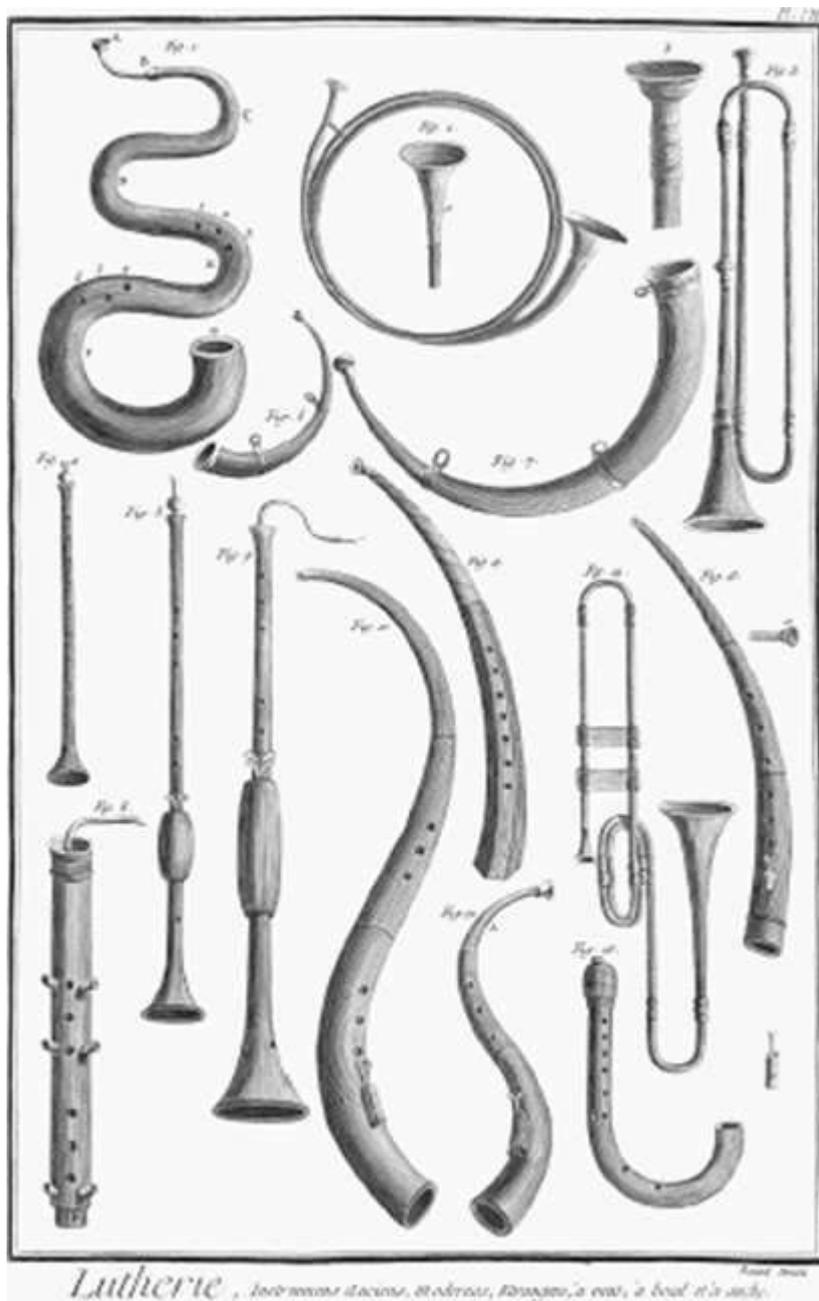


fig. 3-4 Wind and brass instruments, as illustrated in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. The serpent is at the upper left.

The Overture is answered, as it were, by the chorale setting that follows the scene of Paul's conversion (Ex. 3-16). This is a setting very much in the style of certain Bach chorales, in which a simple harmonization is accompanied by orchestral “illustrations.” Here the illustration consists of massed brass fanfares to provide a properly gleaming recollection of the divine manifestation, in which the voice of God is described in scripture as being accompanied by a blinding light. Heinrich Schütz, the great German Protestant master of the seventeenth century, had used a full chorus in echo style to represent that voice; Mendelssohn used the choral sopranos and altos, divided into four parts, accompanied by an aureole of winds and brass.

Because of the brass interventions, it is unlikely that the audience (representing the “congregation”) could have joined in the singing of the chorale. But there was nothing to prevent their joining in the singing of the first chorale in *Paulus* (Ex. 3-17) and literally becoming a *Gemeinschaft*, a “community” of coreligionists or compatriots. Mendelssohn did not specifically call for such audience participation, and probably did not expect it. Other latter-day oratorio composers, however, did call for it; and even where the audience remained silent, it was clear to all that a simple chorale setting like Ex. 3-17 represented the singing of a *Gemeinschaft* that symbolically included all those present.

Con moto ♩ = 69

Sopr.
Wa - chet auf, ruft uns die Stim - me

Alto
Wa - chet auf, ruft uns die Stim - me

Ten.
Wa - chet auf, ruft uns die Stim - me

Bass
Wa - chet auf, ruft uns die Stim - me

der Wäch - ter sehr hoch auf der Zin - ne.

der Wäch - ter sehr hoch auf der Zin - ne.

der Wäch - ter sehr hoch auf der Zin - ne.

der Wäch - ter sehr hoch auf der Zin - ne.

ex. 3-16 Felix Mendelssohn, *Paulus*, Chorale (no. 16), beginning

$\text{♩} = 80$

Soprano
Al - lein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr
To - God on high be - thanks and praise,

Alto
Al - lein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr
To - God on high be - thanks and praise,

Tenor
Al - lein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr
To - God on high be - thanks and praise,

Bass
Al - lein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr
To - God on high be - thanks and praise,

Piano
Piano accompaniment for the beginning of the chorale.

ex. 3-17 Felix Mendelssohn, *Paulus*, Chorale (no. 2), beginning

The remaining chorale settings in *Paulus* are two. “O Jesu Christe, wahres Licht” (“O Jesus Christ, light of truth”), another chorale that makes reference to Paul’s conversion, is set in a somewhat more elaborate style than Ex. 3-16, with a full-fledged ritornello, replete with imitative counterpoint, that intervenes between the lines of every verse. The last chorale setting, by far the most significant both symbolically and musically, is the one sampled in Ex. 3-18. Here Paul, having found his true calling, is addressing the Heathen, who have just mistaken him and his miracle-performing companion Barnabas for the gods Jupiter and Mercury. He rebukes them for their idolatry, preaching that “God does not reside in temples made by human hands.” Instead, he exhorts them, “You yourselves are God’s temple, and the Spirit of God dwells in you.”

These words are then given illustration by Mendelssohn in a remarkable exchange between St. Paul and the chorus. Paul sings, “Aber unser Gott ist im Himmel, er schafft Alles was er will” (“But our God is in heaven; he creates all according to his will”). The melody to which the Apostle sings these words is not a chorale; rather it is a *volkstümlich* tune of a type that can be plausibly transferred to a crowd of Heathen “folks.” When they take up the refrain, however, their counterpoint, doubled discreetly by the strings, becomes the background or accompaniment to a chorale melody sung by the second sopranos (till now held in reserve), illustrating the notion that their singing bodies, providing a “home” for the chorale melody, are indeed the dwelling-place of God’s spirit.

And what chorale melody do the second sopranos sing in Ex. 3-18? None other than “Wir glauben all’ an einen Gott” (“We all believe in one God”), the tune to which, from the time of the very earliest Lutheran hymnbooks, Luther’s translation of the Nicene creed was sung. The whole first verse of the Lutheran creed passes in review, enshrined in an oratorio given its first performance before an audience largely made up of Catholics, to consecrate an ideal of national religious union. There could be no greater testimony to the link that German romanticism had forged between language, folk, and “spirit” in the name of Nation. Through his ostensibly sacred work, Mendelssohn actually emerges as perhaps the nineteenth century’s most important—and successful—civic musician.

The image shows two systems of a musical score. Each system consists of five staves: four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and one piano accompaniment staff. The lyrics are in German and describe the creation of the world by God. The first system covers the first two lines of lyrics, and the second system covers the next three lines. The piano accompaniment features a steady, rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand.

ex. 3-18 Felix Mendelssohn, *Paulus*, last part of no. 36, *con molto di moto*, mm. 122-49

He was duly recognized and rewarded as such, and given the opportunity to lead his soon-to-be-united nation to musical greatness. In 1833, after his first appearances as conductor at the Lower Rhine Music Festival (which did for Handel in Germany what Mendelssohn's 1829 Berlin Passion had already done for Bach), he was appointed music director of the Catholic city of Düsseldorf, a tenure that culminated in the first performance of *Paulus*. Next he was appointed chief conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus (Drapers' Hall) orchestra concerts, which became, as a result of his appointment, the most prestigious music directorship in all of Protestant Germany. He held this post with great distinction for a dozen years, 1835–47, in the course of which he did more than any other single musician to reinvent not only German, but all of modern concert life in the form that we now know it.

Under Mendelssohn's directorship, subscription seasons were extended to increase the orchestra members' pay and insure their exclusive loyalty, so that standards of performance could rise. "Serious" programming was introduced, with symphonies performed *seriatim* (that is, complete and without interpolations between the movements) and "classic" repertory, including Bach (an old Leipziger), maintained alongside performances of new works. An international roster of "name" soloists regularly appeared with the orchestra. Mendelssohn himself conducted not only choral works, the traditional job of the music director or Kapellmeister, but symphonies as well (formerly directed from his chair by the leader of the first violins, still known for this reason as the "concertmaster").

Mendelssohn also appeared regularly as concerto soloist, as chamber-music performer, and as organist in sacred

concerts. As significant an event as his Berlin Bach and his Düsseldorf Handel premieres was Mendelssohn's Leipzig premiere of Schubert's "Great" C-major Symphony in 1839.



fig. 3-5 The Leipzig Gewandhaus (Market Hall) as sketched by Mendelssohn.

From 1843, Mendelssohn added the role of director of the newly founded Leipzig Conservatory (soon regarded as Europe's finest training school for composers) to his civic duties. In the same year he was also made director of the Berlin Cathedral Choir and conductor of the symphonic subscription concerts of the Berlin Opera Orchestra. From around 1840 he was the uncrowned composer (and conductor) laureate of England, too, where his protégé Prince Franz Karl August Albert Emanuel of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (1819–61), a talented organist and composer, had, by marrying Queen Victoria, become the Prince Consort of the realm (known to his subjects as Prince Albert).

Mendelssohn's preeminence in England was cemented by his second oratorio, *Elijah* (*Elias* in German), completed ten years after *Paulus* and first performed (in English) at the 1846 Birmingham Festival, the grandest and most triumphal of British musical ceremonies, bloated up to gargantuan proportions in competition with the German festivals. The chorus numbered more than 300, the orchestra 130. (By then, though, the total personnel at the Lower Rhine Festival numbered 631; henceforth, when it came to nationalism, Germany would never be outdone.) As

obviously Handelian as *Paulus* was Bachian, the chorale-less *Elijah* remained, alongside Handel's *Messiah*, an invariable British festival item, performed as an annual national sacrament to the end of the Victorian era.

Another sidelight on Mendelssohn's status as pan-German and pan-Protestant culture hero, and the status of his musical idiom as the lingua franca of German liberal nationalism, is the way his musical style was appropriated by so-called Reformed Judaism. This was a modernizing movement that arose around 1825 within the German Jewish community in response to civil emancipation. It surprised and to a degree displeased the gentile establishment that had predicted wholesale conversion and assimilation—in effect, the disappearance of urban Jewry—to follow upon the granting of civil rights. Instead, many German Jewish congregations began aping the outward forms of Protestant worship—the structuring of the service around a German-language sermon; the use of music in a contemporary style, performed by choirs and organs; sometimes even the adoption of Sunday rather than Saturday as the Sabbath—but without renouncing the actual Jewish liturgy.

The earliest musical luminary of Reformed Judaism was the Vienna cantor Solomon Sulzer (1804–90), who commissioned from his friend Schubert, in the last summer of the latter's life, a choral setting in Hebrew of Psalm 92 (*Tov l'hodos*, “It is good to give thanks”). The greatest choirmaster-composer for the reformed synagogue was Louis Lewandowski (1821–94), who came to Berlin from the Polish-speaking part of East Prussia at the age of twelve, became the protégé of the banker Arnold Mendelssohn (the composer's cousin), and was sent, the first Jewish pupil ever, to study composition at the Berlin Academy of Arts, from which he graduated with honors, having composed and conducted a symphony, the traditional *Habilitationsstück* or graduation piece.

Lewandowski's collected liturgical works, issued in three volumes between 1871 and 1882, enshrine Mendelssohn's elegantly polished yet *volkstümlich* choral style as a sort of homage to the liberal spirit of emancipation and reform at a time when, as we will shortly see, the tenor of music, of politics, and of musical politics were all turning against Mendelssohn and liberalism alike (Ex. 3-19).

Andante maestoso.



Organ

Soprano

Ma to - wu, ma to - wu, ma to - wu o - ho -

Alto

Ma to - wu, ma - to - wu, ma to - wu o - ho -

Tenor

Ma to - wu, ma - to - wu, ma to - wu o - ho -

Bass

Ma to - wu, ma - to - wu, ma to - wu o - ho -



le - cho jä - ä - kow,

le - cho jä - ä - kow,

le - cho jä - ä - kow, misch - kno - sse - cho jiss - ro -

le - cho jä - ä - kow,



Notes:

(21) Ernst Moritz Arndt, *Von dem Worte und dem Kirchenliede* (Bonn, 1819), p. 23.

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Jewish music

Nationalism

NATIONALISM TAKES A TURN

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Volkstümlichkeit

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Yet less than three years after Mendelssohn's death, in September 1850, an article appeared in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (by then no longer edited by Schumann) that set in motion a backlash against him from which his reputation has never fully recovered, and put a whole new complexion on the idea of German nationalism, indeed of nationalism as such. The article, signed K. Freigedank (“K. Free-thought”), was called *Das Judenthum in der Musik* (“Jewry in music”), and it made the claim that Jews, being not merely culturally or religiously but biologically—that is, racially—distinct from gentile Christians, could not contribute to gentile musical traditions, only dilute them. There could be no such thing as assimilation, only mutually corrupting mixture. A Jew might become a Christian by converting (as Mendelssohn had done), but never a true gentile (hence never a true German).



fig. 3-6 Monument to Mendelssohn by the sculptor Werner Stein, which stood in front of the Leipzig Gewandhaus from 1892 to 1937.

As long as nationalism was conceived in linguistic, cultural, and civic terms, it could be a force for liberal reform and tolerance. To that extent it maintained continuity, despite its romantic origins, with Enlightenment thinking. A concept of a united Germany could encompass not only the union of Catholic and Protestant under a single flag, but could also envision civic commonalty with Jews, even unconverted ones, so long as all citizens shared a common language, a common cultural patrimony and a common political allegiance. During the 1830s and 40s, the period now known to German historians as the *Vormärz* (because it preceded the abortive revolution of March 1848), German musical culture had demonstrated the liberality and inclusiveness of its nationalism by allowing an assimilated Jew to become, in effect, its president.

Mendelssohn, for his part, was an enthusiastic cultural nationalist, even a bit of a German chauvinist, as his letters, with their many smug if affectionate comments about the musical cultures of England, France, and Italy, attest. The libretto of *Paulus*, which begins with the story of the stoning by the Jews of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, even betrays an anti-Judaic sentiment.

But there is a profound difference between the anti-Judaism of the *Paulus* libretto and the sentiment displayed in

Das Judentum in der Musik, to which we now apply the label anti-Semitism (a term coined—by its adherents!—in France in the 1890s). That difference, moreover, is directly congruent with the difference between the liberal or inclusive nationalism of the early nineteenth century and the racist, exclusive nationalism that took its place in the decades following 1848 and that is with us still. A religion may be changed or shed, as a culture may be embraced or renounced. An ethnicity, however, is essential, immutable, and (to use the favored nineteenth-century word) “organic.” A nationalism based on ethnicity is no longer synonymous with patriotism. It has become obsessed not with culture but with nature, symbolized by *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil).

Thus, for the author of *Das Judentum in der Musik*, even Mendelssohn's undoubted genius could not save him from the pitfalls of his race. He could not “call forth in us that deep, that heart-searching effect which we await from Music,” because his art has no “genuine fount of life amid the folk,” and can therefore only be “reflective,” never “instinctive.” His choice of Bach rather than Beethoven as his model was the result of a stunted, “inorganic” personality: “the speech of Beethoven can be spoken only by a whole, entire, warm-breathed human being,” while “Bach's language can be mimicked, at a pinch, by any musician who thoroughly understands his business,” because in Bach “the formal still has the upper hand” over “the purely human expression.” In sly reference to E. T. A. Hoffmann's bedrock romantic tenets, the author denied Mendelssohn, or any Jew, the ability to rise above mere glib, social articulateness and achieve “expression of an unsayable content.” Yet in seeming paradox, the most conclusive proof of Mendelssohn's impotence (and his unworthiness of comparison with Mozart) was his failure to write a great opera. Oratorio—“sexless opera-embryos”—was the highest level to which his Jewish spirit could aspire. The only authentic emotional expression Mendelssohn could achieve was the “soft and mournful resignation” found in his piano pieces, where the author of the article affected to discern a genuine and moving response to the composer's own consciousness of his racial inadequacy.

Finally, the author warned, Germany's acceptance of this musician as its musical president was only the most obvious sign of the “be-Jewing” (*Verjüdung*) of the nation in the name of Enlightened liberality. The Jewish influence must be thrown off if the nation is to achieve organic greatness, its heroic destiny.²²

With contents that by the late twentieth century could only be regarded with alarm, such an article would hardly be worth quoting in a book like this but for three factors that conspired to make it in its day, and (alas) have allowed it to remain into ours, a force to be reckoned with. In the first place, it is the most vivid symptom to be found in musical writings of a change in the nature of nationalism that all modern historians now recognize as a major crux in the history of modern Europe (and, after the blood-soaked twentieth century, in the history of the entire modern world).

Second, it paints a picture of Mendelssohn that has remained influential even after its motives have been forgotten, owing to the radical opposition it constructs between retrospectivism or conservatism (stemming, in this case, from Bach) and “revolutionary” progressivism (stemming from Beethoven) as historical forces. This dubious opposition, originating in ugly politics, has nevertheless remained a basic tenet of music historiography since the middle of the nineteenth century. It has been influential, moreover, not only on historians but on composers as well, which has made it a major influence on the actual history of composition, not merely its historiography.

Third and most immediately consequential: as many readers guessed, and as he himself revealed in 1869, “K. Freigedank” turned out to be Richard Wagner (1813–83), an envious fellow composer and a native Leipziger (and, though it is usually forgotten owing to the very different shapes of their careers, a member of the same generation as Mendelssohn) who would shortly become in his own right one of the towering figures in music history. Wagner's words achieved an almost scriptural authority for his innumerable followers, and he was probably the most potent single “influence” on many succeeding generations of composers everywhere. As hardly need be added in view of his pronouncements on Mendelssohn's limitations, his main domain was opera.

His authority was such that by the end of the 1860s, Wagner was (in Carl Dahlhaus's words) the “uncrowned king of German music.”²³ Comparison of that epithet and the one we have applied to Mendelssohn—“president of German musical culture”—not only goes a long way toward explaining Wagner's obsessive antagonism toward the figure he displaced, but is also quite suggestive of the trajectory along which the parallel histories of music and of Germany would proceed over the course of the nineteenth century.

Notes:

(22) *Richard Wagner's Prose Works, condensed*, Vol. III, pp. 93–96.

(23) Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 4.

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Felix Mendelssohn

Fanny Mendelssohn

EPILOGUE: TWO PRODIGIES

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Volkstümlichkeit

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

As already hinted in Schumann's comparison with Mozart, Felix Mendelssohn was arguably the greatest composing prodigy in the history of European music. He was not exploited by his parents the way Leopold Mozart exploited Wolfgang. He was not taken on concert tours as a child and did not develop an early freakish fame. Nor, though coming close (with fourteen symphonies for strings and one for full "classical" orchestra completed by his sixteenth birthday), did he quite have the child Mozart's amazing facility. But it was not until the age of nineteen, with his violin concertos of 1775, that Mozart began writing music in a style, and of a quality, that was entirely his own, while Mendelssohn produced works as early as the age of sixteen that have to be considered mature masterpieces, the equal of anything anyone was writing at the time.

His Octet (or double quartet) in E \flat major for strings, op. 20 (1825), and especially his Overture to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, op. 21 (1826), originally written as a piano duet, treat extended forms with complete mastery, and are stylistically original to boot. The Overture, particularly its opening section with its depiction of Shakespeare's fairies, sounded a new note of "fantastic romanticism"—a light, scurrying, "elfin" style to which Mendelssohn returned repeatedly in later life (almost always, curiously enough, in the key of E), and that, though widely imitated, remained his virtually patented property (Ex. 3-20).

His infatuation with Bach and Handel, nurtured by his rigorous, counterpoint-saturated training with Zelter, is also reflected in his earliest compositions, not only in purely academic exercises (for example, a long series of fugues for string quartet) but also in his first masterpiece. The climactic moments in the Octet's fugal finale (Ex. 3-21) are crowned by exuberant quotations from Handel's *Messiah* ("And He shall reign forever and ever" from the Hallelujah Chorus), which are later subjected to a very rigorous and complicated contrapuntal development.

The image shows a musical score for Violin I, Violin II, and Piano. The Violin I and II parts are written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (D major) and a 2/4 time signature. The Piano part is written in treble and bass clefs. The Violin I and II parts are marked *sempre stacc.* (always staccato). The Piano part features a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes in the right hand and a more complex bass line in the left hand.

ex. 3-20a Felix Mendelssohn's "elfin" style, opening of *Midsummer Night's Dream Overture*, Op. 21 (1826), mm. 8-15

The image shows a musical score for the opening of Mendelssohn's *Rondo capriccioso*. The score is in 6/8 time and features a key signature of two sharps (D major). The tempo is marked *Presto*. The dynamics are marked *pp* (pianissimo) and *leggiero* (light). The score is written for a single melodic line in treble clef and a bass line in bass clef. The melodic line is characterized by rapid sixteenth-note passages and grace notes, while the bass line provides a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes.

ex. 3-20b Felix Mendelssohn's "elfin" style, opening of *Rondo capriccioso*, Op. 14 (1827), mm. 1-4

The image displays a page of a musical score for Felix Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, Op. 64 (1844), specifically the beginning of the last movement (mm. 3-10). The score is written for a full orchestra and a solo violin. The solo violin part is the most prominent, featuring a complex, flowing melody with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The woodwinds (Flute, Clarinet, Bassoon) and strings (Violins, Viola, Cello) provide a light, accompanimental texture. The solo violin part is marked *pp leggiero pizz.* and *sempre pp e leggiero*. The woodwinds and strings are marked *p*.

ex. 3-20c Felix Mendelssohn's “elfin” style, Violin Concerto, Op. 64 (1844),
beginning of last movement, mm. 3-10

The image displays a musical score for piano and orchestra, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system includes a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and two additional staves, likely for woodwinds or strings. The second system includes a grand staff and two additional staves, likely for strings. The score is written in a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 2/4 time signature. The first system begins with a dynamic marking of *f* (forte) and ends with a dynamic marking of *ff* (fortissimo). The second system continues the piece with various rhythmic patterns and dynamics.

ex. 3-21 Felix Mendelssohn, Octet, Op. 20, IV, mm. 22-33

These examples, impressive as they are, have a down side from the most exigently romantic point of view. They give evidence that Mendelssohn never outgrew his precocious youthful style. Like many musicians from highly cultured, affluent families, used to having his material and emotional needs easily met, he remained stylistically conservative and expressively reserved, disinclined to use his music as an outlet for the display of “inwardness” or strong personal emotion, and feeling no need to attract attention with a display of “revolutionary” novelty. Throughout his short career he remained comfortably faithful to the musical status quo—that is, the “classical” forms, as they were already thought of by his time. His version of romanticism, already evident in his earliest works, consisted in musical “pictorialism” of a fairly conventional, objective nature (though exquisitely wrought), and in a predilection for a “national character” that was as often exotic as German.

Thus two of his five mature symphonies, in the spirit of Herder, incorporate *volkstümlich* souvenirs from countries to which he had traveled: no. 4 in A major (1833) ends with a finale in tarantella style and is called the “Italian,” while no. 3 in A minor (1842) incorporates highland tunes and is called the “Scottish.” (As the dates indicate, Mendelssohn’s symphonies were published in an order that had little to do with their actual chronology.)

The one genre in which Mendelssohn could be regarded as a pioneer arose to suit a need created by his practical activity as conductor and concert programmer: the so-called concert overture, a freestanding, poetically titled orchestral piece (usually in something akin to “first movement” or “sonata” form) that served as a curtain raiser to a concert rather than an opera. The one most frequently played today is another Scots-inspired piece, *Die Hebriden* (The Hebrides; also known as “Fingal’s Cave”), composed in 1830, when Mendelssohn was twenty-one. In 1842, Mendelssohn added several additional pieces, including the famous Wedding March, to his *Midsummer Night’s Dream* Overture to make up an incidental score that could either be used to decorate the play or be performed in its own right as a suite.

Mendelssohn, in short, although he played a highly visible part in the general discourse of romanticism (especially its nationalistic strain), was anything but a “*poète maudit*.” His was the music of a well-adjusted, self-confident social animal, embodying civic virtue in his public works and the bliss of domesticity in his private ones, particularly

his numerous albums of *Lieder ohne Worte* (“Songs without Words”), gently lyrical (and not too difficult) character pieces for piano that spread his fame into countless homes. Until its sadly premature expiration, his was a dream career like Haydn's, pursued under altogether different social conditions, but just as successfully.

It was different with the Mendelssohn family's other musical prodigy. By the time Felix Mendelssohn was born, his older sister Fanny (1805–47) had already shown signs of unusual gifts. She began piano studies in 1812, after the family had moved to Berlin, first with her mother and later (together with her brother) with Ludwig Berger, the Prussian capital's most distinguished teacher. She also underwent the same training in theory and composition as her brother, with Zelter, and enrolled in Zelter's Singakademie to study voice in 1820. Her first composition, a song in honor of her father's birthday, was written in 1819, when she was fourteen. Felix's earliest compositions, stimulated by her example, date from the next year.

It was Fanny Mendelssohn who originated the genre “Songs without Words,” originally called *Lieder für das Pianoforte* or “Songs for Piano” and modeled at first on some cantabile (singing-style) études by Berger. She produced in all more than 500 compositions, including 250 songs, more than 125 piano works, a string quartet, a piano trio, and an orchestral overture. Her most extended works, like her brother's, were choral, written at a time when she was conducting an amateur choir that gave regular concerts in Berlin. They included two cantatas for soloists, chorus, and orchestra: *Hiob* (“Job”) and *Lobgesang* (“Hymn of praise”), the latter bearing the same title as Felix's Symphony no. 2, which like Beethoven's Ninth has a choral finale. Her magnum opus is the *Oratorium nach den Bildern der Bibel* (“Oratorio on biblical scenes”), completed along with the cantatas in 1831, the most active year of her composing career, when she was twenty-five (and a year before Felix began composing *Paulus*, his first oratorio, on which he frequently consulted with Fanny).



fig. 3-7 Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, drawn in 1829 by her husband, Wilhelm Hensel.

Virtually none of Fanny Mendelssohn's music became known during her lifetime beyond the circle of her family and the friends who frequented her Sunday salons; and after her marriage (to the Prussian court painter Wilhelm Hensel) and the birth of her son (Sebastian, named after Bach), she experienced a severe falling-off of inspiration (or “the mood to compose,” as she put it in a letter to Felix). Both her isolation and (probably) her creative blocks were the result of the discouragement she received, from her father and later from her brother, when it came to pursuing a career. Her father forbade her to publish her music or perform in public lest she become ambitious and compromise the feminine virtues of “*love, obedience, tolerance and resignation*” (read: submission) on which the stability of family life depended, as he put it to her in a letter (the grim italics were his).²⁴

Instead, eight of her lieder were published in 1827 and 1830 in books of songs by her brother, and under his name. Once only, after her father's death, did she appear as a concert pianist, performing a concerto by Felix at a charity affair in 1838. Only in 1846, a year before her death, when she was forty years old, did her thirty-seven-year-old brother give her permission to accept the invitation of two Berlin publishing houses to issue small albums of her lieder and her Songs without Words. A few more publications, including the Trio, appeared at Felix's instigation after her death (like her brother's, from a sudden stroke), so that her catalogue includes eleven “opuses.”

Her music, like her brother's, is the product of their social background and training: stylistically conservative, technically polished, and emotionally reserved. In the genres that she cultivated extensively (basically the “women’s” or “salon” genres of keyboard miniature and lied) her output bears entirely favorable comparison with his, as the two songs given in Ex. 3-22 will show. They were printed side by side in Felix's *Zwölf Lieder* (“12 songs”), op. 9 (1830). One of them is by Fanny (but which?).

Lebhaft, aber sanft.

p *f* *p* *dolce*

In wei-te Fer-ne will ich träu-men, da, wo du weilst, wo aus den

p *sf* *pp*

cresc. *f* *p*

schneig hel-len Räu-men die Bä-che in die See-en schäumen, da, wo du weilst, da.

cresc. *f* *p* *dim.* *pp*

ex. 3-22a *Ferne* (text by J. G. Droysen), Op. 9, no. 9, mm. 1-12

Allegro con fuoco.

Und wüssten's die Blumen, die klei - nen, wie tief ver - wundert mein Herz, sie

wür - den mit mir... wei - nen, zu hei - len mei - nen Schmerz. Und

wüssten's die Nachti - gal - len, wie ich so traurig, und krank,

sie ließen fröhlich erschallen er - qui - cken - den Ge - sang.

ex. 3-22b *Verlust* (text by H. Heine), Op. 9, no. 10, mm. 1-19

Many, in fact, regarded Fanny as Felix's potential peer. One was Goethe, who ended a letter to the sixteen-year-old Felix Mendelssohn with "regards to your equally talented sister."²⁵ Another was the French composer Charles Gounod, who met her much later in life, on vacation in Rome in 1840, and was amazed to discover her "rare ability as a composer."²⁶ The life of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel is compelling proof that women's failure to "compete" with men on the compositional playing field has been the result of social prejudice and patriarchal mores (which in the nineteenth century granted only men the right to make the decisions in bourgeois households), not the "natural" deficiency that defenders of the status quo dependably allege. The matter is especially poignant in the case of the Mendelssohns, who epitomized enlightened, emancipated, and assimilated Jewry, since Fanny's fate exposed the limits to emancipation, and the internal resistance to it, just as the posthumous backlash against Felix exposed the limits, and the external resistance, to assimilation.

Notes:

(24) Quoted in Nancy B. Reich, "The Power of Class: Fanny Hensel," in *Mendelssohn and His World*, ed. R. Larry Todd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 91.

(25) Goethe to Felix Mendelssohn, 18 June 1825; Felix Mendelssohn, *Letters*, p. 34.

(26) Charles Gounod, *Autobiographical Reminiscences with Family Letters and Notes on Music*, trans. W. Hely Hutchinson (London: William Heinemann, 1896), p. 91.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 4 Nations, States, and Peoples

Romantic Opera in Germany (Mozart, Weber), France (Auber, Meyerbeer), and Russia (Glinka)

Chapter: CHAPTER 4 Nations, States, and Peoples

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

I. PEASANTS (GERMANY)

MR. NATURAL

Up to now we have seen peasants on the operatic stage only as accessories. They represented their class, not their country. The elevation of *Volkstümlichkeit* to the status of a romantic ideal changed all that. It happened first, of course, in Germany, the land where *das Volk* was first “discovered.” And the first operas in which the new concept of *das Volk* showed up were the nineteenth-century descendants of the vernacular comic operas known as singspiels, “plays with singing.”

Up to now, comic opera, for us, has mainly meant *opera buffa*: the sung-through Italian genre that, starting out as modest intermezzi, conquered the music theaters of the world by the 1750s and (as we saw in chapter 1) had been exerting a strong influence on serious opera as well. In countries like France, Germany, and England, which had thriving spoken theaters, there was another route to comic opera. In these countries (but never in Italy) simple musical numbers—often based on “timbres” (the tunes of well-known folk or popular songs) and meant for the untrained voices of actors—were inserted into spoken comedies for added entertainment or sentimental value. The French name for the genre that resulted is the most revealing: *comédies mêlées d'ariettes*, “comedies mixed with little songs.”

It went without saying that only a character “simple” enough to sing a simple song could credibly sing one in the context of such a play, and so mixing little songs into comedies led to an enormous increase in rural settings. The most popular plots were ones in which (following a tradition going all the way back to the medieval “pastourelle”) honest peasant lovers won out over the machinations of wicked squires, or in which aristocrats (even kings) learned about virtue from the simple manners of country folk.

A vivid example is *Le roi et le fermier* (“The king and the farmer,” 1762), a comedy by the popular playwright Michel-Jean Sedaine (1719–97), with “morceaux de musique” (pieces of music) by Pierre-Alexandre Monsigny (1729–1817), a talented noble amateur. A king, traveling incognito, intervenes to rescue a farmer girl who has been abducted by a villainous aristocrat. The king is charmed by the country singing, evidence of the singers’ purity of heart. But convention decreed that, once having identified himself, the king leave the stage before the final number, a lowly *vaudeville*, a strophic affair in which every character takes a turn, hardly befitting a king’s dignity. (The term *vaudeville* had a very complicated history, extending from fifteenth-century comic songs that flourished in the “valley of Vire”—*Vau de Vire*—in northern France, all the way to the variety shows of the early twentieth century. In the eighteenth century it seems to have been a corruption of *voix de ville*, “city tunes,” even though it was applied to songs sung on stage by rustic characters.)

Le roi et le fermier was an adaptation from an English model, and the English theater bequeathed to the continent another kind of spectacle “mixed with music”: the “magic play,” in which, following a tradition that went back to the seventeenth-century Restoration stage, music was used to differentiate supernatural characters (fairies, sorcerers, and the like) from natural ones. Both varieties of musicalized theater, the peasant comedy or *comédie mêlée d'ariettes* (= *Singspiel*) and the magic play (= *Zauberspiel*), fed into the German stage, eventually producing a hybrid, called *Zauberoper* (“magic opera,” perhaps better translated as “fable” or “fairy-tale” opera), that flourished briefly as a craze in Vienna’s suburban theaters.

The craze lasted from the 1780s into the early nineteenth century, and we have it to thank for Mozart's last operatic masterpiece, *Die Zauberflöte* ("The magic flute"), commissioned by its librettist Emanuel Schikaneder (1751–1812), a singing actor who ran one of those suburban theaters, the Theater auf der Wieden, where Mozart's singspiel was first performed on 30 September 1791, a couple of months before the composer's death.

It was in *Die Zauberflöte*, rather than in his small and insignificant output of lieder, that Mozart came into really fruitful contact with the *volkstümlich* style. It is only one of the many categories represented in the opera, a magnificent farrago or variety show encompassing just about every conceivable style from the most serious to the most farcical, from the most exotic to the most indigenous, and from the most archaic to the most up-to-date. The all-encompassing mixture (under the aegis of "Egyptian"—that is, Masonic—rites) was code for the universalist message of the Enlightenment.

Approaching it now from the limited standpoint of the *volkstümlich* is hardly going to do it justice. But singling out this one strand from its rich tapestry will serve our present purpose. Not that the *volkstümlich* is in any way an inconspicuous component. On the contrary, it is associated with one of the opera's most memorable characters: Papageno, the Queen of the Night's birdcatcher, played in the original production (and partly improvised in the slapstick "Hans Wurst" or Punch-and-Judy tradition) by Schikaneder himself.

Papageno fulfills a traditional role for a peasant character in *Die Zauberflöte*—the Sancho Panza role, so to speak, serving the opera's hero Tamino, a Javanese prince on a noble quest, as wisecracking "vulgar" (i.e., folksy) sidekick, the way Sancho Panza served the knight errant Don Quixote in Cervantes's famous novel. But in his magic, half-man/half-bird aspect he also symbolizes, or begins to symbolize, the specifically romantic mystique of *das Volk* in a way that no previous operatic character had done.

Der Vo - gel - fän - ger bin ich ja stots lu - stig hei - sa hop - sa - sat ich
 Vo - gel - fän - ger bin be - kannt bei alt und jung im gan - zen Land
 Weiß mir dem Lok - ken, um - zu - gehn, und mich auf Pfi - fen
 zu ver - steht! Drum kann ich froh und lu - stig sein, denn
 al - le Vo - gel sind ja mein.

ex. 4-1a W. A. Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte* no. 2, Papageno's aria ("Der Vogelfänger bin ich ja")

The birdcatcher enters in act I, dressed in his suit of feathers and playing his little pipe, singing as straightforward an imitation folk song as any eighteenth-century composer had ever put on paper (Ex. 4-1a). Although headed "Arie," like all the solo numbers in the opera, it is just a strophic lied (compare Schubert's *Heidenröslein* in chapter 3) with an introduction and the most minimal ritornello imaginable—just the five notes of Papageno's panpipe plus a cadence. It is a sort of "Ur-musik," as the Germans would say—a primeval music close to the state of nature. And of course his natural drives are what Papageno celebrates in song, particularly the drive to catch a "bird" and reproduce himself through her.

Just as Papageno's music seems close to the imagined origins of music, so Papageno's utterances often seem close to the origins of speech and language, as if embodying Herder's concept of the origin of human culture(s). Early in the action, Papageno is punished for boasting by having his mouth padlocked, so that he can only gesticulate and hum, "Mmmm-mmm-mmm." Still, he manages to communicate in this way with Tamino. When the lock is removed, he announces that now he'll "chatter forth afresh," but truly. Papageno gets to break through from primeval utterance (*Ursprache*) to language even more graphically at the other end of the opera, during the act II finale, when he is finally granted his heart's desire: a wife (Papagena), through whom he will raise his brood (i.e., a basic human

scenes of all types, including the most dramatic, even tragic ones.

The first opera to achieve the status of national emblem or mirror in the nineteenth century was *Der Freischütz* (1821), by Carl Maria von Weber (1786–1826). The title, literally translated, means “The free marksman,” which conveys little to anyone unfamiliar with the German folk legend (*Volkssage*) on which it is based. For this reason, the opera is sometimes called *The Magic Bullet* in English. Its legendary source was first published in 1810 in a best-selling collection of ghost stories (*Gespensterbuch*) by Johann August Apel and Friedrich Laun.



fig. 4-1 Carl Maria von Weber, engraving by C. A. Schwerdgeburth (1823) after a portrait by Carl Christian Vogel von Vogelstein.

Weber, a cousin of Mozart's wife, Constanze, was born into a distinguished family of musicians. His parents ran a traveling singspiel theater, so he grew up intimately familiar with the existing repertory of popular music-plays in German. Only when the family's tours were interrupted, whether by his mother's illnesses or by the Napoleonic Wars, did they stay in one place long enough for their son to get any regular schooling. One of his early teachers was Michael Haydn, Joseph's brother, under whose supervision the precocious composer produced his third singspiel (but first successful one), *Peter Schmoll und seine Nachbarn* (Peter Schmoll and his Neighbors), first performed in March 1803, when the composer was all of sixteen. The story, a sentimental yarn about a family of refugees from the

French Revolution and their fate in Germany, was a timely one.

In September 1803, Weber journeyed to Vienna to study with the aging Joseph Haydn, but the latter, increasingly enfeebled with what would probably be diagnosed today as Alzheimer's disease, declined to take on a new pupil. Instead, Weber spent a year as apprentice to Georg Joseph Vogler (1749–1814), known as Abbé (or Abt) Vogler because of his youthful position as court chaplain at Mannheim. Vogler was a rather eccentric composer (Mozart once called him “a faker pure and simple”),² but a remarkable teacher whose theories of distant modulation and whose interest in all kinds of exotic musics stimulated Weber's composerly imagination.

Vogler's influence may be seen in his pupil's incidental music to *Turandot, Prinzessin von China* (“Turandot, the Princess of China,” 1809), a “theatrical fable” by the Venetian dramatist Carlo Gozzi (1720–1806) in Schiller's translation. All seven numbers are based on a purportedly authentic *air chinois* (Chinese song) Weber found in Rousseau's *Dictionnaire de musique* of 1768. (Rousseau's source was *A Description of the Empire of China*, published by the traveler Jean-Baptiste Du Halde in 1738; see Fig. 4-2.) Later, Gozzi's play became the basis for a famous opera by Giacomo Puccini; later still, the *air chinois* turned up in an orchestral work by Paul Hindemith called *Symphonic Metamorphoses on Themes by Carl Maria von Weber* (!). The beginning of Weber's overture, one of the earliest European compositions to incorporate an Asian theme other than an Islamic (“Turkish”) one, is given in Ex. 4-2.

mm. 32 - 44

The image shows a musical score for the beginning of the Overture to *Turandot* by Carl Maria von Weber, measures 32-44. The score is in 6/8 time and G major. It features a piano (p) dynamic at the start, followed by a piano-piano (pp) dynamic. The music is characterized by a melodic line in the upper voice and a more rhythmic bass line.

ex. 4-2 Carl Maria von Weber, beginning of Overture to *Turandot*

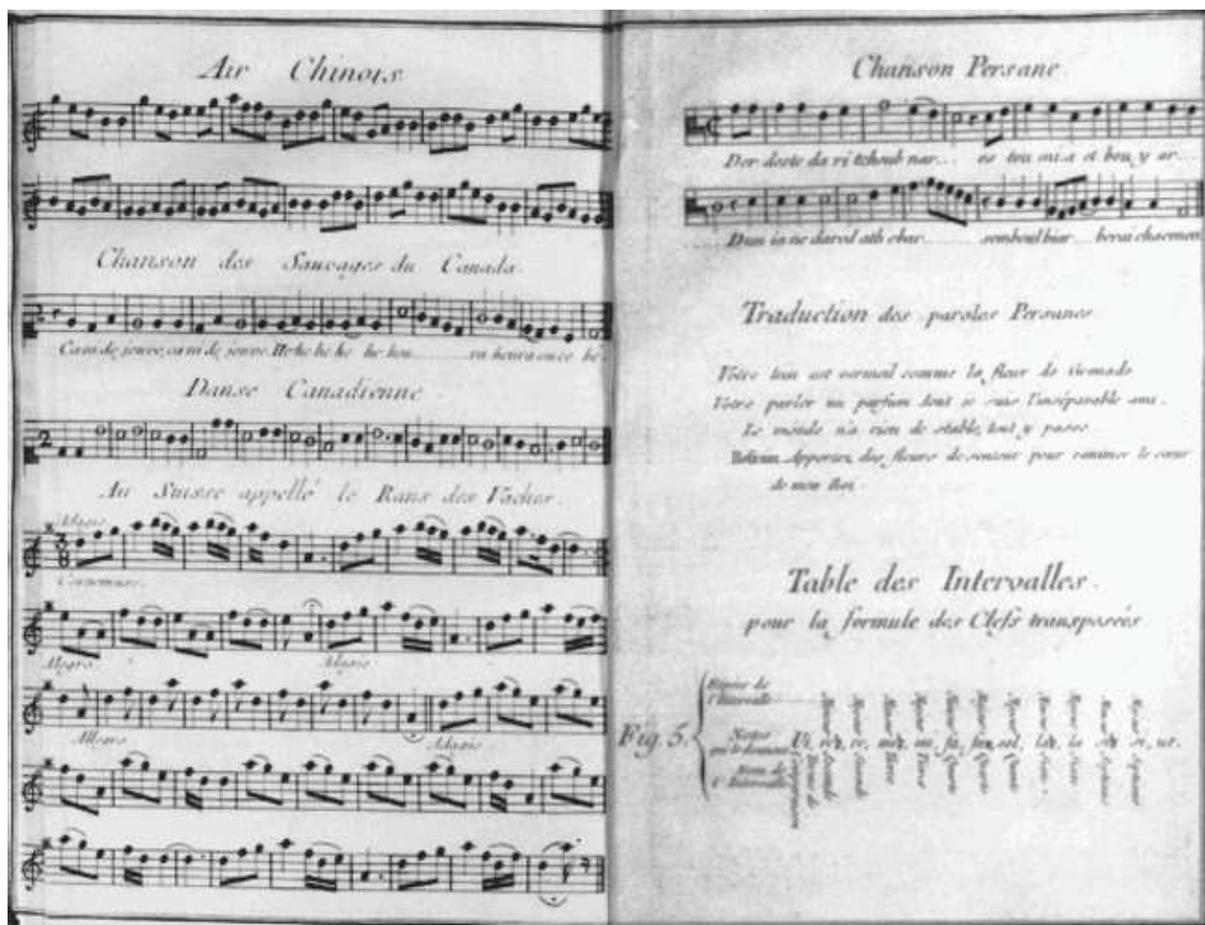


fig. 4-2 Chinese, Native American, Swiss, and Persian tunes as they appear in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Dictionnaire de musique* (1768). The *Air chinois* at top left went into Weber's incidental music for Gozzi's *Turandot* (1809), thence into Paul Hindemith's *Symphonic Metamorphosis after Themes by Carl Maria von Weber* (1943).

Exoticism or orientalism may seem a far cry from nationalism. In light of what nationalism has become, it is a far cry. But in their early phases, nationalism and exoticism were opposite sides of the same coin. They both reflected an interest, at least potentially benign, in human difference (ours from them, theirs from us). Weber's own predilections led him in many directions where settings and “local colors” were concerned. After the *Turandot* music he composed a one-act singspiel called *Abu Hassan* (on a subject drawn from the *Arabian Nights*), with a conventionally “eastern” coloration similar to the one in Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*. After *Der Freischütz* he began *Die drei Pintos*, an opera (never finished) with a Spanish setting; then came *Euryanthe* (1823), set in France in the age of chivalry; then *Oberon* (1826), set partly in “fairyländ,” partly in Africa, and partly (again) in medieval France.

All of these settings can be called “typically romantic,” since romanticism, as we learned in chapter 1, was as much drawn to the long ago, the far away, and the never-never as it was to the celebration of self. And the self that romanticism celebrated (whether personal or collective) was in any case a “romanticized” (that is, idealized and often mythologized) sense of self. The idealization of the peasantry in romantic opera was actually the idealization of a nation's mythic origins, not the peasants as they actually were, or the conditions in which they actually lived (rarely matters to celebrate).

Most important of all: if *Der Freischütz* looms now as Weber's most important work because of its role in “inserting” opera, so to speak, into the history of nationalism, that is due entirely to its reception by the composer's contemporaries, and later by posterity. It is not necessarily an indication, let alone the result, of the composer's intentions. Critics never tire of pointing out that in its musical style and forms the opera owes as much or more to the international theatrical mainstream of its day (that is, to Italian and—say it softly!—even French models) than it does to the *Volkslied* movement.

It is also probably true that Weber was originally attracted to the story of *Der Freischütz* more for its ghostliness than for its local color. Horror stories and other manifestations of “black romanticism” were very much in vogue at the time. It was the age, after all, of Mary Shelley’s immortal *Frankenstein* (1818). A few years after *Der Freischütz*, Heinrich August Marschner (1795–1861), a younger contemporary of Weber’s who was widely regarded as his heir, scored a big hit with a “*grosse romantische Oper*” called *Der Vampyr* (1828), a title that needs no translation, with a plot (loosely based on Byron) that needs no description.

One may even concede that the circumstances of the opera’s first production—the inaugural musical offering at the newly rebuilt national theater in Berlin, the Prussian capital—were, at least at the outset, more powerful than the composer’s intentions or even the work’s specific contents in creating its aura as an event in the life of the nation. National significance, like historical significance and even artistic significance, is a two-way street. It is the product of an interaction between an object (the work) and its consumers (reception), and arises in the course of a performance history.

That said, however, it is entirely appropriate to quote an encomium addressed to *Der Freischütz* in 1909, as it approached its centenary, by the American music critic Henry Krehbiel (1854–1923), who was himself of German extraction and presumably knew whereof he wrote. “There never was an opera,” Krehbiel enthused, “and there is no likelihood that there ever will be one, so intimately bound up with the loves, feelings, sentiments, emotions, superstitions, social customs, and racial characteristics of a people.”³ The reference to race is dated, but Krehbiel speaks truly on behalf of the composer’s countrymen. At a time when Germans were yearning for symbols around which they could construct a sentiment of *Einheit*, of their unity and singularity as a people, Weber provided one, and it was accepted with joy.

The “two-way street” worked in an especially graphic way where *Der Freischütz* was concerned. By 1824, an English writer touring Germany, struck by the way its “beautiful national melodies” were “sung in Germany, by all classes, down to the peasant, the hunter and the laborer,” concluded from this that Weber, lacking the ability to invent his own tunes, had filled his opera with folk songs. In fact Weber borrowed nothing, not even the bridal chorus expressly subtitled “*Volkslied*” (Ex. 4-3). Yet by 1824, according to the English writer’s testimony, the song (and many others from the opera) had *become* a *Volkslied*. It had entered the popular oral tradition. Sung by actual hunters and peasants who did not know the opera, it had gained acceptance not just as a *volkstümliches Lied*, a “song in folk style,” but as an actual folk song.

None of this can be said for *Der Vampyr*, or for Weber’s other operas. It was the nation, not Weber, who made his ghost-story opera a national opera. Its significance for German nationalists of a later time rested on that prior acceptance by the nation at large. It was then that the opera picked up its freight of ideology. Wagner, living in Paris in 1841, took the opportunity presented by the French premiere of *Der Freischütz* at the Grand Opéra to send this chauvinistic dispatch to the newspapers back home, in which Weber’s name is never even mentioned, as if the opera were the collective issue of the German *Volk*:

Andante quasi Allegretto

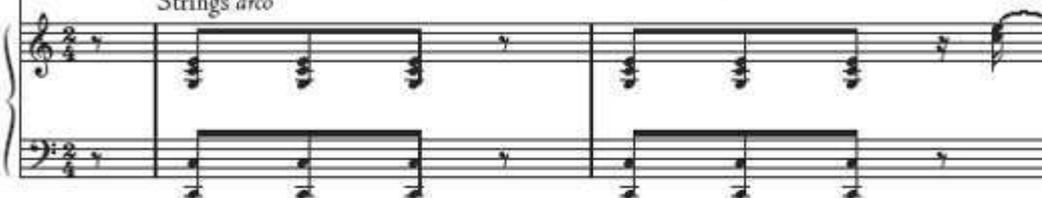
BRIDESMAID



1. The bri - dal wreath for thee we bind, With
 1. Wir win - den dir den Jung - fern - kranz, mit

Strings arco

Piano



sil - ken thread of a - zure, In wed - ded days oh
 veil - chen - blau - er Sei - de, wir füh - ren dich zu



may'st thou find Full store of hope and plea - sure.
 Spiel - und - Tanz, zu Glück und Lie - bes - freu - de!



Chorus

Bei - dal gar - land, Flow - ers white and leaves of
 Schö - ner grü - ner, schö - ner grü - ner Jung - fern -

Bei - dal gar - land, Flow - ers white and leaves of
 Schö - ner grü - ner, schö - ner grü - ner Jung - fern -

Tutti Strings pizz.
 staccato

green, Sil - ken thread of a - zure,
 kraut! wil - chen - blau - e Sei - de,

green, Sil - ken thread of a - zure,
 kraut! wil - chen - blau - e Sei - de,

May thy life be plea - sure!
 wil - chen - blau - e Sei - det

May thy life be plea - sure!
 wil - chen - blau - e Sei - det

Fl. Ob. Strings arco
 Cello

ex. 4-3 Carl Maria von Weber, *Der Freischütz* no. 14, “Volkslied”

O my magnificent German fatherland, how must I love thee, how must I gush over thee, if for no other reason than that *Der Freischütz* rose from thy soil! How must I love the German folk that loves *Der Freischütz*, that even now believes in the wonders of artless legend, that even now, in manhood, feels the same sweet mysterious thrills that made its heart beat fast in youth! Ah, thou adorable German daydream! Thou nature-rapture, bliss in forests, gloaming, stars, moon, village clock-chimes striking seven! How happy he who understands thee, who can believe, feel, dream, delight with thee! How happy I am to be a German!⁴

“Das deutsche Volk,” extolled by Wagner, is Papageno writ large, a whole nation of Mr. Naturals—or of Maxes, to name the wholesome, handsome, gullible hero of Weber's opera. Like many legends from many countries, the plot is a basic yarn of good and evil involving a Faust-like pact with the devil:

Max, the tenor title character, a hunter and forest ranger, is gulled by Caspar, another forester and a sinister bass, into going with him to the “Black Huntsman” Samiel's abode in the Wolf's Glen, the very depths of the forest, there to secure his diabolical aid. The next day Max, who has been suffering a slump, must face a test of marksmanship on which his whole future depends. If he wins the match he will succeed Cuno, the chief ranger to the local prince, and marry Cuno's daughter Agathe, whom he loves (and who loves him).

In the Wolf's Glen Caspar, coached by Samiel, forges the seven magic infallible bullets that he and Max will use on the morrow. What Caspar does not tell Max is that the seventh bullet goes not where the marksman directs it, but wherever Samiel may wish. When the Prince lets fly a white dove and Max aims the seventh bullet at it, Agathe (who has had a prophetic dream) cries out that she is the dove. Too late: the gun is fired, and she falls—but only in a faint. It is Caspar, the evil tempter, whom Samiel has killed with the seventh bullet. Max confesses his misdeed, is forgiven, granted the position he sought, and wins Agathe's hand.

Perhaps needless to say, the original folk legend had ended in a bloodbath. The happy ending, in which the benevolent prince intervenes the way a *deus ex machina* (a god lowered in a machine) might have done in an ancient *opera seria*, was a concession to the requirements of the comic opera genre, as contemporary audiences knew perfectly well. But despite its many conventional aspects, the opera did contain some real novelties, and it was these that enabled audiences to point to *Der Freischütz* as something new under the sun—something new and *theirs*.

One is the Overture, which has quite deservedly become a concert staple. Even so, its frequent detachment from the opera is somewhat ironic, because one of its chief claims to historical fame is its close integration with the drama that follows it. With a single conspicuous exception, all its themes are taken from vocal numbers inside the opera. This is something we have seen previously only in the overture to *Don Giovanni*, and there only in the slow introduction, where the opera's dénouement is foreshadowed.

Probably prompted by Beethoven's *Coriolan* and *Egmont* overtures, neither of which actually precedes an opera, Weber made the *Freischütz* Overture an instrumental précis of the whole drama to follow. Foreshadowed in advance of Weber only by a few French composers, by the second half of the nineteenth century such a procedure would be standard, even de rigueur. And as it became so, it became routinized in the form of the casual medley or “potpourri” overture—literally a mixed bag (even more literally, a “rotten pot”) of themes. Weber still observed the formalities of “sonata-allegro” form, and like Beethoven drew dramatic meaning from them. Leaving the slow introduction aside for the moment and beginning with the *molto vivace*, we can trace both the first theme in C minor and the transitional clarinet melody, marked *con molto passione*, to Max's first aria, in which he feels an inexplicable foreboding as Samiel steals across the stage behind him (Ex. 4-4a). The full-blown “second theme” at m. 123 comes from Agathe's aria in act II, in which, by contrast, she expresses her joyful hopes for the future (Ex. 4-4b). The stormy bridge material (mm. 53–86) is drawn from the horror music in the forging scene at the Wolf's Glen.

Allegro con fuoco

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece with piano accompaniment. It consists of three systems of music. Each system has a vocal line on a single staff and a piano accompaniment on two staves (treble and bass clef). The tempo is marked 'Allegro con fuoco'. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are in German. The first system has the lyrics 'Doch mich um-gar - nen'. The second system has 'fin - stre - Mächte, mich fasst Verzweif - lung fol - tert Spott!'. The third system has 'mich fasst Verzweif - lung, fol - tert, fol - tert Spott, mich fasst Ver-zweif - lung, fol - tert Spott!'. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with dynamic markings *pp*, *f*, *p*, and *ff*. There are also hairpins and slurs in the piano part.

Doch mich um-gar - nen

fin - stre - Mächte, mich fasst Verzweif - lung fol - tert Spott!

mich fasst Verzweif - lung, fol - tert, fol - tert Spott, mich fasst Ver-zweif - lung, fol - tert Spott!

ex. 4-4a Carl Maria von Weber, *Der Freischütz* no. 3, *Allegro con fuoco*

We shall meet in joy at last,
 süß ent-zückt ent-ge-gen-ibm,
 we shall meet in joy at last
 süß ent-zückt ent-ge-gen-

last!
 ihm!

Cello

ex. 4-4b Carl Maria von Weber, *Der Freischütz* no. 8, *Vivace con fuoco*, mm. 2–11

It will surely not pass unnoticed by anyone hearing it that the overture's “recapitulation” recapitulates not only the themes but also the C-minor/C-major trajectory associated with Beethoven's *Kampf und Sieg* (battle-and-victory) scenarios. Indeed Weber dramatizes things even more emphatically than Beethoven ever did by detaching the C-major recap of the second theme from the rest and preceding it with a snatch of dark “forest music” from the slow introduction followed by a fanfare—in short, turning it into a “Victory Symphony,” as Beethoven put it in the *Egmont* Overture. Agathe's optimism, voiced cautiously (in E ♭) in the exposition, is now proclaimed from the rooftops, telegraphing the joyous resolution of the drama. (And while we are on the subject, it is time to reveal that calling Beethoven's minor-major progressions the *Kampf und Sieg* scenario was already a slightly ironic allusion-in-advance to Weber, who actually wrote an oratorio with that title in the fateful year 1815, to commemorate Wellington's victory over Napoleon at Waterloo.) This pointed reference in the *Freischütz* Overture to Beethoven's rhetoric of contrasts has many counterparts in the opera, where time and again dark and light are strikingly juxtaposed. The most famous instance is the beginning of act III, which opens on Agathe's sunlit room after the midnight horrors at the Wolf's Glen at the end of act II. She sings a paean to the sun's warmth in harmonious duet with a solo cello. This scene was repeatedly cited by later composers and critics (and not only German ones) as a model of how all the elements in opera—poetry, music, scene-painting lighting—can interact to intensify a single impression.⁵ It was a major stimulus on the theory and practice of composers (most notably Wagner) who saw in opera a “union of all the arts.”

We have been holding the slow introduction to the *Freischütz* Overture in reserve because it contains the one important musical passage without a direct counterpart in the body of the opera: the “aria” for four concertante French horns (*Waldhörner*—“forest horns”—in German), or to be more precise, for two pairs of horns, one in C, the other in F, that alternately call to one another and croon together over a bed of murmuring strings (Ex. 4-5). It seems a normal enough way to set the scene for an opera about hunters (and one that had plenty of eighteenth-century precedents), but as sheer sound it was an unprecedented and electrifying effect that forever changed the nature of orchestral horn writing.

The first system of the musical score shows the beginning of the introduction. It features six staves: Horns (Hrn.), Violins I (Vln. I), Violins II (Vln. II), Violas (Vla.), Cellos (Vc.), and Contrabasses (Cb.). The Horns part is marked with a dynamic of *pp* and includes a section labeled "Sch." (Schweigen) with a fermata. The strings play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, also marked *pp*.

The second system of the musical score continues the introduction. It features the same six staves as the first system. The Horns part is marked with a dynamic of *mf* and includes a section labeled "Sch." with a fermata. The strings continue their rhythmic pattern, also marked *mf*.

ex. 4-5 Carl Maria von Weber, *Der Freischütz* Overture, mm. 9–36

Until then horn parts had hardly differed from trumpet parts except in range. Now the horn became for German composers the *Naturlaut*—“nature sound”—par excellence, instantly evoking the whole panoply of romantic nature mysticism. After Weber, a quartet became the normal orchestral horn complement everywhere, not just in Germany. But what made Weber’s horns sound particularly “German,” hence (to recall Krehbiel) “intimately bound up with the loves, feelings, etc., of a people,” was the close harmony, equivalent in range and “voicing” to the style of the *Männerchor*, the men’s-chorus idiom that instantly evoked nationalistic singing societies with their patriotic hymns and “Rheinlieder.” Weber’s horn quartet, in other words, effectively mediated between the human (vocal) and ghostly (forest) domains, giving the first real taste of what Paul Bekker (1882–1937), a historian of orchestration, called “the orchestra of romantic illusion.”⁶

As soon as the horns have finished (m. 25), the strings begin an eerie unmeasured tremolo, a device that has been traced back as far as Niccolò Piccinni in 1781, but not yet a commonplace in 1821. It makes all the more explicit the supernatural connotations of the forest-horn music; and in the very next measure harmonic color joins orchestral color to transport us to the world of the baleful nature spirits on whom Max and Caspar will be calling: the tremolo veers into a rootless diminished-seventh chord that is held out for four measures before returning to the harmony whence it sprang. It is a magnificent amplification, so to speak, of the sublime opening of Schubert’s C-major Quintet (Fv 9-28c)

Eeriness is compounded by the use of the clarinets in their lowest register, and the thudding notes of the timpani, marked “solo” (albeit supported by the double basses, pizzicato, for greater pitch definition). We definitely get the feeling that not only the cello melody beginning at m. 27, but also the harmony and the orchestral timbres will be returning later with dramatic significance—or, in other words, that these atomic musical particles (a single chord, a timpani stroke) have become “motivic.”

The significant return comes, of course, in the act II finale, the midnight forging scene known as “The Wolf’s Glen” (Fig. 4-3). The whole scene is a series of ghastly apparitions or *Geistererscheinungen* that (as the music historian Anthony Newcomb was first to demonstrate in detail) reproduces the effects of a phantasmagoria, an exhibition of optical illusions produced by a “magic lantern” or light projector.⁷ Phantasmagorias were a popular form of mass entertainment in the early nineteenth century, invented by a French engineer named Étienne-Gaspard Robert (or Robertson) and first shown to the public in Paris in 1798.



fig. 4-3 Scene from *Der Freischütz*, lithograph by Adam and Holstein after Johann Heinrich Ramberg (1763-1840).

Some phantasmagorias, like Robertson's own, were frankly presented as light shows, or demonstrations of an ingenious scientific apparatus. Others were billed by charlatans as supernatural events in which “actual” specters

were raised: the prophet Samuel (cf. Samiel!), originally raised by the Witch of Endor at the behest of King Saul; a witches' sabbath; a "*nonne sanglante*" (nun with bleeding stigmata); a "*danse macabre*" (dance of death), and the like. Weber was only the first of many composers who took a cue from the phantasmagoria shows: in later chapters we will observe a Witches' Sabbath orchestrally evoked by Hector Berlioz (1830), and an orchestral *Danse macabre* conjured up by Camille Saint-Saëns (1874).

To achieve the musical equivalent of a light show implies a musical analogy with visual imagery. The operative correspondence or common denominator—the *tertium quid* (third element), to put it in terms of logic—is *color*, which in music means effects of "chromatic" harmony (from *chroma*, color in Greek) and effects of timbre ("tone color"). The Wolf's Glen scene in *Der Freischütz*, more than any previous musical conception, abounds in such effects; and what is more, it links them in a way already noted in the Overture, where a chromatic harmony (the diminished seventh chord) is expressed through a rare timbre (unmeasured string tremolo).

That very effect is the chief connecting tissue in the Wolf's Glen, which otherwise consists of an explosive succession of brief, blindingly colored and contrasted episodes. The scene opens in the key of F# minor, as distant from the key of the Overture as a key can be. As soon as the "chorus of invisible spirits" intones its "Uhui! Uhui," however, the tonic chord is replaced with the very same diminished-seventh (C–E♭–F#–A) tremolo that we have seen strategically prolonged in the overture. It, too, functions as a *tertium quid*, bearing the same intervallic relationship to C minor as to F# minor: as spelled in parentheses above, the first two notes are the root and third of the former and the remaining ones are the root and third of the latter, identifying it as C minor's "tritone complement." The whole scene will be an oscillation between these two tritonally related keys: Weber was no doubt recalling the tritone's medieval nickname of *diabolus in musica*, part of musicological folklore to this day. But it is the mediator of the progression, the diminished seventh chord, redolent as it is of the Dungeon Scene from Beethoven's *Fidelio* (Ex. 1-1a), that is the scene's really characteristic harmony. It sounds whenever the devil Samiel is invoked (becoming, in effect, his identifying motive), and is sustained for as many as eight measures at a stretch.

The scene takes shape through an ever-accelerating progression of images. It begins with another miracle of media coordination to set beside the scene in Agathe's room, but at the opposite extreme, with every component conspiring to project gloom. The orchestration—once again combining low-or "chalumeau"-register clarinets and tremolando strings, to which a soft trombone choir and faint glowering bassoons are added—reinforces the murk onstage. When the unseen spirits wail and the harmony turns dissonant, the stage direction, in which an intermittently visible full moon "throws a lurid light over all," is matched by a pair of piccolos in octaves, adding their sinister glint to the unison woodwind choir. This music, "coloristic" to an unprecedented degree, continued to reverberate in the work of opera composers, and eventually "symphony composers" as well, for the rest of the century.

The vocal writing effectively mediates between song and "melodrama," or accompanied speech. The voice of Samiel is never set to music; it remains an unintegrated alien presence throughout the scene. Max's first terrified outcry is preceded by an uncanny horn blast first heard in the Overture (m. 93). The first phantasmic vision is that of Max's mother in her grave; next comes Agathe, appearing to Max alone as a hallucination. When she seems about to plunge to her death in a waterfall, the orchestra sounds another reprise from the Overture (rushing strings at m. 249).

Then the actual bullet-casting begins. Each of the seven bullets, counted off by Caspar and eerily echoed by an offstage voice, is accompanied, exactly as in a light show, by a fleeting hallucination, the orchestra assuming the role of magic lantern, projecting bizarre orchestral colors in dazzlingly quick succession to parallel the flashing stage lights.

- • At the shout of "One!" night birds with glowing eyes come flying out of the trees and flap their wings. Measured trills in the strings accompany glinting diminished seventh chords (the Samiel-harmony!) in the winds.
- • At "Two!" a black boar comes crashing through the bushes and darts across the stage. A rumbling of the bass instruments over a diminished fourth is accompanied by the tremolando strings: the rumble's low notes are harmonized by the Samiel chord.
- • At "Three!" a hurricane bends the tops of the forest trees. The music is clearly adapted from the Storm (fourth movement) in Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony.
- • At "Four!" an invisible coach, of which only the supporting fiery wheels can be seen, rattles across the stage to precipitate triplets reminiscent of Schubert's *Erlkönig*.
- • At "Five!" the "Wild Hunt," a ghostly mirage replete with horses and dogs, appears in midair. The

phantasmic hunters egg their hounds on to the sounding brass of the orchestral horns.

- At “Six!” volcanic eruptions break out, accompanied by a reprise of the whole madly squalling thematic transition from the Overture (m. 61 ff), but this time veering off into tonal regions (F# minor, A b minor) never even broached in the Overture’s development section.
- At its height, at the count of “Seven!” Samiel himself appears; Caspar and Max fall in a dead faint; the full orchestra, rolling timpani predominating, negotiates an unprecedented juxtaposition of the keys of C minor and F# minor, with a single reiterated diminished seventh chord the sole intermediary.

Though Weber’s “Wolf’s Glen” looms in retrospect as a watershed of musical romanticism, and though the idea seems paradoxical given the subject matter, many German artists at the time suspected it of excessive “realism.” That is because it gave its imaginative or (in the language of the time) “fantastic” contents a visually explicit representation. In so doing it contradicted Beethoven’s precept, in describing the “Pastoral” Symphony, that music should aim at *mehr Ausdruck der Empfindung als Mahlerey*, “more the expression of feeling than painting.” What Weber had accomplished, with unprecedented success, was frankly painting, and some of his contemporaries were offended by it.

By implication, they included E. T. A. Hoffmann himself the foremost German theorist of musical romanticism. In an essay on theatrical direction published in 1818, he had warned that:

Nothing is more ridiculous than to bring the spectator to the point where he, without needing to contribute anything from his own imagination, actually believes in the painted palaces, tress, and rocks.... First and foremost one must take care to avoid anything unseemly; then one must rely on a deep understanding of the genuinely fantastic, which will work upon and free up the fantasy of the spectator. The stage set should not itself, as an independent striking image, attract the eye of the spectator. Rather the spectator should come to feel, as the action progresses and without being aware of it, the effect of the stage set in which the action takes place.⁸

This is exactly the kind of argument that people advanced, in the early days of mass-produced and widely available television, on behalf of radio: it enlisted the listener’s imagination (“the mind’s eye”) rather than dulled imagination with explicit imagery. Then, as before (and as always), there was a covert social component to the criticism. It came out *almost* explicitly in a letter from Zelter to Goethe after the *Freischütz* premiere. After praising the music, he mocked the staging of the Wolf’s Glen scene, replete with “clouds of dust and smoke,” and added that “children and women are crazy about it.”⁹

Newcomb argues convincingly that the scene’s obvious debt to the phantasmagoria shows—a street and fairground entertainment, not a “high art”—was the aspect that evoked the criticism, and that it concealed social snobbery: aristocratic scorn for the “peasant” tastes of street and fairground spectators. It was only after the opera’s canonization as mirror or mystical embodiment of German nationhood that such criticism was silenced. But that was the point, exactly. It took precisely such a “lowering” of taste to give the work such an elevated status. Thanks to it, “peasantry,” as figurative proxy for the nation, was not only represented in the work but actually incorporated into it. Whether described as a debasement of aristocracy or as an elevation of peasantry, a truly national art, like the idea of nation itself, gave differing social classes a common ground, and a common bond.

Notes:

(1) Johann Gottfried Herder, *Essay on the Origin of Language*, trans. Alexander Gode (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 135.

(2) Wolfgang to Leopold Mozart, 18 December 1777; quoted in Margaret Grave, “Vogler, Georg Joseph,” in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. XXVI (2nd ed., New York: Grove, 2001), p. 865.

(3) Henry Edward Krehbiel, *A Book of Operas* (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing, 1917), p. 207.

(4) *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works*, trans. W. Ashton Ellis, Vol. VII (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1898), p. 183.

(5) See Alexander Serov, letter to Vladimir Stasov, 18 August 1843, in A. A. Gozenpud and V. A. Ogram, eds., "A. N. Serov. Pis'ma k V. V. i D. V. Stasovim," *Muzikal'noye nasledstvo*, Vol. I (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1962), p. 234.

(6) Paul Bekker, *The Story of the Orchestra* (New York: Norton, 1936), Chap. 5.

(7) See Anthony Newcomb, "New Light(s) on Weber's Wolf's Glen Scene," in *Opera and the Enlightenment*, eds. T. Bauman and M. P. McClymonds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 61–88.

(8) Quoted in Newcomb, "New Light(s)," pp. 72–73.

(9) Quoted in Newcomb, "New Light(s)," p. 74.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

II. HISTORY (FRANCE)

Chapter: CHAPTER 4 Nations, States, and Peoples

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

OPERA AND REVOLUTION

There was another route to nation through opera. The musical stage became the favored site, in the age of burgeoning nationalism, for the idealized or allegorical reenactment of every nation's history. If largeness of conception automatically meant significance of achievement, historical opera would rank first in the history of opera, since history-in-music became the overriding preoccupation of the venerable Paris Opera (the Académie Royale de Musique). In the period of the so-called July Monarchy (1830–1848), the Académie Royale became the site of the hugest opera spectacles ever attempted anywhere. Never was art more directly involved with or inspired by politics, and never was politics more directly concerned with national destiny.

The Parisian predilection for the “monster spectacle” was a direct reflection of France's self-image as the great political monolith of Western Europe. It had been so under the Bourbon monarchy, when the French court opera had flourished, and so it remained after the revolution. At a time when the maps of Germany and Italy were crazy quilts of little principalities and city-states, and the multinational Hapsburg (“Holy Roman”) Empire was slowly crumbling under its own dead weight, France was the same large centralized entity it had been since the fifteenth century, the only continental European country that looked on an early nineteenth-century political map pretty much the way it looks now.

Its political fortunes may have been volatile, what with three revolutions in little more than fifty years and a perpetual pendulum swing during the nineteenth century between republican and imperial rule. But its territorial integrity was stable, and its military was mighty. It took the whole “concert of Europe,” the massed armies of every other major European country, even Russia, to beat its armies back during the Napoleonic Wars. Even when subdued, France remained a giant and “the one to beat,” and its arts establishment continued to reflect that traditional self-image.

The Paris Opera's post-Napoleonic recovery was signaled by the building of a new home for it in 1821, the Salle Le Peletier (named after the street on which it stood), with a seating capacity of around two thousand. That was indeed large for the time, even if the Metropolitan Opera House in New York (both the old house in use from 1883 to 1966 and the one at Lincoln Center that replaced it) accommodated almost twice that number. The difference is that for all its size, the Paris Opera was in 1821 still a government-subsidized enterprise that, while encouraged to recoup its expenditures, did not have to do so.

Even after the July Revolution, government involvement with the theater remained strong and decisive, reflecting the even more fundamental fact that in nineteenth-century France (and, to a considerable extent, in many European countries even today) opera was considered a national asset and an instrument of national policy, while in twentieth-or twenty-first-century America it is considered a luxury product and is expected, therefore, to earn a profit—not that it can really do so without philanthropic and (to a small and incessantly contested degree) public support.

The new house was not only large, it was also superbly equipped. In 1822 it became the first opera house to use gas lighting instead of candles, around 1830 the first to use limelight, and in 1849 the first to use electricity. Its stage machinery was comparably advanced. Composers and librettists were encouraged to exploit it in consultation with a specially appointed stage manager (*metteur en scène*), the first such official in the history of opera, who from 1827 supervised a staging committee consisting of specialists in machine construction, lighting, set-design, and costumery.

This renewed emphasis on the visual reflected, just as it did in Weber's Germany, a deliberate modernization and popularization of an ancient and aristocratic art. All the design and mechanical innovations on which the Académie

now prided itself had long since been standard equipment for the melodramas, peepshows, dioramas, and vaudeville comedies displayed at the so-called boulevard theaters visited by the bourgeoisie. The Académie Royale now wanted to attract that audience, not only because its patronage was lucrative, but also because the bourgeoisie increasingly defined the concept of “nation” in France, even after the post-Napoleonic Restoration, and the Académie now thought of itself, in a way it could never have done under the old regime, as a *national* theater.

The first opera to benefit from this state-supported grandiosity in production was a five-act monster titled *La muette de Portici* (“The mute girl of Portici,” 1828, sometimes called *Masaniello* or *Fenella* after its leading characters), by Daniel-François-Esprit Auber (1782–1871), to a libretto by Eugène Scribe (1791–1861). Some said (and say) that Scribe was the greatest librettist of the nineteenth century, some that he was the worst. What all must agree is that he was the century's most prolific and influential dramatist. As the arbiter of the so-called *pièce bien faite* (well-made play), and creator of literally dozens of libretti set by every composer of the period (some more than once), Scribe was the nineteenth-century Metastasio.

Even his admirers admit that Scribe's librettos are full of hackneyed language and theatrical clichés. What he was uniquely gifted for doing, however, was what librettists were paid to do—that is, exploit resources and create opportunities. In the words of Louis Véron (1798–1867), Scribe's nominal boss as director of the Opéra in its glory days:

For a long time people have thought that nothing was easier to compose than a poem for opera. What a huge literary error! An opera in five acts can only come alive by means of a very dramatic scenario bringing into play the grandest passions of the human heart and strong historical interest. This dramatic action, however, ought to be able to be comprehended by the eye like the action of a ballet. It is necessary that the chorus play an impassioned role in it and be so to speak one of the interesting characters of the play. Each act ought to offer contrasts in settings, costumes, and above all in ably prepared situations. The librettos of M. Scribe offer this abundance of ideas, these dramatic situations, and fulfill all the conditions for variety of setting (*mise-en-scène*) that the construction of an opera in five acts demands. When one has at one's disposal the most enormous theater, an orchestra of more than eighty musicians, nearly eighty chorus members male and female, eighty supernumeraries [“spear-carriers” or “extras,” walk-on actors who do not speak or sing but augment the spectacle], not counting children, a company of sixty *machinistes* [highly skilled stagehands] for moving sets, the public listens and expects great things from you. You fail in your mission if so many resources only serve you to put on comic operas or vaudevilles!¹⁰

And that is why there were five acts: it was the standard format for tragedies, “great” plays. In collaboration with Véron, with Charles Duponchel (1794–1868) and Pierre Cicéri (1782–1868), *metteurs en scène*, and with a *pléiade* of gifted composers, beginning with Auber and also including Jacques Fromental Halévy (1799–1862) and especially Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791–1864), Scribe masterminded a new and epoch-making genre called “grand opera,” or (since it was associated specifically with the Paris Opera house) *grand opéra*. The enduring repertoire of late nineteenth-century opera—above all the operas of Verdi and Wagner (falsely supposed to be antipodes)—is fundamentally beholden, both musically and dramatically, to *grand opéra*, and historically incomprehensible without knowledge of it.

La muette de Portici, slightly predating both the July Revolution and the advent of Véron, set the tone for these mighty collaborative efforts, and became their model. Just as Véron described, a passionate love intrigue is played out in it against a vast historical panorama, with intense dramatic confrontations alternating with immense crowd scenes and extravagant scenic effects. It was to motivate the crowd scenes that the historical background initially became so important, and it was his skill at aiming acts unerringly toward grandiose dénouements that made Scribe such a successful librettist for the genre.

To get crowds moving on stage, popular uprisings were handy, and so *La muette de Portici* is projected against the background of an insurrection led by the Neapolitan fisherman-revolutionist Tommaso Aniello (called Masaniello) against Spanish rule in 1647. It was a popular subject at the time. A stirring literary account of it, Raimond de Moirmoiron's *Mémoires sur la révolution de Naples de 1647*, published in 1825, had already been turned to theatrical account in an *opéra comique* with music by the transplanted Neapolitan Michele Carafa, a friend of Rossini, which in turn restimulated literary endeavors: several “book versions” (commercial spin-offs from the opera) like the pseudonymously authored *Masaniello, histoire du soulèvement de Naples en 1647* (“Masaniello: The Story of the Naples Rebellion of 1647”) were being hawked in the Paris bookstalls.

In addition, a spectacular “diorama” (pictorial projection with lighting effects) called the “Eruption of Mount Vesuvius” was being displayed on the boulevard, at the theater of Louis Daguerre, the future photographic pioneer. To compete with all of these at once, a tragic twist was envisioned, and that made necessary the five-act *tragédie lyrique* format that would henceforth become standard once again, as it had been in the days of Louis XIV.

A three-act *opéra comique* libretto on the subject of Masaniello, by a staff hack named Germain Delavigne, was already the theater's property. It was to “play-doctor” that version into a “well-made” lyric tragedy that Scribe was engaged. The tragic treatment meant replacing spoken dialogue with fully accompanied recitative; that already meant lengthening the piece, since singing takes so much longer than speaking. It also meant interpolating ballet into at least two of the acts as had been de rigueur at the Académie Royale since Lully's time. These requirements were even applied to existing operas when staged by the Académie Royale. The production of Weber's *Der Freischütz* that Wagner described (and, for home consumption, derided) in 1841 had been fitted out with orchestrally accompanied recitatives, composed on commission by Berlioz, who also orchestrated a well-known piano piece of Weber's —“Invitation to the Dance” (*Aufforderung zum Tanze*), a *rondeau brilliant* in waltz time (1819)—to serve as the interpolated ballet.

Above all, tragedy implied an ill-fated love intrigue. In meeting this last requirement Scribe was faced with a quandary. Owing to the unexpected departure of one of the Académie's leading ladies, only one dramatic soprano was available for the new opera, not enough to populate a traditional love triangle. Scribe's inspired solution was to raid the ballet (another genre that was having a popular rebirth at the Académie Royale), where miming to music had long since been brought to a high degree of expressive precision. The use of a mime character as operatic protagonist was not completely unprecedented (there is one, for example, in *Silvana*, an early opera by Weber). But the idea was novel enough, and the Académie's stable of attractive ballerinas popular enough, to stimulate advance interest in the new work among the social classes the theater now wanted to woo. And so the “mute girl” was not only included in the cast but even made the title character.

Thus arrived at, the love triangle in the opera's foreground became that of Alphonse, the Spanish viceroy's rakish son, who is betrothed to the Spanish princess Elvira, but who has seduced and abandoned the mute fishermaid Fenella, whose spunky pantomimes provide not only piquant entertainment—especially as played at the premiere by the ballerina Lise Noblet (1801–52), a famous beauty reputedly “kept” by Count Claparède, a wizened military hero who was the crony of the Vicomte de Martignac, the Minister of the Interior (whose office oversaw all theaters), and consequently a focal point for gossip (Fig. 4-4)—but also the primary incitement for the background matter, her brother Masaniello's rebellion.

Scribe's technique for relating libidinous foreground to historical background is shown off to perfection by his scenario for the opera's culmination, the fifth act. It is essentially a refinement (if that is the word) on the “entrance opera” technique described in chapter 1 in connection with Donizetti, in which characters accumulate on stage as the plot thickens. Set at the gateway to the Viceroy's palace, now occupied by Masaniello's victorious troops, and with an ominously smoking Mount Vesuvius visible at stage rear, the act proceeds in two great waves.



**fig. 4-4 Lise Noblet as Fenella in Auber's *La muette de Portici* (1828).
Lithograph by Lemercier after a drawing by Achille Deveria.**

Wave the first: the act begins, just as act II had begun, with a barcarolle, a decorative, seemingly innocent “genre” number for Pietro, one of Masaniello's henchmen, and his companions, wine cups in hand. Between the barcarolle's stanzas, however, Pietro reveals that Masaniello has betrayed the revolution he has set in motion, that he (Pietro) has punished Masaniello with a slow poison, and that Masaniello will soon be dead. Borella, another revolutionist, rushes in with a crowd of fishermen and issues a call to arms against Alphonse's forces, who are poised to attack. The crowd responds with panic, not only at the threatened bloodshed but also at the volcano's impending eruption. They call for Masaniello. He arrives, clearly deranged from the effects of the poison, singing an incoherent reprise of the act II barcarolle (i.e., a “mad scene”), while Vesuvius and the Viceroy's advancing army both rumble in the orchestral background. Fenella rouses him from his reverie and, becoming aware of the situation, Masaniello leads everyone off but Fenella, who is left alone onstage, miming prayer.

Wave the second: the first to enter this time is Elvira, who warns Fenella to flee. Next Alphonse arrives with news that Masaniello has perished at the hands of his own followers, incited by Pietro. As the massed choruses (fishermen, fisherwomen, revolutionists, Spanish soldiers) reenter the stage, Vesuvius erupts. On learning of her brother's death Fenella is overcome with grief. To general horror, she throws herself into the burning lava that has

begun to inundate the stage.

Musically speaking, what is most remarkable about this act is its breakneck dramatic tempo: a matter not of clock time or of musical tempo as normally defined, but of structure. As listed in the score, there are only two “numbers”: the opening barcarolle and a colossal unbroken finale that takes in all the rest of the action. As established in the days of Mozart and Da Ponte, a finale is a section in which musical numbers never close with full cadences (i.e., signals to applaud), but are subsumed into an unbroken continuity, further emphasized by frequent, sometimes remote, harmonic modulations reflecting the vicissitudes on stage.

We have previously seen the ensemble finale, long the exclusive preserve of the comic opera where it originated, adapted to tragic ends in the Italian operas of the 1830s (Bellini) and 1840s (Donizetti). Rossini, in his late *opere serie* for Naples, had also adapted it in this way. Having come to Paris and produced some of these operas in French translation, Rossini was part of the background to the Scribian finale as well. But before Scribe there was no precedent for a whole act that was in effect a continuous finale, which is to say a fluid dramatic or “organic” continuity uninterrupted by individual “numbers.” As Wagner wrote in wonder, spectators perceived *La muette de Portici* as “something completely novel,” because “one was always kept in suspense and transported by a complete act in its entirety.”¹¹ This will be a very important point to remember when considering the various operatic “reforms” of the later nineteenth century, most of which (but particularly Wagner's own) were attempts to achieve precisely this “numberless” continuity. Remembering this is all the more pertinent in view of an implicit, often forgotten, irony. Idealistic reformers of opera were wont to look back derisively on the French *grand opéra*, giving it in retrospect a reputation for opportunistic, exploitative commercial cynicism that is certainly supported by many of the details in this account of its origins and of the genesis of *La muette de Portici*. Surely no operatic genre was ever devised with a more constant and fretful eye toward its public reception. And yet two of the principal tenets of late-century “reformist” opera—the emphasis on uniting all media (poetry, music, setting, spectacle) in mutually reinforcing collaboration, and the achievement of “numberless” continuity—were powerfully anticipated by the *grand opéra* not in opposition to public taste but in the very act of courting it.

And yet public taste—a protean, discrepant thing—has rarely if ever been successfully controlled or anticipated from “above”; nor does public reception ever completely match creative intention. The adventures of *La muette de Portici* provide one of the most pointed illustrations of these truths. That story, the story of its reception, is its truest claim on our attention.

The opera was planned during the period of the so-called Bourbon Restoration, toward the end of the stormy and reactionary reign of Charles X, the brother of Louis XVI, the last monarch of the old regime (beheaded during the Reign of Terror). Charles had succeeded his other brother, Louis XVIII, who had been placed on the throne by the “concert of Europe” following Napoleon's defeat. By 1827 the political atmosphere was tense and theatrical censorship was severe. In such circumstances an opera about a revolution, even one as removed in time and place as Masaniello's, might seem the very last thing the Académie Royale, France's most official musical stage, would consider offering for public view. In fact, however, the opera was planned by the theatrical directorate in direct collaboration with the king's chief minister, the Vicomte de Martignac, in an effort to sway liberal opinion away from renewed revolutionary action.

The revolution depicted in the opera is not only abortive but disastrous for all concerned. By the fourth act it has gone out of Masaniello's control and descended into mob rule. Masaniello turns against his former companions (even offering his protection to Alphonse and Elvira) in an effort to stop the senseless bloodshed. He becomes, improbably enough, the embodiment of order, and is condemned by the senseless mob for his moderation. It is only Fenella's final act of suicidal desperation that brings everyone to their senses. The opera's last lines, spoken “in one voice” by all the surviving characters and choruses, suggest that the natural disaster (the eruption of Vesuvius) was a divine punishment for the civil disaster they had wrought:

Grâce pour notre crime! Mercy for our crime!

Grand Dieu! protège-nous! Great God! Protect us!

Et que cette victime And let this one victim

Suffise à ton courroux! Appease your anger!

As Karin Pendle, a historian of the *grand opéra*, observes, the intended moral of the opera was that in Masaniello's revolution, and by implication in all revolutions, "the losers are not primarily the leaders but rather the masses of people who have been taken advantage of by both sides." It was "the mood of the times," she adds, that "dictated the content of *La muette de Portici*," and "its warning was there for all who had ears to hear."¹² And yet as Jane Fulcher, a rival historian of the *grand opéra*, points out, many among the public had ears for another message altogether, and managed to find it in the opera by "reading" the work opportunistically and selectively, the way large, heterogeneous modern audiences always interpret works of art.

The outcome of the drama finally mattered less to the public than the manner in which the crowd, with which the public identified, was portrayed. "In the end," writes Fulcher,

the depiction of the people was the work's most gripping aspect: the people depicted as grand and heroic, through most of the work, on the first royal stage.... The blocking of the crowd scenes presented them as an active and self-assured group, now themselves in a position to inspire fear and awe in the authorities. Moreover, their choral scenes, by far the most musically powerful parts of the work, similarly projected a sense of dignity and pride that clashed openly with what occurred at the opera's end.¹³

So completely did bourgeois audiences identify, against official expectation, with the powerfully portrayed peasant revolutionaries, as to turn the opera into a virtual "accessory before the fact" to the revolution of 1830, the so-called July Revolution, in which political power was decisively wrested by the bourgeoisie from the aristocracy for good and all.

This reading of the opera against the official grain was much abetted by the means of its public dissemination. Operas were published and popularized not only as complete works, but in separate "numbers" as well. Individual numbers were encoded in barrel organ cylinders and became street music. They were issued in sheet music and enjoyed independent sales as home music. One item from *La muette de Portici* that became an instant, runaway best-seller was the act II duet for Masaniello and Pietro, "Amour sacré de la patrie" ("Sacred love of fatherland," Ex. 4-6).

Detached from its original context, this exhilarating marchlike number could serve as many contradictory purposes as could patriotism itself, teaching government and governed alike that works of art could be freely appropriated, in an age of mass dissemination, for use as political weapons. It became customary for audiences to applaud the revolutionary duet with special show-stopping fervor, turning the occasion into a virtual antigovernment demonstration. What the nineteenth century learned from the *grand opéra* was that works of art could be dangerous. They were dangerous not necessarily by design but by virtue of their ambiguity—and, consequently, the different ways in which they could be used. In an age of emergent mass politics, music had become a potential rabble-rouser. Opera could now not only mirror but actually make the history of nations. In extreme cases it could even help make the nation.

Just how literally this was the case was driven home when *La muette de Portici* was exported, first to Germany, next, and fatefully, to Belgium. The political situation in the Low Countries, particularly among the French-speaking Belgians or Walloons, was much closer to that portrayed in the opera than the situation in France, where the opera had already proved politically explosive. Like Masaniello's Neapolitans, the Belgians had been living under Hapsburg domination since 1815, when the Congress of Vienna had peremptorily assigned the Belgian provinces to the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, a de facto Austrian protectorate. The July Revolution in France had emboldened Belgian patriots to seek independence. They demanded a performance of *La muette de Portici*, banned by the nervous Austrians, as the price of their participation in birthday celebrations for the Dutch king, William of Orange, scheduled for 24 August.

La muette, heavily cut, opened the very next day, Wednesday, 25 August 1830, at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels. As usual, the authorities cut the wrong numbers. The scenes of mob violence were gone, but "Amour sacré de la patrie" remained. Having circulated for two years in sheet and street music, it was widely known by heart. By the end of the number, the whole audience seemed to be on its feet, singing along. The chief of police sent a scout outside to assess the mood of the mob that had collected on the theater square. The scout returned and reported that the chief was to be assassinated in his box at the end of the performance.

By the end of the fourth act, most of the audience had left the theater and had joined the crowd, which swept into

and occupied the offices of the main Brussels newspaper, the city courthouse, and the Hôtel de Ville, the seat of government. The decisive moment came with the storming of the municipal armory and the distribution of weapons to the rioters. Over the next few days the revolt spread to other cities. Unable to contain the crowds, the Dutch forces withdrew. By the next year, with the connivance of the anti-French coalition of “powers,” Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (uncle of the soon-to-be-crowned Queen Victoria of England) had been elected King of the Belgians. His descendants reign to this day.

ex. 4-6 Daniel-François-Esprit Auber, *La muette de Portici* no. 8, duo, “Amour sacrée de la patrie,” mm. 48–56

Historians debate the spontaneity of the Belgian uprising, and its precise relationship to the operatic performance that seemed to spark it. Was the demonstration an unpremeditated reaction to the patriotic duet or was the duet the prearranged signal to begin the demonstration? The latter, admittedly, seems more likely to be the case, since according to all reports the police anticipated the demonstration (if not its strength) and had put the theater square under guard.

Yet how much of a difference, finally, do these admissions and qualifications make? Unaffected is the status of the musical performance—and, secondarily, of the work performed—as a political act. It is clear, moreover, that the effect of the performance on Belgian history had nothing at all to do with the conception of the work or the intentions of its creators. But again, what difference did that make to the Brussels demonstrators, and what difference should it make to us?

BOURGEOIS KINGS

The Belgian insurrection of August 1830 differed very significantly from its French counterpart of the previous month (the so-called July Revolution), to which it is often likened. The one was a revolt of patriots against an imposed foreign regime. The other was a revolt by an aristocracy of wealth (the *haute bourgeoisie* or upper middle class) against an aristocracy of birth. It put an end to the Bourbon dynasty once and for all, but, remembering the post-revolutionary Reign of Terror and fearful of the “proletariat” (the industrialized and newly populous urban working class), the victors, headed by the venerable Marquis de Lafayette of American revolutionary fame, held back from redeclaring republican rule. Instead, a liberal constitutional monarchy, respectful of individual rights (and particularly the rights of private property), was declared by the newly empowered legislature or Chamber of Deputies, a stronghold of bourgeois interests.

At its head stood Louis Philippe (1773–1850), the gray-suited, umbrella-toting “citizen king,” whose father, the Duke of Orléans, had been an active revolutionary (under the name Philippe Egalité) but had been martyred by the Terror. The new king stood for the protection of bourgeois interests against aristocrat and proletarian alike. Especially after a number of variously motivated attempts were made on his life, the France his reign represented became a bastion of “conservative liberalism,” a strong secular state committed to economic growth and the securing of all attendant rights and privileges. The “July Monarchy” was thus at once a beacon of religious and civil tolerance and bulwark of political stability, bitterly opposed in the name of these values to all clericalism and aristocratic resurgence, but to all revolutionary or socialist tendencies as well. It was a brief European foretaste of “Americanism,” the sort of capitalistic economic liberalism that only became a world force much later with the emergence of the United States as a world power.

And its art exhibited traces of precocious Americanism as well; it is hard nowadays to overlook the many parallels between the luxuriance and the implied values of the July Monarchy's most exalted art product—the *grand opéra*, which reached its zenith under Louis Philippe—and those of the Hollywood movie industry: the same basis in popular spectacle, the same emphasis on high-tech “production values” and “special effects,” the same preoccupation with richly appointed semi-fantastic historical settings, and the same enthusiastic, anachronistic reinforcement of contemporary middle-class values by means of epic dramaturgy.

And by no means least: the same social tolerance in the name of economic expansion, exemplified in the hospitality shown both by Hollywood and by the Académie Royale under Louis Philippe to enterprising Jewish talent. Both Halévy and Meyerbeer, the grand opera's leading lights, were Jews (and Meyerbeer was a foreigner to boot). But both were welcomed as creators of artistic showpieces of a specifically national type, in which the French nation in its most militantly bourgeois phase took an intense patriotic pride.

Indeed, Halévy's most successful opera, *La Juive* (“The Jewess”, 1835), to a book by Scribe, is an impassioned indictment of religious bigotry. That is not what packed them in, though. It was, rather, the staging by Duponchel and Cicéri that bowled audiences over with its conspicuous consumption and its “cast of thousands,” causing one reviewer to exult that “the Opéra may become a power capable of throwing its armies into the balance of power in Europe.”¹⁴ The gold standard for opulence, however, was set the next year by *Les Huguenots*, Meyerbeer's masterpiece, which also clothed a liberal bourgeois plea for religious tolerance in raiment of unbelievable, Versailles-rivaling splendor.

The composer of *Les Huguenots* was born Jakob Liebmann Meyer Beer to a wealthy Berlin family, comparable to the Mendelssohns but if anything even richer and more acculturated. It was a mark of his sense of security that the composer's father, Juda Herz Beer, a sugar merchant and an elder in the municipal synagogue, never converted or had his children baptized. His mother, Amalia, the daughter of perhaps the most prosperous banker in Berlin, actually made her son swear never to renounce his hereditary faith; and while the composer was a totally assimilated and cosmopolitan citizen of Europe, and never religiously observant, he honored his pledge and was eventually brought back to Berlin for burial, amid huge publicity, in the city's Jewish cemetery.



fig. 4-5 Meyerbeer, photographed in 1855 by Félix Nadar.

His career is if anything an even more impressive illustration than Mendelssohn's of the opportunities that opened up to “emancipated Jews” in the early optimistic decades of the nineteenth century. Trained first as a piano virtuoso, he was able to perform Mozart's D-minor Piano Concerto at the age of ten. Two years later he enrolled in the Berlin Singakademie where, a couple of decades ahead of Mendelssohn, he studied theory and beginning composition (counterpoint) with Carl Friedrich Zelter. In 1810, having embarked on a professional career and contracted his last two names into “Meyerbeer,” he began two years of lessons (alongside Weber, from then on a friend) with Abbé Vogler.

Meyerbeer landed a court Kapellmeister's post in 1813, the same year that his second German singspiel was produced to indifferent success. Wishing to devote himself to theatrical composition, and therefore unhappy with the prospect of a life spent in small-time court service, he took the advice of Antonio Salieri (still the Vienna court composer), quit his job, and went to Italy to learn the tricks of the opera trade. Actually, it was not much of a gamble. Thanks to his family's fortune, Meyerbeer was financially independent throughout his life. Indeed, he was one of the richest men in Europe, and in later years knew how to use his money to manipulate the press. (His biographer, Heinz Becker, credits him with the invention of “the modern press conference with refreshments.”)¹⁵

He spent eight miraculously successful years (1816–24) in Italy (Venice, Padua, Milan) much as Handel had done a century before him, Italianizing not only his style but even his first name (to Giacomo). By the time of his last Italian opera, *Il crociato in Egitto* (The Crusader in Egypt, 1824), a *melodramma eroico* on the Rossini model (and the last important opera, incidentally, to feature a major role for a castrato), Meyerbeer was recognized as Rossini's most viable rival. (His viability was most effectively, if backhandedly, acknowledged by Rossini himself, who never tired of denigrating Meyerbeer's work, especially after he had quit the scene and Meyerbeer continued to thrive.) *Il crociato* was a deliberate bid to attract the attention of the Paris opera houses, by then regarded (thanks precisely to their status as an official national establishment) as the Mecca of the operatic world. After a trial Paris production of another of his Italian operas in 1826, he was at last favored (a year later than Rossini) with an actual Paris commission. The commission came not from the Académie Royale but from the director of the Opéra Comique, with whom the composer had struck up a friendship. For that house one was expected to write three-act operas with spoken dialogue and happy endings: by then it was a firmly established principle that a tragic opera ended with at least one death and a comic opera with at least one marriage. Before he could embark on the project, however, he was sidetracked by a request from the widow of Weber, who had just died unexpectedly in London, to complete his friend's singspiel, *Die drei Pintos*.

There are probably the makings of a psychological novel in Meyerbeer's lifelong failure to keep this promise. (He finally returned the still-unfinished score to the Weber family a quarter of a century later, appeasing them with a large indemnity; the opera was eventually completed—in 1887!—by a young opera conductor named Gustav Mahler, who went on to become a major composer of symphonies but never wrote an opera of his own.) The temporary delay had a fateful and, for Meyerbeer, a very happy consequence, however. While he was ostensibly occupied with the abortive *Drei Pintos* project, the success of Auber's *Muette de Portici* created a demand for more operas on a like heroic scale, and Meyerbeer thus got in on the ground floor, so to speak, of the nascent *grand opéra*.

The original Opéra Comique commission—*Robert le diable* (“Robert the devil”), vaguely based on an old Norman legend—would have been something of a chip off *Der Freischütz*, already popular at the Opéra Comique in a free adaptation called *Robin des bois* (“Robin Hood”). Robert, one of several knights set to compete for the hand of Princess Isabelle, is tempted by his sinister friend Bertram, just as Max is tempted in *Der Freischütz* by his friend Caspar, to enhance his chances of success with supernatural aid. Bertram turns out to be not a man but a demon, and not Robert's friend but his father. He comes within a hair's breadth of claiming Robert's soul, but is defeated in the end by Alice, Robert's foster sister.

In the five-act *grand opéra* version eventually presented at the Académie Royale, Bertram is swallowed up in an earthquake at the very end, and Robert is led off to the altar, where Isabelle is waiting. (Thus the marriage survived from the *opéra comique* conception, but what is actually shown on stage is Bertram's hellish Don Giovanni-ish demise.) The obligatory third-act ballet is a counterpart to Weber's “Wolf's Glen,” with a fiery “Valse infernale” representing a demoniac orgy in a deserted cave, and most spectacularly (as well as most obviously indebted to the phantasmagoria shows) a swirling dance for a whole convent-cemetery's worth of risen nuns' corpses. This was as much an opera to see as to hear, and it has been argued that the real hero behind *Robert le diable* was Cicéri, the designer. But it made Meyerbeer the toast of Paris (and the object of furious resentment back home). The Jewish parvenu became the bourgeois king of the opera, to match the one at the helm of government. He maintained his preeminence with three more grand opera scores, each with an elephantine gestation period and a behemoth of a production, spaced out over a period of thirty years.

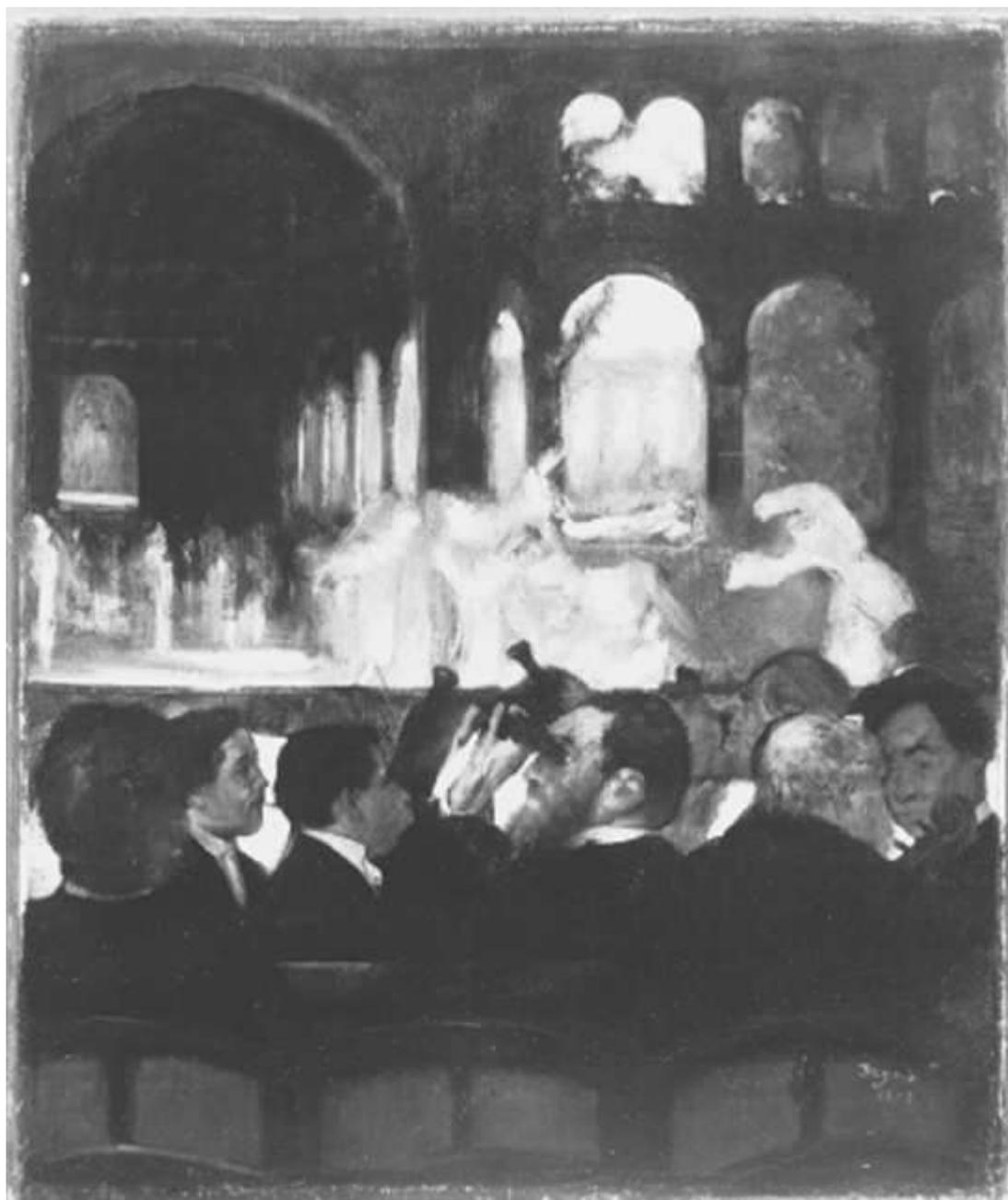


fig. 4-6 Edgar Degas (1834–1917), *The Ballet from “Robert le Diable”* (1871).

While maintaining *Robert le diable's* colossal scale and reliance on awe-inspiring spectacle, the operas that followed differed significantly from the prototype as dramatic conceptions. It was not an artistic difference alone, but one that matched the changes in the political climate. Owing to the snail's pace at which the cumbersome Paris production machine had to operate—whereas Italian productions typically went from contract-signing to opening night in a matter of weeks, the process normally lasted from three to twelve years in Paris—a grand opera production could sometimes be curiously out of joint with the times by the time it reached the stage.

Robert le diable was a case in point. Although first presented in 1831, in the first year of the July Monarchy, the score was commissioned and supplied in the waning years of the restoration. However thrilling, it was at heart a frivolous *diablerie* (“deviltry,” to use the term current at the cheap boulevard theaters) with a facile, unproblematic moral and a rather smugly happy end, in which good and bad characters alike receive their just deserts. The works actually created in the period of the ascendant bourgeoisie, in contrast, employed the same dazzling theatrical rhetoric to produce uniformly horrifying *dénouements*, investing them, however artificially, with a gripping moral urgency.

M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet, a historian of the Paris musical stage, has caught their common denominator with succinct precision. In the grand operas of the July Monarchy, she writes, “sympathetic characters are crushed by forces

beyond their control.”¹⁶ The portrayal of these forces as human rather than supernatural was the reason why every grand opera commissioned after 1830 had to have an explicit historical setting, usually a well-defined “time of troubles” brought about by irreconcilable factional strife. And the forces being human, they are subject to moral judgment and can serve as cautionary examples. The moral is always the same: “Don't let things get out of control! Resolve your differences!” Naked conflict, intransigence, prejudice, as every grand opera shows us time and again, lead inevitably to destruction.

Rarely if ever does the opera appear to take sides within the conflict portrayed. It sides, ostensibly, against conflict itself. As George Sand was quick to discern (and to approve), however, there was an implicit political bias in *grand opéra*. It proceeded, she noted, from a “new liberal theory of history according to which, far from being the exclusive property of revolutionists, terrorism was attributed primarily to the aristocratic nobles, kings, princes and gentlemen.”¹⁷

In *Les Huguenots* (1836) these political morals are drawn with particular clarity thanks to the trusty Romeo-and-Juliet formula. A pair of star-crossed lovers, Raoul (Protestant) and Valentine (Catholic), are caught in the Reformation's web. They meet their doom in the course of the infamous St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of 1572, in which many hundreds of Huguenots (French Calvinists) were shot dead in the streets of Paris at the behest of Catherine de' Medici, the Italian-born queen mother. The entire fifth act of the opera was given over to a reenactment of the horrible event, at the end of which the auditorium famously reeked of gunpowder and buckshot, adding yet another sensory element to the media-saturation for which the *grand opéra* was famed. Like *La Juive*, which preceded it by a year, *Les Huguenots* is an indictment of religious fanaticism and an implicit declaration of bourgeois liberalism.

In *Le prophète* (1849), the setting is sixteenth-century Holland and Germany, where another fanatical religious movement, that of the Anabaptists (“Rebaptizers” rejecting infant baptism), held sway. The Anabaptists, whose main tactic was fomenting peasant revolts, could be looked upon as the extreme left wing of the early Reformation movement. The title character is John of Leiden (Jean in the opera), who declared himself the resurrected King David and declared a theocratic “kingdom of Zion” in the town of Münster in 1534. After presiding over this self-created polygamous religious commune for about a year, John was defeated by the Catholic prince bishop whom he had deposed and was publicly tortured to death along with his followers.

In the opera, Jean is portrayed as a good-natured innkeeper gulled by crafty thieves posing as Anabaptists into becoming their religious figurehead. He is disillusioned in the end, with tragic results for himself, Berthe his betrothed (who stabs herself when she learns the tyrannical “prophet's” identity), and his mother Fidès, who dies with Jean in the catastrophic explosion of his palace, which he himself has engineered as an act of expiation. In this opera the political subtext is especially obvious. As the poet and critic Théophile Gautier (1811–72) wittily observed, “the Anabaptists and the peasants have dialogue that one could believe to have been drawn from the prose of communistic journals” such as were proliferating in the period leading up to the abortive proletarian revolutions of 1848.¹⁸ Again there was an irony engendered by delayed production. By the time it was staged, the revolution of which it sought to forewarn had already taken place and France was again a republic.

L'Africaine (“The African girl”), the last Scribe-Meyerbeer collaboration, was not produced until 1865, a year after the composer's death. Once again the historical setting is the sixteenth century, the “age of exploration,” but the exotic geographical setting (“an island in the Indian Ocean”) is semi-fantastical. And once again religious fanaticism (this time the Iberian inquisition) is cast as a destructive force, though this time it has a rival in the collision and mutual corruption of European and African mores.

The two main characters are the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama and Sélika, an “African” (actually Hindu) queen he has brought back to Portugal as a slave and concubine. Taking her back with him on a subsequent expedition, Vasco is defeated and captured by Sélika's tribe. In the end, though, she demonstrates her superior magnanimity by first marrying him rather than having him killed, and then letting him go back to Portugal with Inès, his European betrothed. In a final scene reminiscent of the Dido-and-Aeneas theme so beloved of the *opera seria* composers of yore, Sélika, like Dido (also an African queen), poisons herself on a promontory overlooking the sea as Vasco and his fleet depart.

GRANDEST OF THE GRAND

As Wagner's appreciation of *La muette de Portici* has already suggested a *grand opéra* cannot be fairly sampled as a

musical achievement at any level short of an entire act. The fourth act of *Les Huguenots* is the inevitable choice, not only because it has long been acclaimed as the greatest, if not the “grandest” single act in all of *grand opéra*, but also (if paradoxically) because it is an interestingly atypical work that reveals the genre's conceptual Achilles' heel even as it suggests the ways in which its virtues would later be absorbed into the international operatic mainstream.

It is often said that *grand opéra* killed the bel canto, just as bourgeois pretension and “conspicuous consumption” killed aristocratic grace. As evidence, its amazing paucity of solo numbers is often cited. Arias, the dramatic as well as the musical focal points in Italian operas, became merely occasional and decorative, often sung *ad libitum*. Single characters rarely got to occupy the stage long enough to sing one. And while every grand opera score contained its share of “detachable” numbers (numbers intended for a life outside the opera on the recital stage and in homes), they are often throwaways, used for the purpose of narrative exposition rather than emotional effusion, and are written in a simple ballad (strophic) style more often than in the gripping sequence of accelerating tempos that one gets in Italian opera.

In *Les Huguenots* only two characters are given real arias to sing. Both of them are decidedly minor characters, and their big moments come early in the evening, before the plot has had a chance to thicken much. One is Marguerite, the Queen of Navarre, who gets a traditionally regal coloratura aria at the beginning of act II to establish it, in keeping with the “act-oriented” principle of Scribian librettos, as the “feminine” act (replete with a then-licitious bathing scene) to contrast with the all-male cast of act I. The other is Urbain, Marguerite's gawkily flirtatious page, a “trousers” role often compared with that of Cherubino, the Countess Almaviva's androgynous lover-boy in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*. (There is also a blustery musket song in act I called “Pif paf pouf!” for the *basso profundo* role of Marcel, an old Huguenot; it was often detached, and became famous, but it is hardly an aria.) It is a superb commentary on the values of *grand opéra* that it should have been Urbain, the most incidental of the major roles in *Les Huguenots*, who was given the opera's most famous aria to sing. But even as an element of décor, the Cavatine du Page (“Nobles seigneurs, salut!” [“Greetings, Noble Lords”]) is a sumptuous and revealing tidbit. It deserves a peek for the way it brought a note of frank sexual suggestiveness into operatic music, making winkingly overt what had always been an implicit component of opera's appeal.

Marguerite has sent Urbain into the stag party that is act I with a summons for Raoul, the male lead. The demonstratively male atmosphere of the act makes the *travesti* character's sexual ambiguity all the more piquant. The character is a boy, but the singer is a woman among men, and the composer plays the gag for all it is worth. Urbain is marked as “exotic” (i.e., sexy) by his vocal range, to be sure; but also by his coloratura flourishes at the beginning and the end, which provide a musical equivalent to the ironically obsequious courtly bows that surely accompanied them in the stage business. His lascivious allure is also underscored by Scribe: the Count of Nevers (the host on whose party he has intruded) pointedly addresses Urbain as “beau page”—literally “handsome page,” but to be understood as “pretty boy.”

But all of these (and the gorgeously sensuous orchestration besides) are secondary to the main attraction, the lilting waltz rhythms in which Urbain's creamy cantabile phrases are cast, as close to a belly dance as a meter could get within a strictly European setting. It is a compound waltz, in fact, implying in its meter two levels of curvaceous ternary movement, whirls within whirls (and still more whirls when the writing includes sixteenth-note triplets). Urbain's melody behaves like a veritable ballerina—pirouettes (twirls) cynically placed on the word “*honneur*,” jetés (leaps) on “*Chevaliers*,” spectacular *fouettés en tournant* (whip-arounds) to characterize the coquettish series of “*nons*” in the middle section.



fig. 4-7 Autograph score of the Page's cavatina from act I of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* (1836).

Most coaxing of all are the *battements* (flutters) alternating with *tendus* (stretches)—the staccato repeated notes alternating with languorous “sighing” pairs (marked *dolce e legato* in the composer's manuscript)—in the middle section, where the page promises “glory and bliss” to the lucky recipient of her mistress's summons. There is technical interest here in the composer's apparently superfluous use of the words *staccato* and *legato* to denote what might already seem sufficiently explicit in the dots and slurs (Fig. 4-7). Spotlighted in this way they tell the conductor to reinforce the distinction by adjusting the tempo—something that was becoming more and more the rule in romantic orchestral practice, now that baton conducting was coming in. A new kind of virtuoso—the podium virtuoso—was emerging.

And he was emerging amid controversy. That Meyerbeer asks for the conductor's intervention here is evidence that he saw the innovation as useful. Others affected disapproval, especially where the sacralized repertory of “absolute music” was concerned. There is a passage in a treatise on conducting by Felix Weingartner (1863–1942), who saw himself as a reformer of the art, in which he protested what he described as the distortions wrought by the podium virtuosi of his student days. The chief culprit was Hans von Bülow (1830–94), probably the late nineteenth century's most celebrated maestro. The passage Weingartner chose for illustrating von Bülow's sins was one from Beethoven's

Egmont Overture that exhibits exactly the same contrast in articulation that Meyerbeer called for in Urbain's cavatina (Ex. 4-7).



ex. 4-7 Ludwig van Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture, second theme

Weingartner carped that Bülow “leaped at once from *allegro* into an *andante grave*” at this point, “thereby destroying the uniform tempo” marked by the composer. The historical evidence (including Meyerbeer's notation) suggests that Weingartner's protests were actually bent not toward the restoration of a lost propriety but at a new ideal of regularity most appropriately associated with twentieth-century modernism. Ironically enough, the tradition of tempo fluidity Weingartner was trying to stamp out (and which was effectively eliminated from most twentieth-century performances) was a tradition largely instituted by the very figure whose unsullied texts Weingartner was trying to restore. For Beethoven was one of the first baton conductors, and all who have given ear-witness testimony on his performances agree, to quote one of them, that he was “much concerned to achieve a proper *tempo rubato*.”¹⁹ It is altogether possible, even likely, that Meyerbeer, German by birth, was trying through his notation to acquaint French musicians with the freewheeling “Beethovenian” approach to tempo he had imbibed in his youth.

But it was a new expressive purpose to which Meyerbeer sought to put the style. His page's cavatina is worlds away from the *Innerlichkeit* of German romanticism, and Meyerbeer's use of coloratura is equally far from that of his Italian contemporaries, Bellini and Donizetti. The page's delivery is not self-revealing. It is a facade. The only affect projected (if one can call it an affect) is that of coquetry. For high romantic emotion one must turn, in a *grand opéra*, to the “production numbers”: the *morceaux d'ensemble*, as they were called.

Vocal virtuosity will certainly not be lacking. Not for nothing were performances of *Les Huguenots* billed as *les nuits de sept étoiles*—“nights of seven stars”—and ticket prices raised. With seven roles demanding singers of the absolute first rank it was the highest-priced of all operas for all concerned, including the management. But it was a new kind of virtuoso singing that Meyerbeer required in dramatic (as opposed to decorative) roles: a forceful rather than graceful virtuosity that demanded an extension of the full (or “chest”) voice almost to the top of the range, with a concomitantly lessened dependence on refined falsetto (“head-voice”) singing. This is the kind of heroic singing style we know today as “operatic.” For better or worse, we owe it, in the first instance, to Meyerbeer.

The fourth act of *Les Huguenots* contains just three big numbers. First there is a “scene,” a hectic recitative number in which Valentine, now married and unavailable, hides her illicit Protestant lover Raoul from her father St. Bris, the mastermind of the St. Bartholomew's Day plot. After the first performances, Meyerbeer added a brief romance for Valentine alone so as to give the opera's female lead a lyrical moment to balance Raoul's little air at the beginning of act V. Its two to three minutes' duration, believe it or not, is the only span of time in the entire four-hour show when the stage is occupied by a single soliloquizing character expressing strong emotion. This was indeed a new kind of opera!

What follows next is one of Scribe's most powerful “dramatic tableaux,” to which Meyerbeer composed his most famous *morceau d'ensemble*: the Conspiracy and Blessing of the Daggers (*Conjuration et bénédiction des poignards*). Here is where the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre is plotted. The first section, the *conjuration*, is baritone St. Bris's big moment. He leads the taking of the oath with a big rabble-rousing tune (“Pour cette cause sainte”/“For this holy cause”) whose resemblance to *La Marseillaise*, whether calculated or not, is patent—and potent (Ex. 4-8).

Pour cet - te cau - se Sain - te

Al - lons, en - fants de la pa - tri - e

ex. 4-8 Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Les Huguenots*, “Pour cette cause sainte,” compared with La Marseillaise

Treated at first as if it were the beginning of an aria, its second half is immediately taken up by St. Bris and Nevers (now Valentine's husband), as a duet accompanied by shouts of assent from the chorus of Catholic lords, and a pair of countermelodies (in contrary motion, of course) for Tavannes, an ardent coconspirator, and the horrified Valentine (sung “aside” to the audience, cadenza and all). Having thus been given a monumental exposition, the tune will come back as a kind of rondo theme (or “double return”) to bind up the whole tableau. In between its appearances Nevers, realizing that it is not a battle but a craven massacre of innocents that is being planned, angrily withdraws. With fine irony, Meyerbeer gives him the hushed yet nevertheless crowning reprise of the tune so bumptiously put forth by St. Bris, as Nevers claims the honorable position that St. Bris in his cowardice has abdicated.

After Nevers has stalked off the stage, and Valentine has been shooed away by her father, the actual plot is hatched, following which three monks enter, bearing baskets full of white scarves that will serve on the morrow as identification badges for Catholics during the bloodbath. (During their entrance, Valentine, having escaped from her room, returns unnoticed to the stage and sings an arioso reminding the audience about the concealed presence of Raoul.)

The preparation for the blessing of the daggers is a moment of brutally degraded pomp, characterized musically by the dotted rhythms of the old French overture. The actual blessing (Ex. 4-9) is intoned to a weird chord progression that shows Meyerbeer to have been paying attention to the latest developments in German music: the tonic, $A\flat$, is shadowed by major thirds below (E major) and above (C major), completing an uncanny “thirds cycle” before the C-major chord resolves as a dominant to F.

St. Bais et les 3 Moines

f Glai - ves pi

cux - saintes é - pé - es Qui dans un sang impur serez bien - tôt trempé - es. Vous par qui le Très Haut

frappe ses ennemis. Glai - ves pi - eux par nous soy - ez bé - nis!

Glai - ves pi - eux par nous soy - ez bé - nis!

pp

ex. 4-9 Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Les Huguenots*, Act IV (blessing scene)

After an anathema has been pronounced on the Huguenots, and an oath taken to spare no one, be it graybeard, woman, or child, the stage erupts in a bloodthirsty *allegro furioso* that functions as a sort of choral cabaletta. Meyerbeer's virtuosity in the scoring of this sonorous explosion (still using "natural" brass instruments) was widely admired and emulated, perennially cited in orchestration treatises beginning with Berlioz's in 1843. What seems almost a greater achievement, though, is the way in which the composer managed to scale the sonority down by degrees to pianissimo as the conspirators disperse.

Here, the most fully populated moment of the tableau, was where Scribe thought the act was over. And so it was when the opera went into rehearsal in June 1835. It was Adolphe Nourrit (1802–39), the leading tenor of the Opéra, playing Raoul, who demanded that he and his leading lady—Cornélie Falcon (1812–97), his protégé and mistress, in the role of Valentine—be given a proper love scene. It was not an easy thing to rationalize, and Scribe refused to supply it. Meyerbeer turned to a friend, Émile Deschamps, for the requisite text.

In the end, the strangely motivated Grand Duo went like this: Raoul emerges from hiding and immediately makes for the door, so that he can warn his fellow Huguenots of the impending catastrophe. The desperate Valentine, losing her head and trying to detain him, blurts out that she loves him. Thunderstruck ("Tu l'as dit!"/"You said it!"), Raoul asks to hear her say it again, over and over. This provides the slow "cavatine" portion of the duet, set in the exotically "remote" key of G \flat major and marked *andante amoroso* (Ex. 4-10). But finally, hearing the local church bells give

out the fatal signal (on F, followed by a blast of brass on a jarring C# that may remind us of Weber's Wolf Glen tritones), he tears himself away and runs to his coreligionists' aid, thus providing the pretexts for a concluding "stretta" or fast finish.

What seemed to Scribe a contrived situation, improbable to the point of absurdity, became irresistible theater when realized. The freezing of the action into "aria time" at this terribly fraught juncture—just long enough for the two doomed characters to catch a moment's "inward" bliss before being predictably crushed by the inexorable march of external events—brought audiences to a frenzy of empathy. It was instantly the most successful number in the opera, chiefly responsible for the work's becoming the first grand opera to reach a thousand documented performances (in Paris in 1900); and it has retained its reputation as a masterpiece even as Meyerbeer's music has fallen out of the active repertory and his name has sunk, in many quarters, into low repute.

What brought the opera up to this self-surpassing level was the introduction of a new member into the planning board, so to speak, to join the composer, the librettist, the theater manager, the stage director, and the designer. Or rather, it was the readmittance to lost privilege of an old member, the oldest one of all, namely the singer. Never before in a grand opera, and never since, did a solo singer's voice dominate the work's most memorable moment. That made *Les Huguenots* at once the greatest *grand opéra* and an atypical one. It fused the novel, timely values of *grand opéra* with the foundational, "eternal" verities of all public music drama, as set in stone in Venice almost exactly two hundred years before. Opera has always thrived—and, it seems, can only thrive—on voice-inspired empathy.

Très doux
Tu l'as dit

oui, tu m'ai mes! Dans ma nuit

quelle é toi le a bnil lit Je renais, c'est l'ai pur des cieus mé

mes! Je renais, c'est l'ai pur des cieus mé mes! Là toujours, oubliez, oubli

et Tu l'as dit oui, tu m'ai mes!

**ex. 4-10 Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Les Huguenots*, Act IV (“Cavatine,”
andante amoroso)**

Until then not particularly known for its intimacy, Meyerbeer's music, especially in the cavatine that capitalized on Nourrit's extraordinary range and timbre, set a standard of tenderness that long remained a touchstone. In the witty words of Hugh Macdonald, a historian of French opera, “Tu l'as dit’ is a classic love duet: at least it is of a type that immediately became a classic,” owing to its many imitators. “Echoes of this duet are heard throughout the nineteenth century, not just for its orchestral and vocal style but for its key. I doubt if any composer familiar with *Les Huguenots* (and what composer was not?) was free to use G \flat in any other way.”²⁰

VAGARIES OF RECEPTION

Macdonald's long list of Meyerbeer's debtors and emulators has its ironies. For one thing it shows that, whatever the enabling conditions that brought forth Meyerbeer's work, its artistic and historical significance is not at all tantamount to, or exhausted by, its now-forgotten political significance. Even in its own time, the opera circulated in a variety of guises thanks to the many touchy government censorships that held sway in post-Napoleonic Europe. It was banned outright in French Protestant cities; in Vienna, and later in St. Petersburg, it became *The Guelphs and the Ghibellines* with the action transferred to thirteenth-century Italy; in Munich the setting was changed to

seventeenth-century England and the warring factions became Anglicans and Puritans.

But whatever the ostensible subject, a composer's colleagues, rivals, and progeny constitute an audience in their own right, one that (like all audiences) receives its impressions selectively and reads opportunistically, according to its predilections and its needs. So the other irony—that the list of Meyerbeer's debtors contains some who were far from his professed admirers—is in the end not so surprising. Most noteworthy is the prominence among them of Richard Wagner, whose hostility to Meyerbeer was of a piece with his denigration of Mendelssohn.

In *Das Judentum in der Musik*, Wagner steered clear of naming Meyerbeer's name as well as his own (probably because Meyerbeer was then technically an employee of the Prussian court and enjoyed its protection), but nobody had any trouble guessing the identity of “a far-famed Jew composer of our day” who “has addressed himself and his products to a section of our public whose total confusion of musical taste was less caused by him than exploited by him to his profit.” This charlatan “writes operas for Paris, and sends them touring round the world.” His is an art designed to titillate “that section of our citizen society whose only reason for attending the opera is utter boredom.” His success, Wagner argued, is “proof of the ineptitude of the present musical epoch,” since “the Jews could never have taken possession of our art until our art began to show signs of what they have now demonstrably brought to light—namely, its inner incapacity for life.”

To clinch the point, Wagner triumphantly asserted that “so long as the art of Music had a real organic life-need in it, down to the epochs of Mozart and Beethoven, there was nowhere to be found a Jew composer,” just as “at the time when Goethe and Schiller sang among us, we certainly knew nothing of a poetizing Jew.”²¹ In other words, Wagner claimed, it was not a change in the legal and social status of affluent Jews (their so-called emancipation) that made possible their participation in the arts, but rather the degeneration of the arts themselves, which had degraded them to a level susceptible to Jewish infiltration.

This diatribe did not go unanswered. One answer, appearing in the same journal as the original screed, went beyond the defense or vindication of individuals. Instead, it managed to engage Wagner's (or “Herr Freigedank's”) arguments at a profound and culturally significant level. The author, Eduard Bernsdorf, was a member of a distinguished German family of diplomats. (His nephew, who called himself Johann-Heinrich von Bernstorff, served as German ambassador to Washington in the years immediately preceding the First World War.) Bernsdorf's main point was that Wagner's diagnosis of the state of contemporary art and society was accurate, but that it was merely witless scapegoating to attribute it all to Jewish influence. “What he says about Meyerbeer is in many respects true,” Bernsdorf allowed, “but not because Meyerbeer is a Jew but because Meyerbeer is a man of the nineteenth century.”²²

A man of the nineteenth century—a “modern man,” that is, in the eyes of contemporaries—meant a beneficiary of progress in commerce and technology. The works of Meyerbeer—or rather their success—epitomized this benefit. Nineteenth-century improvements in transport and communications (e.g., the railroad, the telegraph) shrank distances dramatically, and enabled a truer cosmopolitanism than ever before. Of this, too, Meyerbeer had been a conspicuous beneficiary. A great deal of romantic ideology—especially where it involved the purity of nations and ethnicities (and particularly where it took on an exclusionary or xenophobic tinge, as it did with Wagner)—was a direct reaction to this new cosmopolitanism born of urbanization and improved communications. In many ways, then, romanticism had become antimodern and reactionary. This was the kind of romanticism Wagner's tract espoused.

And to such romantics, the Jew—who had achieved civil rights and emerged as a force in gentile society concurrently with (and partly as a result of) urbanization as well as the technological and commercial modernization of Europe—became the symbol of everything they found threatening in modern life. Defenders of German *Kultur* began to see Jews not only as tainted by commerce (“merchants”) and as spreaders of “modernity,” but as the henchmen of the hated French with their cosmopolitan mores and their unregenerate Enlightened “civilization.” What better focal point for such a phobia, then, than “a far-famed Jew composer” who “writes operas for Paris, and sends them touring round the world”?

These ancient debates would hardly merit airing in a book like this if they were merely ancient debates. Sadly, however, aspects of Wagner's anti-Semitic diatribe (motivated partly by personal spite, Meyerbeer having been his indispensable benefactor but having ceased his financial support in 1846) continue to surface, sometimes unwittingly, in present-day discussions of Meyerbeer, and continue, often unwittingly, to influence contemporary thinking about art. The most influential music history text of the mid-twentieth century (and still in print) Paul

Henry Lang's *Music in Western Civilization*, paraphrases Wagner almost word for word, imputing the same "boredom" to Meyerbeer's audience (in a quote cribbed from Voltaire): "One goes to see a tragedy to be moved, to the Opéra one goes either for want of any other interest or to facilitate digestion."²³

Then comes a fusillade of dated antibourgeois rhetoric, presented (one hopes) in naive ignorance of its former status as anti-Semitic code: Meyerbeer's operas were "written and composed for the use of merchants"; his work represented "the invasion of the bourgeois spirit, the pursuit of money and pleasure," which "abolished the sincere atmosphere of the first fervors of the romantic movement"; they represented the sinister intrusion of "a foreigner" into the domain of French art, when "a certain Jacob Liebmann Beer came to France" and "deliberately set out to utilize the weaknesses of the French character"; they are not a legitimate genre because they lack "a foundation in nature."²⁴ The only thing missing is Wagner's magnificent string of epithets summing up what he (and many since) perceived as the cynicism of *Les Huguenots*, the opera to which he was most indebted, and that consequently caused him the most distress: "a monstrous piebald, historico-romantic, diabolico-religious, fanatico-libidinous, sacro-frivolous, mysterio-criminal, autolytico-sentimental dramatic hotchpotch."²⁵

But the worst of it, for the Germans, was the fact that so much of the music in *Les Huguenots* seemed to be deliberately ugly. "The horrible is Meyerbeer's element," wrote Robert Schumann, another composer-turned-journalist, when the work was given in Leipzig in 1837.²⁶ That made Meyerbeer, in German eyes, not a romantic but another base realist, willing to sacrifice art's transcendent domain to the depiction of grim, filthy, or (worst of all) ordinary reality. The other side of realism was the importation into art of the musical artifacts of "external reality," made all the more intolerable in the case of *Les Huguenots* by the fact that one of these artifacts was a Protestant chorale—indeed the most famous of all chorales, Luther's own *Ein' feste Burg*, invoked not for its spiritual content but as a trademark to identify the Protestant faction.

Literally from the beginning of the opera (the Overture) to the end (the act V massacre), *Ein' feste Burg* haunts the opera (see Ex. 4-11), sometimes merely quoted (for example, by the doughty old Marcel in act 1), sometimes "developed" (as in the massacre). All parties to the device—composer, audience, critics—were aware that it was not historically "true" to use a Lutheran melody to represent the Calvinist Huguenots. The melody was selected not for its literal truth but for its "verisimilitude"—a distinction that is crucial to an understanding of artistic realism.

What is "verisimilar" is what *seems* true (*vraisemblable* in French), not necessarily what *is* true. When it came to musical "semiosis"—the creation of musical "signs"—what counted above all was legibility: not "is it the literal truth?" but "can it be read?" Only *Ein' feste Burg*, Meyerbeer realized, would instantly and automatically register with uninitiated audiences as "Protestant." Within the context of the artwork it alone, consequently, would elicit a "true" response. That is why another name for verisimilitude is "artistic truth." What is most important to realize is that artistic truth was as "real" a truth as any other kind. For one thing, it immediately set at nought all political censorship. Hearing *Ein' feste Burg* ring out in an opera retitled *The Guelphs and Ghibellines* immediately erased the censor's cover and revealed the work's "true" and original intent.

So it was not the actual, factual falsity of the symbol that made it anathema to German romantics, but rather the profane use to which Meyerbeer had put it, as well as the potentially corrupting effect such a usage might have on the audience. "I am no moralist," Schumann wrote, moralizing "but it enrages a good Protestant to hear his dearest chorale shrieked out on the boards, to see the bloodiest drama in the whole history of his religion degraded to the level of an annual fair farce, in order to raise money and noise with it." And even more pointedly, "one is often inclined to grasp one's brow, to feel whether all up there is in the right condition, when one reflects on Meyerbeer's success in healthy, musical Germany."

This time, however, there was no question of anti-Semitic code, because the work with which Schumann invidiously contrasted Meyerbeer's degrading spectacle was Mendelssohn's *Paulus*, "a work of pure art," in which "the resumption of the chorale," as Schumann put it, served the purposes of true religious feeling and, beyond that, the expression of *das innerliche Herz*, "the inward heart," romantic art's only true domain.²⁷

Notes:

(10) Quoted in Karin Pendle, *Eugène Scribe and French Opera of the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979), p. 50.

- (11) *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. W. Ashton Ellis, Vol. V (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1896), p. 39.
- (12) Pendle, *Eugène Scribe and French Opera of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 397.
- (13) Jane Fulcher, *The Nation's Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 40–41.
- (14) Quoted in Hugh Macdonald, "Juive, La," in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. II (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 926.
- (15) Heinz Becker, "Meyerbeer," in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. XII (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 253.
- (16) M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet, "Grand Opera," in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. II, p. 514.
- (17) Quoted in Pendle, *Eugène Scribe and French Opera*, p. 470.
- (18) Quoted in Pendle, p. 566 n20.
- (19) Ignaz von Seyfried, quoted in *Thayer's Life of Beethoven*, ed. Elliott Forbes (rev. ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 371.
- (20) Hugh Macdonald, "[G flat major, 9/8 time]," *Nineteenth-Century Music* XI (1987–8): 227.
- (21) *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, Vol. III, p. 96.
- (22) Eduard Bernsdorf, "K. Freigedank und das Judentum in der Musik," in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Vol. XXXIII (1850), p. 168; quoted in Sanna Pederson, "Enlightened and Romantic German Music Criticism, 1800–1850" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995), p. 258.
- (23) Quoted in Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization* (New York: Norton, 1941), p. 826.
- (24) Lang, *Music in Western Civilization*, pp. 830–32.
- (25) *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, Vol. II, trans. W. Ashton Ellis (*Opera and Drama*) (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1900), p. 94.
- (26) Robert Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*, ed. K. Wolff, trans. P. Rosenfeld (New York: Pantheon, 1946), p. 196.
- (27) Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*, p. 194.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

III. PEASANTS AND HISTORY (RUSSIA)

Chapter: CHAPTER 4 Nations, States, and Peoples**Source:** MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin**A NEWCOMER TO THE TRADITION**

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. The tempo is marked 'Poco andante' with a quarter note equal to 84 beats per minute. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of two systems of music. The first system has a treble clef on the top staff and a bass clef on the bottom staff. The second system has a bass clef on both the top and bottom staves. The music features various dynamics including piano (p), pianissimo (pp), and crescendo (cresc.). There are also markings for 'Piano' and 'Piano' in the first system. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs.

ex. 4-11a *Ein' feste Burg* in *Les Huguenots*, Overture, mm. 1–13

Perhaps the most piquant case history involving the relationship between music (particularly opera) and ideas of nationhood was that of Russia, which emerged as a European musical “power” at about the same point in its history as its emergence as a political and diplomatic power. Consequential musical contacts between Russia and Western Europe were a result of the “Westernizing” campaign of Tsar Peter I (“the Great,” reigned 1682–1725), and mainly occurred, to begin with, in Peter's new capital, St. Petersburg, named for the Tsar's patron saint. Over the course of a rough century beginning in the 1730s, Russia participated in the musical commerce of Europe first as a consumer only, then as a producer for home consumption, and finally as an exporter.

en extase
ff

Marcel

Sei - gneur, rem - part — et seul — sou -

Piano

NEVERS: offrant un verre
 plein à Raoul

Tiens!

M.

tiens — Du fai - ble qui r'a -

pp

RAOUL: embarrassé

bois! Non!

M.

do re —

ex. 4-11b Ein' feste Burg in *Les Huguenots*, Act I, "Choral"

Since the period in which Russia emerged as a musical power was precisely the period when Herderian ideas about the essential reality of national character—and the merits of cultural difference—were gaining credence, it is not surprising that the second phase of Russian participation, that of domestic production, should have placed a premium on national “markings,” often secured by the incorporation of “natural artifacts” from the surrounding peasant culture, newly valued under Herder's influence.

The image shows a musical score for a scene from *Les Huguenots*, Act V. It consists of two systems of music. Each system includes three vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in French and are repeated across the vocal parts. The first system ends with the vocalists on a long note, and the piano accompaniment continues. The second system continues the vocal lines and piano accompaniment.

ex. 4-11c *Ein' feste Burg* in *Les Huguenots*, Act V, height of the massacre

The first published collection of transcribed Russian folk songs (*narodniye pesni*, a term directly translated from Herder's *Volkslieder*), arranged for voice and parlor piano, was issued in 1790. It was compiled by an aristocratic admirer of Herder named Nikolai Lvov, with musical arrangements contributed by a hired hand, an immigrant Bohemian pianist named Johann Gottfried (or Jan Bogumir) Pratsch. The Lvov-Pratsch collection immediately became an avidly mined quarry of raw thematic material for composers in the European tradition (including such Europeans as Beethoven, who mined it for his “Razumovsky” Quartets, op. 59).

Later, when Russia became a musical exporter in its own right, the cultural-commercial value of its product was much enhanced by its exoticism, providing another incentive for national coloration. Utilizing Russian peasant lore within literate or “fine-art” musical products is often seen as an example of Russian “nationalism” in music, and the term can be justified in various contexts so long as it is not forgotten that the nations of Western Europe were just as nationalistic as Russia in the post-Napoleonic period. Indeed, Russia received its notions about national character, and its nationalistic aspirations, from the West; Russian “nationalistic” music has therefore to be regarded as an aspect of the country's musical Westernization.

For the only Russian music to which the word “nationalistic” is ever applied is the music composed by urban

Russians with elite Western training, in Western forms, and for Western media. The truly indigenous music of Russia, that is its folk music, is never called nationalistic, because it has no sense of an “other” against which its character is to be measured, and without a sense of the other there cannot any true self-consciousness. “And what should they know of England who only England know?”²⁸ asked the British poet Rudyard Kipling in the heyday of imperialist expansion. The same question is worth asking of any country that seeks national self-assertion, whether in art, in politics, or in art politics.

In any event, no other country was ever more conscious of the power and value of musical “semiosis”—musical “sign” language, often involving the appropriation of musical symbols “from life”—than Russia. As long as there has been a significant school of Russian composers in the European art music tradition, there has been a musically defined mythology of the Russian nation and its history, and it has often sought expression through the incorporation—or more precisely, the “professional assimilation”—of folklore.

The presence of that “significant school” in Russia is often dated precisely to the year 1836, the same year that witnessed the Paris premiere of *Les Huguenots*. And the crucial event that gave that year its significance in Russian musical history was also an operatic premiere: that of *A Life for the Tsar*, a “patriotic heroic-tragic opera” by Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka (1804–57).

This was not by a long way the first Russian opera, let alone the first opera premiered in Russia. The history of music as a continuously practiced secular fine art in the European literate tradition begins for Russia in the year 1735, ten years after the death of Peter the Great, when his niece, the Empress Anne (or Anna Ioannovna, reigned 1730–40), decided to import a resident troupe of Italian opera singers to adorn her court with elegant imported entertainments. Anne's operatic project could be called a continuation of Peter's legacy into a new cultural sphere.

The main reasons why Russia had stood culturally apart from Western Europe until the advent of Peter the Great were two: first, Russia accepted Christianity (in 988) from Byzantium, the seat of the Greek (Eastern) Orthodox Church; and second, from around 1240 until 1480 Russia was ruled as a conquered territory by the Mongol empire, from a seat in Central Asia. Under the suzerainty of an Islamic empire, the Russians and their local rulers, while still Christian, were for two centuries politically and economically cut off from all other Christian states. By the time the Muscovite princes were able to shake off their Muslim overlords, Byzantium and all the former Greek territories had fallen to the Ottoman Turks, another Islamic empire. Thus Russia had become an isolated Orthodox power, and took pride in viewing itself as the “Third Rome,” the true seat of Christendom.

Up to the time of Peter, virtually the only literate musical tradition in Russia was that of Church chant and its derivative polyphonic genres, preserved in a neumatic notation of a kind that had not been used in Western Europe since the days of the Carolingians. So alien was the secular art music of the West from any indigenous Russian music that the Russian vocabulary distinguished radically between the two. Russian chant was called *peniye* (“singing”). All Western art music, whether vocal or instrumental, was called *musika*, later changed to *muzika*. (The sign *ī* represents a Russian vowel similar to the English short *i*, but pronounced much further back in the mouth; in Russian transliterations, the letter *i* stands for the same sound as the Italian *i*, namely the English long *e*.)

The first Russian *musika* treatises and practical scores, which began appearing in the late seventeenth century, disseminated what was known as *partesnoye peniye* (“part-singing”) or *khoroviye kontserti* (“choral concertos”): that is, a *cappella* adaptations of Venetian-style “concerted” motets for the use of Orthodox choirs in what is now Ukraine, an area bordering on Catholic Poland. (They had to be a *cappella* because the Orthodox Church, strictly interpreting the last line of Psalm 150—“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!”—forbade the use of inanimate instruments for divine praises.) One of these treatises, the *Grammatika musikiyskaya* (1675) by the Ukrainian singer and composer Nikolai Diletsky, has the curious distinction of containing the earliest graphic representation of the complete chromatic circle of fifths.

The earliest indigenous secular genre of *muzika* practiced in Russia was called the *kant*. *Kanty* were simply songs in *partesnoye peniye* or choral concerto style furnished with secular texts of any kind. These genres were short-lived and fairly primitive attempts at hybridizing native Russian genres with high-prestige Western styles.

The Italian opera, though at first a wholly imported court luxury that had no contact at all with native genres (or even native musicians), eventually took root and thrived. The first opera to have its premiere on Russian soil was *Il finto Nino, overo La Semiramide riconosciuta* (“The feigned child;” or, “Semiramis recognized”), an *opera seria* by Francesco Araia or Araia (1709–70), the Naples-born maestro of Anne's troupe. (Should this be called the first

Russian opera?) Araja stayed in St. Petersburg until 1762, through the reigns of Anne and her three immediate successors. In 1755, he composed an *opera seria*, *Tsefal i Prokris* (“Cephalus and Procris”), to a libretto in Russian by the court poet Alexander Sumarokov (1718–77), to be enacted before the court of the Empress Elizabeth by a cast of serfs. (Or was this “the first Russian opera”?)

Araja was succeeded, during the long reign of the Empress Catherine II (“the Great,” reigned 1762–96) by a very distinguished line of St. Petersburg *maestri di cappella*: Vincenzo Manfredini (served 1762–65), Baldassare Galuppi (1765–68), Tommaso Traetta (1768–75), Giovanni Paisiello (1776–83), Giuseppe Sarti (1784–1801, with interruptions), Domenico Cimarosa (1787–91), and Vincente Martín y Soler (1790–1804, with interruptions). These were among the biggest names in all of Europe. Catherine lured them to her cold, remote capital by offering them huge “hardship wages,” and they definitely put St. Petersburg (which in terms of international diplomacy stood for all of Russia) on the international musical map. One of the most famous operas of the late eighteenth century, Paisiello's *Barber of Seville* (1782), had its premiere in the Russian capital. Sarti, Catherine's special favorite, was Mozart's closest rival in fame and prestige (as Mozart acknowledged by quoting his music in *Don Giovanni*).

Two changes that took place under Catherine had far-reaching, if not necessarily intended, significance for the eventual growth of a national school of composition. First, comic operas (often French ones, with spoken dialogue) were performed at Catherine's court alongside the more serious Italian fare. And second, native-born composers began to receive training from the *maestri*, mostly in order to furnish modest comic operas in the Frenchy popular style that the *maestri* felt it beneath their dignity to compose.

Thus the first European-style comic opera by a native composer to receive performance in Russia was *Anyuta* (“Little Annie”), a *comédie mêlée d'ariettes* presented at the empress's summer residence in 1772, in which the vocal numbers were sung to the tunes of well-known folk or popular tunes. It was modeled, by one of Catherine's court poets, directly on a French favorite called *Annette et Lubin*. The musical arrangements, by a composer whose name has been forgotten, have not survived, but the work, artistically insignificant as it must have been, is historically famous because according to some people's definition, *this* was “the first Russian opera.”

Meanwhile, two talented Ukrainian-born lads, Maxim Berezovsky (1745–77) and Dmitri Bortnyansky (1751–1825), were sent by Catherine in the late 1760s (probably after apprenticeship with Galuppi) to complete their studies in Italy with the famous Bolognese pedagogue “Padre” Giovanni Battista Martini. Both of them had *opera seria* performed in Italy before returning to Russia and being put to work modernizing (that is, Italianizing) the repertoire of the Imperial Chapel Choir, replacing traditional *peniye* with arty Italianate *muzika*. Berezovsky's opera, *Demofonte* (1773), to a libretto by Metastasio himself, received performance first. As the earliest opera by a native Russian composer with an entirely original score (albeit sung in Italian, and never performed in Russia), maybe this was “the first Russian opera.”

Or maybe that distinction belongs to *Misfortune on Account of a Coach* (*Neschast'ye ot kareti*, 1779), an *opéra comique* (or singspiel, or whatever) by Vasily Pashkevich (1742–97), one of Catherine's court musicians, which was the first opera by a native Russian composer (unless, as his surname seems to suggest, he turns out to have been a Polish immigrant) to a Russian libretto, performed in Russia. By the end of the century there were dozens of Russian musical comedies by Russian composers in existence, some of them quite elaborate and expertly composed.

By the time *A Life for the Tsar* was produced, they numbered in the hundreds and included a few that could bear comparison with the finest German singspiels. At least one—*Askold's Grave* (*Askol'dova mogila*, 1835) by Alexey Nikolayevich Verstovsky (1799–1862)—counts as a full-fledged “Russian romantic opera,” fully comparable (indeed heavily indebted) to Weber's *Der Freischütz*. So why was Glinka's opera immediately greeted (in the words of the novelist Nikolai Gogol) as “a wonderful beginning”?²⁹ And why does Glinka, rather than Verstovsky, now have such an unshakeable historical position as the founding father of the “Russian national school”?

Glinka's was not even the first Russian opera to employ a markedly “Russian” (that is, folkishly Russian) style. Such a style was virtually built into the Russian singspiel genre, which as far back as *Anyuta* had employed popular songs to match their stock of peasant or otherwise lowborn characters, just as popular, folk, or folk-style (*volkstümlich*) tunes were doing in comic operas everywhere in Europe. They normally featured at least one “Papageno type” as a matter of course, and a Papageno had to sing folk songs, whether real or invented.

A vivid example of the Russian brand of this standard-issue eighteenth-century *Volksstümlichkeit* comes from *Yamshchiki na podstave* (“The post-coachmen at the relay station,” 1787), with words by Count Lvov (soon to

compile his folk-song anthology), and music by an emancipated serf, Yevstigney Fomin, whose backwoods given name betrays his peasant origins. This number shows a trio of rustics named Timofey, Yan'ka, and Fadeyevna (Timothy, Johnny, and "Thaddeus's little girl") going into a dance to entertain their owner, the local *barin* (landowning lord). Verisimilitude is achieved by the use of a famous tune ("The Birch Tree") that became more and more famous over the course of the nineteenth century as composer after composer borrowed it for local color, and by the use of pizzicato strings to imitate the balalaika, a sort of triangular-bellied Russian banjo (Ex. 4-12).

Glinka's music never got any more "Russian" than this. Likewise, *Askold's Grave*, whose composer Verstovsky outlived Glinka and could never understand his rival's immediately recognized historical status, much less come to terms with it, contains a wealth of beguiling choral "fakesongs" (well-counterfeited folk songs) to characterize the opera's peasants. One of them (Ex. 4-13), called "The Moon Shone at Midnight," is sung in authentic responsorial style, with a solo "intoner" (*zapevala*) and a choir that answers in rough-hewn "harmonizations" (*podgoloski*, literally "undervoices"). Others show the slippery modal "mutability" (*peremennost'* in Russian) exhibited by many Russian folk songs, with cadences that alternate between the tonic and the "natural minor" seventh degree. These choruses are every bit as authentically "national" as anything Glinka ever wrote. They display many idiosyncrasies of performance style, like the "voice-throwings" or octave leaps at the ends of phrases, that are neatly drawn from life. So why, finally, did Glinka and not Verstovsky get the credit for ushering true *narodnost'* (nationhood) into Russian musical art and thereby establishing the Russian national school? Did it have to do with something more (or at least other) than folklore?

Allegro

TIMOFEY
Vo po - le be - ryo - za bu - she - va - la, oy, di di

FADEYEVNA
Ne be - ryo - za, Oy, di di la - do, ne be - ryo - za.
la - do, oy, di di la - do, ne be - ryo - za.

ex. 4-12 Yevstigney Fomin, *Yamshchiki na podstave*, no. 8

For answers to these questions we must turn to contemporary witnesses. In a review that appeared in a Moscow newspaper shortly after the premiere of *A Life for the Tsar*, a would-be composer named Yanuariy Neverov, who had studied briefly in Berlin and had his head stuffed full of Herderian romanticism, declared that “delightful Russian tunes” by themselves would never create a truly national style. For that you needed more than tunes; in fact you needed more than a musical style. You had to achieve the “organic unity” that comes from a “dominating idea.”³⁰ Glinka, in other words, was truly *narodniy* (nation-embodying) because he was ideologically, not merely decoratively, *narodniy*. He used his folk or folklike melodies, in a manner that precisely corresponded to the difference between Mozart's *Volkstümlichkeit* and Weber's, or between the peasant folksiness of the Enlightenment and the national folksiness of romanticism, not merely to evoke a pleasant peasant flavor or provide a tasty condiment to the main dramatic course, but to evoke an all-encompassing idea of Russia that lay at the heart of the dramatic conception. That, and only that, was true *narodnost'*.

Neverov, and many others since, have noted that, paradoxically enough, there is actually less direct quotation of folk sources, less purely stylistic *Volkstümlichkeit*, in Glinka than in Verstovsky, or in many a forgotten eighteenth-century singspiel. His greater *narodnost'*, according to Neverov, came not from literal imitation of reality but, in true romantic fashion, from his own *innerliche Herz*, which, like that of any artistic genius, had been formed in the spirit of his nation. “Mr. Glinka has set about things differently” from Verstovsky, the critic wrote. “He has looked deeply into the character of our folk music, has observed all its characteristics, has studied and assimilated it—and then has given full freedom to his own fantasy,” thus producing “images that are purely Russian, native, clear, comprehensible, familiar to us simply because they breathe a pure *narodnost'*, because we hear in them native sounds.” But also because “all these Russian images are created by the composer in such a way that *in the aggregate*, in their cohesion, they have been marshalled and deployed in defense of Russia.”³¹

Moderato

Sop. Alto
Sve - tel me - syats vo po - lu - no - chi. Yas - no

Ten.
Yas - no

Bass
Yas - no

S.
sol - nish - ko v vesh - niy den', lyu - li

T.
sol - nish - ko v vesh - niy den', lyu - li

B.
sol - nish - ko v vesh - niy den', lyu - li

ex. 4-13 Alexey Nikolayevich Verstovsky, *Askold's Grave*, no. 10

There is a lot here to unpack, even before we get to the musical text itself. In the first place, Neverov is calling attention to Glinka's greater seriousness and his mastery of a self-consciously advanced international technique. This last was absolutely unprecedented in a Russian musician. To Neverov, *A Life for the Tsar*, and nothing earlier, was “the first Russian opera,” simply because it was the first Russian opera that was truly an opera, not a singspiel. It is sung throughout, thus becoming the first Russian opera to employ accompanied recitative as well as the full range

of arias and ensembles. It competed ambitiously with the operas of Europe on every front, overcoming all taint of provincialism and successfully combining the virtues of many national schools.

Not only because of its musical continuity, but also because of its large-scale virtuoso vocal numbers in accelerating tempos, its multipartite ensembles and monumental finales, *A Life for the Tsar* demonstrated its composer's complete mastery of what in chapter 1 was called the "Code Rossini," the full panoply of sophisticated Italian conventions. But the opera was also "French" in its liberal use of "recalling themes," its ample choruses, and its popular tone, all characteristics of the old "rescue" genre, and of the nascent *grand opéra* as well, showing Glinka to have been entirely up-to-date, abreast of all the latest European developments. There is even a second-act ballet, just as there would have had to be in Paris. And finally, the opera was "German" in its harmonic complexity and the prominence accorded its rich, colorful orchestra. It had bigness and greatness stamped all over it. It was, in short, a bid for recognition as a major player on the world stage, such as Russia herself was making in post-Napoleonic European diplomacy.

Glinka's *narodnost'* was thus paradoxically proved by his cosmopolitan eclecticism. But this seems more paradoxical to us than it did to the composer's contemporaries. Combining or "organically" uniting the best of the West—or, more generally, the best of the rest—was one highly preferred way of asserting Russianness (*narodnost'*) for members of Glinka's and Neverov's generation. It affirmed the universality of Russian culture, hence its superiority to all other cultures. Thus Neverov could praise Glinka's recitatives (the one area in which he had no competition from any other Russian composer) as the world's finest, because "they unite the expressivity and dramatic flexibility of the German with the melodiousness of the Italian."

It was a deliberate synthesis of opposites at which Glinka was aiming. To recall the anti-Rossinian strictures of Prince Odoyevsky, the "Russian Hoffmann" and a friend of Glinka's (quoted in chapter 1), Russians drew an even sharper distinction than the Germans themselves between the "spirituality" of German romanticism and the "sensuality" of Italian opera. In German this was the opposition of *Geist* and *Sinnlichkeit*; the Russian equivalents were *dukh* and *chuvstvennost'*. German music in Russian eyes was all *dukh*, brains without beauty; Italian music was all *chuvstvennost'*, beauty without brains. Glinka resolved that his music, Russian music, would uniquely have both brains and beauty.

Because he grew up in a country that until the 1860s lacked the institutional means for training professional composers (i.e., conservatories), Glinka is often looked upon as a "naive" or self-taught composer, with all the limitations on technique that would seem to imply. That is a serious misapprehension. Despite a late start, and despite his being, as an aristocrat, an avocational musician (the only kind that in early nineteenth-century Russia had the leisure to indulge in composition), Glinka had an exceptionally well-rounded professional education in music—but one acquired the old-fashioned way, by apprenticeship and practical experience.

After childhood and adolescent music instruction in piano and violin, both on his ancestral estate and at an exclusive boarding school in St. Petersburg, and after teaching himself the rudiments of form and orchestration by rehearsing and conducting his uncle's serf orchestra in the classical repertory, Glinka apprenticed himself at the age of twenty-four to Leopoldo Zamboni, the principal coach for the visiting Italian opera troupe, briefly mentioned in chapter 1, that was headed by Leopoldo's father Luigi, a famous *buffo* bass who had "created" the role of Figaro in Rossini's *Barber of Seville*. Zamboni schooled his local apprentice in the forms and conventions of Italian opera, as well as elementary counterpoint. Over the next two years Glinka attended the rehearsals and the extremely idiomatic Zamboni-led St. Petersburg performances of over a dozen Rossini operas.



fig. 4-8 Glinka conducting a chamber ensemble, in a drawing by V. Tauber.

In 1830 Glinka went abroad for an extended stay. In Milan he became personally acquainted with Bellini and Donizetti and under their supervision wrote creditable imitations of their work. Thus he acquired beauty. Then he went after brains, making straight for the Teutonic source. He spent the winter of 1833–34 in Berlin, under the tutelage of Siegfried Dehn (1799–1858), the most sought-after German pedagogue of the day, who through a combination of strict counterpoint and idealistic aesthetics “not only put my knowledge in order, but also my ideas on art,”³² as Glinka would put it in his memoirs. He returned to Russia shortly before his thirtieth birthday, the possessor of a fully professional, perhaps uniquely cosmopolitan, European technique.

And on top of all that he was “ideologically Russian.” The final element in the mix that made Glinka's opera the foundation of a national school had only marginally to do with musical style, but everything to do with the specific Russian concept of *narodnost'* (nationhood) that then reigned. While it clothed itself, like all such romantic notions, in the rhetoric of antiquity, the *narodnost'* embodied in Glinka's opera was a brand-new doctrine, promulgated as part of the general, Europe-wide post-Napoleonic reaction by Tsar Nikolai I (reigned 1825–55), the most reactionary crowned head on the continent. It was no progressive thing.

On the second of April 1833, Count Sergey Uvarov, the Tsar's newly appointed minister of education, circulated a

letter to the heads of all educational districts in the Russian empire, stating that “our common obligation consists in this, that the education of the people be conducted, according to the Supreme intention of our August Monarch, in the joint spirit of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationhood.”³³ This troika of interdependent values to which Russians would henceforth be expected to subscribe—*pravoslaviye, samoderzhaviye, narodnost'* in Russian—was formulated thus in direct rebuttal to the familiar French revolutionary slogan, *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* (“liberty, equality, fraternity”). In this company *narodnost'* would function as “a worthy tool of the government,”³⁴ as Uvarov put it, or (as quite accurately, if maliciously, paraphrased in Soviet times) as “an ideological weapon in support of serfdom and autocracy.”³⁵ The “Russian nation” was conceived entirely in dynastic and religious terms, autocracy (absolute monarchy) being related to Orthodoxy as “the ultimate link between the power of man and the power of God.”

These last words were written by Vasily Zhukovsky (1783–1852), Glinka's friend and mentor, who was himself an outstanding romantic poet as well as a government censor, and who authored the text to the fifth act or epilogue of *A Life for the Tsar*, a magnificent pageant of religious veneration that celebrates the birth of the nation in the person of the tsar. This was the brand of “nationalism”—Official Nationalism, as it came to be called—that was embodied in Uvarov's slogan, in Zhukovsky's poetry, in Glinka's opera, and in Neverov's critique.

Immediately after his return to Russia in 1834, Glinka joined Zhukovsky's literary salon. “When I declared my ambition to undertake an opera in Russian,” Glinka recalled in his memoirs, “Zhukovsky sincerely approved of my intention and suggested the subject of Ivan Susanin.”³⁶ It was a predictable choice, even an inevitable one. For one of the cornerstones of Official Nationalism was the creation of a romantic national mythology, “a sense of the present based on a remodeled past,” in the apt words of Hubert Babinski, a historian of Russian literature. “Legend and history,” Babinski continues,

were a pleasing combination, and one sees among some Poles and Russians of this time that odd cultural phenomenon in which a legendary past is created to antedate and form a basis for recorded history. Not having an *Iliad* or an *Aeneid* [that is, an authentic national epic], they wrote their own mythical past from folklore, inspired by Herder's idea of creating a national consciousness out of fraternal myths.³⁷

Glinka's maiden opera, the first Russian opera that was really an opera and the earliest to achieve permanent repertory status, hence the cornerstone of the national repertory, was created out of just such a didactic mythography.

The legend of Ivan Susanin had a tenuous documentary basis: a concession conferred in 1619 by Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich on a peasant named Bodgan Sobinin, and renewed to Sobinin's heirs by every subsequent ruler all the way down to Nikolai I, granting dispensation from certain taxes and obligations in recognition of the merits of Sobinin's father-in-law, Ivan Susanin, who,

suffering at the hands of said Polish and Lithuanian persons immeasurable torments on Our account, did not tell said Polish and Lithuanian persons where We were at the time, and said Polish and Lithuanian persons did torture him to death.³⁸

That is to say, the peasant Ivan Susanin had at the cost of his life concealed from a Polish search party the whereabouts of Mikhail Fyodorovich, the sixteen-year-old scion of an old noble family named Romanov, who had been elected tsar by a popular assembly in February 1613, thus ending a “time of troubles” regarding the Russian succession and founding the Romanov dynasty that would rule Russia until 1917. The name of Ivan Susanin entered historical literature in 1792 and his heroic martyrdom was embroidered and immortalized by Sergey Nikolayevich Glinka, the composer's cousin, in his *Russian History for Purposes of Upbringing*, published in 1817, since which time it went into all children's textbooks and became part of every Russian's patriotic consciousness.

Timely parallels with Susanin's deed were suggested by the activities of peasant partisans in the Patriotic War of 1812 against Napoleon. In the aftermath of that war “Ivan Susanin” became a fixture of Russian romantic literature. There was even a singspiel on the subject by a transplanted Italian composer named Catterino Cavos, performed in 1815, the year of the post-Napoleonic restoration. Since a singspiel had to have a happy ending, Cavos's Susanin gets rescued at the last minute by a detachment of troops led by Sobinin. Glinka's tragic hero dies his historical death, hence the title of the opera. It was Tsar Nikolai's idea, actually; at first the opera was simply to be called *Ivan Susanin*. The direct participation of the tsar in its very naming suggests the context into which the opera should be placed. It reflects above all Glinka's enthusiastic commitment to the doctrine of Official Nationalism and his

determination to embody it in symbolic sounds.

As the composer put it in his memoirs, his root conception of the drama's shape lay in the opposition of musical styles, Russian vs. Polish. This basic structural antithesis has many surface manifestations. The Poles (the hated “other”) are at all times and places represented by stereotyped dance genres in triple meter (polonaise, mazurka) or highly syncopated duple (krakowiak). They express themselves only collectively, in impersonal choral declamation. Choral recitative was something Meyerbeer, too, was experimenting with; but Glinka's purpose was different. By never letting a Polish character sing as an individual person, he effectively “dehumanized” the enemy the way good war propaganda always does.

The “Russian” music (that is, the music the Russian characters get to sing) is at all times highly personal and lyrical. To a very small extent—two instances, both involving the title character—it draws upon existing folk melodies. Susanin's very first *réplique* (sung line) in act 1—“How can you think of getting married at a time like this?” (addressed to his daughter Antonida and Sobinin)—is based on a tune Glinka once heard a coachman sing, and which he noted down in his memoirs (Ex. 4-14a; Fig. 4-9). At the other end of the opera, the triumphant moment when Susanin reveals to the Poles that he has led them all to their death in the woods instead of to the tsar, motives from the same tune are accompanied by a basso ostinato (Ex. 4-14b) derived from one of the most famous Russian folk songs, “Downstream on Mother Volga” (“Vniz po matushke po Volge,” Ex. 4-14c).

Piu moderato ♩ = 116

Susanin

MÄNNERCHOR

Coro

Piano

S.

How can there be a wedding when such a storm is brewing?

ex. 4-14a Folklore in Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar*, Susanin's “Chto gadat' o svad'be”

S. Tu - da za - vel ja vas, ku - da i ser - iy

S. volk ne za - be - gal.

I have taken you where not even the grey wolf ever runs.

ex. 4-14b Folklore in Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar*, Susanin's "Tuda zavyol ya vas"

Vniz po ma - tush - ke po Vol - ge

po shi - ro - ko - mu - raz - dol' - yu.

Down the mother Volga, along its wide expanse...

EX. 4-14D Folklore in Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar*, Girls' chorus: "Razgulyalasya, razlivalasya"

ex. 4-14c Folklore in Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar*, "Vniz po matushke po Volge"

Con moto

Raz - gu - lya - la - sya, raz - li - va - la - sya vo - da vesh - nya - ya po lu - gam.

Ra - zi - gra - li - sya, raz - ply - sa - lis' kras - ni - de - vi - tsi v te - re - mu, kak od - na si - dit,

ne i - gra - yet pod - gor - yu - ni - las' slyo - zi lyot, slyo - zi gor' - ki ye.

ex. 4-14d Folklore in Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar*, Girls' chorus: "Razgulyalasya, razlivalasya"

The only other demonstrably folkloric element in the opera (just as in Verstovsky's operas) were the choruses. One of them, a girls' wedding song in act III, while set to an original melody, translates the traditional five-syllable (*pentonic*) line of actual peasant wedding songs into a five-beat meter notated with a time signature of $\frac{5}{4}$, one of the earliest such usages in European art music (Ex. 4-14d). Otherwise, the Russian music is modeled on the idiom of the contemporary sentimental "romance," an urban professional genre in which the Russian folk melos had been put through an Italianate refinery. Again, the objective was not to be "authentic," but "legible" to an audience of urban operagoers. Legibility, in short, *meant* authenticity.

moderato

Вино радует о чужбине,

fig. 4-9 Coachman's song (quoted in the first line Susanin sings in *A Life for the Tsar*) as jotted by Glinka in the manuscript of his memoirs.

Very much in the manner of the *grand opéra*, the rhythm of the contrast between Russian and Polish musics unfolds at first at the rate of entire acts. After a first act consisting of Russian peasant choruses and romancelike arias and ensembles for the principles, the second act is entirely given over to Polish dances. Thereafter the rhythm of contrast is accelerated to reflect the mounting dramatic tension. The Poles' approach in act III is telegraphed by a few strategic orchestral allusions to the act II polonaise. Their colloquies with Susanin in acts III and IV are always couched (on both sides) in stereotyped generic terms. At the tensest moment in act III, where the Poles forcibly seize Susanin and he cries out "God, save the Tsar!" Polish (triple) and Russian (duple) rhythms are briefly superimposed (Ex. 4-15).

The musical score consists of three systems of staves. The first system is for Susanin, with a *ff* dynamic marking. The second system is for the Poles, with a *Ten.* marking. The third system is for the Bassi. The lyrics are in Russian.

SUSANIN
ff
 Stra - kha — ne — stra - shus' — smer — ti —

POLES
 ne — bo - yus' — lya - gu — za — Tsar - ya — za Rus'!
Ten.
 Pro -

Bassi
 klya - tiy — u - pry - mets — u - bit' — ye - go — chto li? — Ka - ka - ya — nam

pol' - za ot smer - ti ye - go? Kog - da za ne - znan' - ye dru -

Bo - zhe, spa - si Tsar - ya, Ti u - mud - ri me - nya, Ti na - u -
gikh - mi ko - lo - li rak è - tot po - dav - no do -

chi me - nya Bo - zhe, spa - si Tsar - ya.
sto - in to - go.

- I fear nothing, not even death! I will lay down my life for the Tsar, for Russia!
- Damned mule, shall we kill him?
- What good would it do?
- We run others through for not knowing, so it'll serve him right

ex. 4-15 Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka, *A Life for the Tsar*, Act III, montage of “Russian” and “Polish” styles

Far more important than the sheer amount of folk or folklike material in the score is the use to which the material is put. This was Glinka's great breakthrough, and the reason why he is fairly regarded by Russian music historiography as a founding father. As Rossini-hating Prince Odoyevsky was first to discern and celebrate, what Glinka “proved” in *A Life for the Tsar* was that “Russian melody may be elevated to a tragic style.” In so doing, Odoyevsky declared, Glinka had introduced “a new element in art,” one that had repercussions not only for Russian music, but for all music in the European tradition.³⁹

What Odoyevsky meant by “a new element” was that Glinka had *without loss of scale* integrated the national material into the stuff of his “heroic” drama instead of relegating it, as was customary, to the decorative periphery. Of the dramatic crux, including Susanin's act IV solo *scena*, which strongly resembles Florestan's dungeon scene in *Fidelio* (on which it may very well have been modeled), but where the national style is nevertheless particularly marked, Odoyevsky wrote, “One must hear it to be convinced of the feasibility of such a union, which until now has been considered an unrealizable dream.”

One reason why it had been so considered, as we have seen, was that before Glinka Russian composers had never aspired to the tragic style at all. What made it “feasible” was that the main characters in Glinka's opera were all peasants, hence eligible, within the conventions of the day, to espouse a folkish idiom (even an Italianized, urbanized one). But the tragic style nevertheless ennobles Susanin. He is not “just” a peasant; he has become an embodiment of the nation, a veritable icon, and so had the Russian folk idiom.

But while this made the opera musically progressive, it remained politically and socially reactionary; for the most advanced of all of Glinka's musicodramatic techniques was one that enabled him to harp from beginning to end on the opera's overriding theme of zealous submission to divinely ordained dynastic authority. The epilogue, which portrays Mikhail Romanov's triumphant entrance into Moscow following Susanin's sacrifice and the rout of the Poles, is built around a choral anthem (Ex. 4-16; Glinka called it a “hymn-march”) proclaimed by massed Meyerbeerian forces, including not one but two wind bands on stage, to a text by Zhukovsky that culminates in the following quatrain:

Slav'sya, slav'sya nash russkiy Tsar', Glory, glory to thee our Russian Caesar,

Gospodom danniy nam Tsar'-gosudar'! Our sovereign given us by God!

Da budet bessmerten tvoy tsarskiy rod! May thy royal line be immortal!

Da im blagodenstvuyet russkiy narod! May the Russian people prosper through it!

Allegro maestoso M.M. $\text{♩} = 108$.

Sopr. Alt. *f* Slav - sya, slav - sya nash Rus - skiy Tsar! Gos - po - dom

Ten. *f* Slav - sya, slav - sya nash Rus - skiy Tsar! Gos - po - dom

Bass *f* Slav - sya, slav - sya nash Rus - skiy Tsar! Gos - po - dom

Piano *f* *marcato*

dan - niy nam Tsar' Go - su - dar! Da bu - det bes - smer - ten tvoy Tsar - skiy

dan - niy nam Tsar' Go - su - dar! Da bu - det bes - smer - ten tvoy Tsar - skiy

dan - niy nam Tsar' Go - su - dar! Da bu - det bes - smer - ten tvoy Tsar - skiy

Piano

rod; Da im bla-go-den - stvu-yet Rus - skiy na - rod!

rod; Da im bla-go-den - stvu-yet Rus - skiy na - rod!

rod; Da im bla-go-den - stvu-yet Rus - skiy na - rod!

ex. 4-16 Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka, *A Life for the Tsar*, Epilogue, mm. 1–16

Glinka's setting of these words is in a recognizable “period” style—the style of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *kanty*, the three- and four-part polyphonic songs mentioned above as the earliest Westernized secular genre in Russian music. (Ironically, and possibly unknown to Glinka, their ancestry was part Polish.) In Peter the Great's time such songs, chorally sung, were often used for civic panegyrics, in which form they were known as “Vivats.” The *Slav'sya* or “Glorification” theme in Ex. 4-16 is motivically—that is, “organically”—related to that of Susanin's retort to the Poles in Ex. 4-15 (on the defiant words “*ne strashus'*,” “I'm not afraid”), which was derived in turn from the opening peasant chorus in act 1 (and through that relationship related to the opening phrase of the overture; see Ex. 4-17).

Allegro risoluto

f Slav' - sya, slav' - sya nash Rus - skiy Tsar!

ex. 4-17a Prefigurings of the *Slav'sya* theme in *A Life for the Tsar*, Epilogue, “Hymn-March,” mm. 1–4

V bu - ryu vo - gro - zu

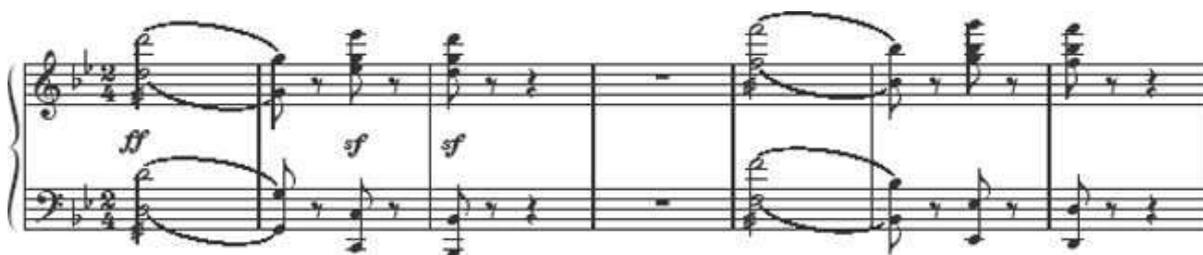
(In blizzard, in storm)

ex. 4-17b Prefigurings of the *Slav'sya* theme in *A Life for the Tsar* Act I, opening chorus

But that only begins to describe its unifying role. As the composer and critic Alexander Serov (1820–71) first pointed out in an essay published in 1859, the *Slav'sya* theme, which in nineteenth-century Russia became virtually a second national anthem, is foreshadowed throughout the opera wherever the topic of dynastic legitimacy (that is, the divine right of the tsar) is broached (Ex. 4-18). The approach is gradual, beginning in act I with a minor-mode reference to the first two bars of the theme when Susanin (seconded by the chorus) dreams of “A Tsar! A lawful Tsar!” In act III, when news arrives of Mikhail's election. Susanin and his household bless their good fortune by falling to their knees

in prayer: “Lord! Love our Tsar! Make him glorious!”—and between their lines the strings insinuate the same fragment of the *Slav'sya* theme, only this time in the major. When later in the same act the Poles demand to be taken to the tsar, Susanin defies them with an extended if somewhat simplified snatch of the *Slav'sya* theme, disguised mainly in tempo, and sung in the “remote,” hence highly emotional key of D ♭ major:

Visok i svyat nash tsarskiy dom Our Tsar's home is a high and holy place,
 I krepost' bozhiya krugom! Surrounded with God's staunch strength!
 Pod neyu sila Rusi tseloy, Beneath it is the power of all of Russia,
 A na stene v odezhde beloy And on the walls, dressed all in white,
 Stoyat krilatīye vozhdī! Winged angels stand guard!



ex. 4-17c Prefigurings of the *Slav'sya* theme in *A Life for the Tsar* beginning of Overture

CHORUS, SOBININ, ANTONIDA
ritenuto assai

SUSANIN N.B.

Tsar! za - kon - niy_ Tsar! za - kon - niy_ Tsar!

ex. 4-18a More prefigurings of the *Slav'sya* theme in *A Life for the Tsar* Act I, no. 4 (voices only)

Bo - zhe! Bo - zhe, lyu - bi Tsa - rya!

strings N.B.

Bo - zhe, pro - slav' Tsa - rya!

sf

ex. 4-18b More prefigurings of the *Slav'sya* theme in *A Life for the Tsar* Act III, no. 11 (quartet)

Thus *A Life for the Tsar* is thematically unified in both verbal and musical dimensions by the tenets of Official Nationalism. The irony, of course, is that Glinka adapted the techniques by which he achieved this broadly developed musicodramatic plan from the French rescue operas of the revolutionary period and applied them to an opera where rescue is thwarted, and in which the political sentiment was literally counterrevolutionary. No wonder, then, that the opera became the mandatory season opener for the Russian Imperial Theaters; and no wonder that the libretto had to be superseded under Soviet power (which had a censorship as strict as Nikolai's, but of a rather different political complexion) by a new one that replaced devotion to the Romanov dynasty with abstract commitment to national liberation, and to an anachronistically secular concept of the Russian nation.

That malleability, as we have had ample opportunity to observe, was highly characteristic of nineteenth-century “national” opera, which was the product of an intense, continuing, and never entirely settled negotiation between musical style and “extramusical” associations. But since such associations are never entirely lacking, and cannot be, it is finally inappropriate to call them extramusical. They are as much a part of the work as the notes. The meaning of the work arises out of a process of interpretation in which the relationship between the notes and the associations to which they give rise is in a perpetual state of definition and redefinition. And that is why interpretation requires both an object and an interpreting subject, and why, therefore, it can never be either entirely “objective” or entirely “subjective” to the exclusion of the other.

Notes:

(28) Rudyard Kipling, *The English Flag* (1891).

(29) Nikolai Gogol, “Peterburgskiye zapiski” (1836), in *Sochineniya i pis'ma N. V. Gogolya*, Vol. VII, ed. V. V. Kallash

(St. Petersburg: Prosveshcheniye, 1896), p. 340.

(30) Yanuariy Neverov, "O novoy opere g. Glinki 'Zhizn' za tsarya," quoted in David Brown, *Glinka* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 112–13.

(31) Neverov, "O novoy opere g. Glinki 'Zhizn' za tsarya," quoted in Tamara Livanova and Vladimir Protopopov, *Opernaya kritika v Rossii*, Vol. I (Moscow: Muzika, 1966), part 1, p. 208 (italics original).

(32) Mikhail I. Glinka, "Zapiski," in *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy: Literaturniye proizvedeniya i perepiska*, Vol. I (Moscow: Muzika, 1973), p. 262.

(33) "Tsirkulyarnoye predlozheniye G. Upravlyayushchego Ministerstvom Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya Nachalstvam Uchobnikh Okrugov 'o vstuplenii v upravlenii Ministerstvom,'" quoted in Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825–1855* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959), p. 73.

(34) *Ibid.*, p. 74.

(35) *Éntsiklopedicheskiy slovar'* Vol. II (Moscow: Sovetskaya éntsiklopediya, 1964), p. 542.

(36) Glinka, "Zapiski," p. 266.

(37) Hubert F. Babinski, *The Mazeppa Legend in European Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 89.

(38) Quoted in Alexander V. Ossovsky, "Dramaturgiya operi M. I. Glinki 'Ivan Susanin,'" in *Glinka: Issledovaniya i materiali*, ed. A. V. Ossovsky (Leningrad and Moscow: Muzgiz, 1950), p. 16.

(39) V. F. Odoyevsky, "Pis'mo k lyubitelyu muziki ob opere g. Glinki: Zhizn' za tsarya," in *Muzikal'no-literaturnoye naslidiye*, ed. G. B. Bernandt (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1956), p. 11.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 5 Virtuosos

Paganini and Liszt

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 Virtuosos

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

STIMULUS

The enlargement and social broadening of the musical public in response to new economic, demographic, and technological conditions was the great nineteenth-century musical change. Its most immediate effect, and one with an eventually profound if sometimes indirect influence on all performing and composing activity, is often called “the democratization of taste.” Attitudes toward it vary with attitudes toward democracy itself. From the aristocratic standpoint the democratization of taste meant the debasement of taste. From the standpoint of the bourgeoisie it meant the enlivening, the enrichment, but above all the enhanced accessibility and social relevance of art.

From the point of view of artists, the democratization of taste meant a new competitiveness, as institutional or household patronage gave way to the collective patronage of a ticket-buying public. The surest road to success no longer lay in reaching high, toward a secure career-niche at the most exclusive social plane, but in reaching wide, “packing them in.” The ability to astonish as well as move became paramount. The age, in short, of the itinerant virtuoso was born. We are still living in it.

There were always itinerant musicians—“wand'ring minstrels,” vagabond players, street serenaders. The difference was that such musicians, especially the instrumentalists, had formerly subsisted at the margins of society, only remotely involved with the literate traditions we have been tracing, which were the product and preserve of the higher social echelons. The new nineteenth-century itinerants, by contrast, were the stars of the musical world, and took their place among the literate tradition's primary bearers and beneficiaries.

For our purposes, the line begins with the Italian violinist Niccolò Paganini (1782–1840). He was not the first of the new breed, to be sure, and came from the land that had the longest, most illustrious tradition of string virtuosity. But he made a career of unprecedented brilliance and notoriety, arousing in its wake an unprecedented degree of envy and zealous emulation that went far beyond the confines of his—or any particular—instrument. In the pithy summary of the violinist-historian Boris Schwarz, “by his development of technique, his exceptional skills and his extreme personal magnetism,” Paganini “not only contributed to the history of the violin as its most famous virtuoso, but drew the attention of Romantic composers to the significance of virtuosity as an element of art.”¹

He was born in the northern coastal city of Genoa, then as now Italy's chief seaport and commercial center. As a transport hub Genoa received many foreign visitors, especially from Central Europe, for which it was the main trade outlet. And so it was that a flashy Polish violinist, August Duranowski, happened to give a concert at the Genoese church of San Filippo Neri and aroused the jealous admiration of the twelve-year-old Paganini, whose precocious talents were then just emerging, with his “multitude of technical tricks,” as Paganini later confessed to a biographer.



fig. 5-1 Paganini, statuette by Jean-Pierre Dantan, 1832.

The other main formative influence came directly from the “classical” tradition of Italian string virtuosity, when Paganini rediscovered *L'arte del violino*, a set of twelve concertos by Pietro Locatelli (1695–1764), published in Amsterdam in 1733, each sporting a pair of enormous unaccompanied cadenzas called *capricci ad libitum*. Paganini modeled his first published composition, *24 Caprices* for unaccompanied violin, directly on Locatelli's *capricci*, and even incorporated a theme from one of them into the first in his own set, as if flaunting his outdone predecessor as a trophy. The technical standard Paganini set with this publication was as much on the cutting edge of virtuosity as Locatelli's had been seventy years before, incorporating not only Duranowski's bag of tricks but a whole array of which Paganini was the inventor, and which, until the *Caprices* were published, nobody else could duplicate. They remain a benchmark of consummate virtuosity to this day.

All twenty-four are thought to have been completed by 1805, when Paganini was serving as court soloist to the Princess Elisa Baciocchi, Napoleon Bonaparte's sister, recently installed by her brother as viceroy in the Italian city-state of Lucca. By 1809, armed with the caprices, Paganini felt ready to renounce the security of a court appointment and ply his trade as a free musical entrepreneur in a style “calculated for the great masses” (as he put it to another violinist composer, Louis Spohr, for whom he declined to play in private).²

A patient, purposeful sort, Paganini confined his activities to Italy for almost twenty years before attempting the conquest of the European capitals. During this time he composed a number of concertos, which he would need for orchestral appearances in the big European centers, and, in 1820, published the caprices, with a half-deferential, half-challenging dedication *Agli artisti*, “to the artists,” that is, his rivals. The book was met, probably just as Paganini hoped, with scorn and disbelief, and widely pronounced unplayable. In 1828, delayed longer than he intended by several serious illnesses that left him with a cadaverous look he would later turn famously to his advantage, Paganini finally headed across the Alps.

The first city on the invader's map was Vienna. A measure of his effect there can be found in the recollection of Schubert's friend Eduard Bauernfeld that in the aftermath of his one-and-only benefit concert (described in chapter 2), Schubert insisted on treating Bauernfeld to one of Paganini's recitals, saying, “I have stacks of money now—so come on. We'll never hear his like again!”³ (Afterward, Schubert wrote to another friend, “I have heard an angel sing.”)⁴ After appearances in Prague, then another Austrian city, Paganini hit the German states to the north, playing eleven concerts in Berlin alone. He appeared before Goethe in Weimar (the poet's response: “I have heard something meteoric”); before Heine (who left a fictional memoir of the occasion) in Hamburg; before Robert Schumann (then a budding composer, later a powerful critic) in Frankfurt; and (taking a detour) before Tsar Nikolai I in Warsaw. By now, having had all his teeth extracted on account of jaw disease, Paganini eschewed the use of dentures during concerts, to give his face an even more frightfully sunken aspect.

The only dissenting voice on record is that of old Spohr, who finally caught Paganini's act in Kassel: “In his composition and his style there is a strange mixture of consummate genius, childishness and lack of taste that alternately charms and repels.”⁵ But it is not clear that Paganini's admirers would have described him any differently; in the new spirit of the time the virtuoso actively cultivated repulsion as an aspect of his charm. It is an aspect of romanticism—(mis)labeled “realism”—that we have already observed in the work of Weber and Meyerbeer, among others.

Finally, in 1831, Paganini reached Paris, where his series of ten concerts at the new opera house inspired press scandals and slander campaigns as if to prove the completeness of his triumph. The same reception greeted him the next year in London, another city with a powerful press. But Paganini knew how to exploit publicity, responding to charges of venality by playing free concerts, reaping praise for his generosity and paeans for his playing, and then, having thus created a fury of demand, charging enormously inflated prices for his remaining appearances.

In Paris, Paganini made a conquest of another composer-critic in Hector Berlioz, who thought enough of Paganini to favor him not with the viola concerto that Paganini requested of him, but rather a big programmatic symphony (*Harold in Italy*) based on Lord Byron's poem *Childe Harold*, with a viola obbligato that symbolized the romantic loner, the archetype of the age, testifying to the new role the virtuoso protagonist was assuming at the pinnacle of modern art. The most fateful—indeed prophetic—encounter in Paris, however (though Paganini was not aware of it), was with the nineteen-year-old Franz Liszt, who, sitting unnoticed and incredulous in the hall, heard the great virtuoso perform the fabled caprices in addition to his Second Concerto.

And then, in 1834, after only six years, the whirlwind was over. Continued ill-health forced Paganini, now a wealthy man, back into semiretirement in Italy, where he briefly accepted a position—for a man of his means a sinecure, really—as *maestro di cappella* at the ducal court of Parma. Later, like Rossini before him but less luckily, he ventured into business, sponsoring an ill-fated gambling casino in Paris over which he lost a good part of his fortune. On his deathbed he refused the ministrations of a priest, for which reason the church denied him a religious burial. For five years his body was stored in a cellar in Nice, occupying a discarded olive oil vat, until the Grand Duchess of Parma intervened to have him interred. His dark exploits thus continued even after his death.

Needless to say, and for all sorts of reasons, Paganini was a legend in his lifetime. His effective international career lasted a mere six years, but its long-term historical impact must far exceed that of any other single-handed burst of musical activity of comparable duration. It went far beyond the matter of his instrumental technique, peerless and influential though that was. With his gaunt and gangling appearance and his demoniac temperament, Paganini almost single-handedly forged the romantic mystique of virtuosity as a superhuman, even diabolical endowment. He was Faust come to life—a role model for countless geniuses, charlatans, entertainers, and adolescents ever since his first appearances abroad.

His ability to dominate and mesmerize an audience created a whole new relationship—a far more romantic relationship—between artist and collective patronage than had ever existed before. Fig. 5-2 a famous caricature

(*Paganini, Master-Magician*) by the painter and poet L. P. A. Burmeister (alias Lyser, 1804–70), replete with cabalistic symbols, a dance of death, and a hypnotized maiden, effectively sums up his extraordinary image, and helps account for the hostility toward Paganini on the part of the church that ultimately refused him burial. That hostility, his quick burnout, and his perpetual association with wasting disease only enhanced his fiendish aura, turning him, despite the commercial nature of his career and his abundant worldly success, into one of the century's authentic *poètes maudits*.



fig. 5-2 Niccolò Paganini, in a caricature, *Paganini, Master-Magician* (1819), by Lyser.

For an idea—probably only a dim idea—of what the shouting was all about, we can turn to Paganini's written legacy. There we will see technical innovation galore, but what is more important, we will see it allied to a new poetic idea of virtuosity and its role in musical expression. That poetic idea comes across best not in Paganini's concertos but in his shorter pieces. The five concertos, underneath the fireworks rather ordinary works from the formal or craftsmanly point of view, are proof of the composer's traditional schooling and competence. (In his teens Paganini had studied composition quite seriously, eventually with Ferdinando Paer, the composer of the first *Leonora* opera.) The only glimmer they contain of Paganini's uniqueness is the finale of the Second (1826), a rondo based—typically for the day—on a folk tune, a popular Neapolitan tarantella called *La campanella* (“The church bell”).

That finale, while full of bravura (“show-offery”), remains well within the bounds of the *style brillant* or “sparkling style,” the ingratiatingly decorative or ornamental virtuosity well known to the eighteenth century and valued by aristocratic audiences as evidence of their investment, so to speak, in quality goods. The First Concerto (1817), still a popular concert piece, shows how far a composer could go in an effort to “sparkle” in this way. The orchestral parts are written in E \flat but the solo part is written in D major for a violin tuned a half step sharp. In this way, not only will the timbre take on extra brilliance, but all the open-string resonance and multiple stoppings available in D major will remain available at the higher pitch.

Nowadays, possibly because concerto-quality violins have become so inordinately valuable on the art market, because modernized instruments are already under so much greater tension than in Paganini's day, and because concert pitch has actually risen in the twentieth century, no violinist is willing to risk damaging a Strad by tuning it high, and the concerto is performed “honestly,” with all instruments written and sounding in D major. Paganini did not need to worry so: at the time of his death (in relatively straitened circumstances) he owned seven Stradivarius

violins, two by Amati, and four (including his favorite) by Guarneri del Gesù. He could afford to be casual about his charlatanry.

The caprices and the variation sets were the pieces in which Paganini turned virtuosity into something new and frightening, in the tradition of romantic realism (“black romanticism”). He made it the vehicle for “thinking new thoughts”—that is, projecting aggressively novel, sometimes grotesquely novel musical ideas—and in so doing inspired generations of artists to do the same. His signature piece, *Le streghe* (“The witches,” 1813), a set of variations on a theme from a comic opera by Franz Xaver Süssmayr (the Mozart pupil who completed his teacher’s requiem), played heavily into the demoniac image Paganini was cultivating. The violinistic technical novelties were now motivated by a shocking poetic idea.

A good example of such grotesquerie is the motive on which the Caprice no. 13 is based (Ex. 5-1a). Basically a study in parallel thirds featuring Paganini’s trademark device of playing whole melodies on single strings (or, as here, a pair of strings) with spectacular swooping shifts, the caprice quickly acquired the nickname “Le rire du diable” (“The devil’s laugh”) owing to the chilling chromatic descent with portato bowings. Caprice no. 17 (Ex. 5-1b) is another combination of weirdly striking ideas—diatonic and later chromatic runs often involving complicated “downshifting” on a single string (one of the most difficult violinistic tricks to bring off cleanly) juxtaposed with ascending double stops in a contrasting register—that startle and astonish as much as they “please.” The middle section (Ex. 5-1c) is played entirely in octaves: another Paganini specialty of which he was, if not the originator, the chief popularizer, making its emulation a must for all competitors (and in so doing, “advancing” the normal technique of the instrument).

Caprice no. 24, the most famous of the *Caprices*, combines the genres of technical study and bravura variations. For fairly obvious reasons, variations make an ideal showcase for virtuosity. Here, successive variations on the brief and businesslike binary *tema* (Ex. 5-1d) feature in turn the “thrown” (*jeté*) bow stroke, legato string-crossings, octaves, downshifting, broken octaves, parallel thirds and sixths, and so on. Variation 9 (Ex. 5-1e) was the shocker. It introduced a technique of which Paganini was indeed the inventor, the so-called left-hand pizzicato, in which (at the spots marked “+”) the fingers of the left hand are drawn sharply off the strings they stop, thus plucking the pitch prepared by the next lower finger. (This effect, obviously, can be executed only on descending scales or arpeggios or on open strings) The best measure of Paganini’s spell on later generations of composers, by the way, is the number of major figures who wrote their own sets of bravura variations on the theme of Caprice no. 24. Besides Liszt, whose transcription we will be viewing shortly, they include Robert Schumann (1810–56), Johannes Brahms (1833–97), Sergey Rachmaninoff (1873–1943), Boris Blacher (1903–75), and Witold Lutosławski (1913–94).

Allegro
dolce

ex. 5-1a Niccolò Paganini, *Caprice*, Op. 1, no. 13 (“Rire du diable”)

Andante

ex. 5-1b Niccolò Paganini, *Caprice*, Op. 1, no. 17 (Andante)

ex. 5-1c Niccolò Paganini, Caprice, Op. 1, no. 17, middle section

ex. 5-1d Niccolò Paganini, Caprice, Op. 1, no. 24, Tema

ex. 5-1e Niccolò Paganini, Caprice, Op. 1, no. 24, Variation 9

The only aspect of Paganiniana that the Caprices do not illustrate is the violinist's pioneering use of harmonics, both natural and (to an extent previously unattempted) “artificial,” in which a lower left-hand finger stops a note that will serve as fundamental to a harmonic produced by a higher finger. It is altogether possible that Paganini performed the Caprices with harmonics that he deliberately held back (as a “trade secret”) from publishing. All of the concert pieces (concertos and variation sets) that were finally published from manuscript after Paganini's death are liberally strewn with them, and all reviewers mention “flageolet tones” as Paganini's *pièce de résistance*.

Most striking of all is an autograph document that has happened to survive, headed “*Segreto comunicato e raccomandato da Paganini al suo caro amico L. G. Germi: Armonici a doppie corde di terza*” (Secret passed along and recommended by Paganini to his dear friend L. G. Germi: Harmonics in double stops at the interval of a third), in which the complicated fingerings he had worked out for playing whole scales of parallel thirds in artificial harmonics are divulged to a comrade violinist, who is implored in a note at the foot of the page “to tear up the present paper as soon as you have read it, and not to let yourself be seen performing it, because they will steal the secret from you” (Fig. 5-3).



fig. 5-3 “Segreto comunicato da Paganini.”

For Paganini at full strength, then, only a variation set will do. There are many spectacular items from which to choose, from the set on the French revolutionary hymn *La carmagnole* (1795), composed during his year of study with Paer, to the sets on *God Save the King* and *St. Patrick's Day*, composed (perhaps needless to say) for his British tour, to the most famous one of all, the Introduction and Variations on “Dal tuo stellato soglio” (“From thy starry throne”) from Rossini’s biblical opera *Mosè*, played entirely on the low G string (1819). For us, however, the most resonant choice will be the set simply titled *I palpiti* (“Heart throbs,” 1819), based on the celebrated aria from Rossini’s *Tancredi* at which we took a long look in chapter 1. Like the first concerto, it is composed for a *scordatura* (“mistuned”) violin, notated in A major but sounding a half step higher, in B \flat .

An operatic scena in its own right, it begins with a slow introduction marked *largetto e cantabile* to stand in for the obligatory cantabile with which any Rossini cavatina started up. Then comes a section marked *Recit.: con grande espress.* (Ex. 5-2a) to function as transition, in pure operatic style, to the famous cabaletta, “Di tanti palpiti,” on which the variations will finally be played. By so elaborately evoking the operatic context, Paganini is in effect declaring equal rights for instrumental virtuosity, challenging on their home turf the laurels of the declining castrati and the ascendant *musici* (sopranos and altos in trousers), for centuries the undefeated international champions of musical Europe. Paganini’s ultimate triumph, in fact, was to earn concert fees that equaled and finally exceeded those of opera stars.

Recit: *con grande espress.*
arco

The image displays a musical score for a recitative piece. It consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). The first system begins with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and includes the instruction *arco*. The second system features a piano (*p*) dynamic. The third system includes markings for *string.*, *ten.*, and *morendo*. The fourth system contains markings for *cresc.*, *string e cresc.*, *p rit.*, and *f*.

ex. 5-2a Niccolò Paganini, *I palpiti*, Recitativo

The image displays a musical score for the 'Theme Andantino' by Niccolò Paganini. It is presented in two systems, each with a violin part and a piano accompaniment. The violin part is in the key of D major (one sharp) and 2/4 time, marked 'Andantino' and 'dol.'. The piano accompaniment is in the key of B-flat major (two flats) and 2/4 time, marked 'Andantino' and 'P dolce'. The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The violin part includes a melodic line with slurs and triplets.

ex. 5-2b Niccolò Paganini, *I palpiti*, Theme

ex. 5-2c Niccolò Paganini, *I palpiti*, Variation II, mm. 1–12

Since a cabaletta is always cast in strophic form, one could say that Paganini's variations represent a four-stanza aria. The first stanza (Ex. 5-2b) is more or less what Rossini wrote. The second and fourth will remind us of the devices already encountered in the caprices. The third, however, is unique—the longest spate of (practically) uninterrupted *armonici a doppie corde di terza* Paganini ever committed to paper (Ex. 5-2c). Even here, though, and characteristically, Paganini did not commit the “secret” itself to paper. All he notated was the result, not the means of achieving it. For that, an edited part for the soloist (Ex. 5-2d) has to be supplied, by a violinist familiar with the technique that Paganini guarded so closely during his lifetime, confiding it only once, to Germa. (In 1831, however, a German violinist named Karl Guhr, who had figured it out after hearing Paganini in Frankfurt, spilled the beans: he published a book, *Über Paganinis Kunst die Violine zu spielen* [On Paganini's Art of Violin Playing] containing tables similar to the one shown in Fig. 5-3.)

Notes:

(1) Boris Schwarz, “Paganini,” in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. XIV (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 86.

(2) *Louis Spohr's Autobiography*, Vol. I (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, 1865), p. 283.

(3) O. F. Deutsch ed. *Schubert: Die Erinnerungen seiner Freunde* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1866), p. 261.

(4) O. E. Deutsch, *The Schubert Reader* (New York: Norton, 1947), p. 773.

(5) *Louis Spohr's Autobiography*, Vol. II, p. 168.

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Franz Liszt

Carl Czerny

Liszt and the piano

RESPONSE

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 Virtuosos

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

By the time the nineteen-year-old Liszt heard Paganini in Paris he had himself been a concert artist for almost ten years, and a working composer for more than five. He was born in the village of Raiding (now Dobojan) in the vicinity of the old Hungarian town of Sopron (then called Ödenburg) near the Austrian border. As the alternate naming of the localities suggests, the region had a mixed Hungarian and German culture. The composer's family name is German, but spelled in the Hungarian fashion. (If it were spelled List, it would be pronounced "Lisht" in Hungarian.) His father was an overseer at the court of Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, the nephew and namesake of Haydn's patron. His mother hailed from Krems, a town in lower Austria. Liszt grew up speaking German, not Hungarian, although he showed an early interest in the music of Gypsy bands, and later in life drew on his experience with it to construct an exotically Hungarian "persona" for himself with which to fascinate audiences.

ex. 5-2d Niccolò Paganini, *I palpiti*, Variation II as edited

In the spring of 1821, before he turned ten, the boy and his family moved to Vienna so that he could develop his precocious gifts. He studied piano with Carl Czerny (1791–1857), a pupil and disciple of the still-living Beethoven.

and composition with old Antonio Salieri, *still* (aged seventy) the nominal Imperial Kapellmeister. Czerny lost no time presenting Liszt as a prodigy. His first Vienna concert took place in December 1822, the second in April 1823. At the latter, Beethoven is reputed to have planted an anointing kiss on the eleven-year-old soloist's forehead; in later life, Liszt recalled having been taken to Beethoven's quarters by Czerny and receiving the kiss there. In any case, having received Beethoven's blessing, Liszt was asked to contribute a variation to Diabelli's famous "patriotic anthology" (Ex. 5-3).



fig. 5-4 Franz Liszt in 1860 with his daughter Cosima (1837–1930), then married to the pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow, later to Richard Wagner.

Liszt's international concert career began that fall. On the way to Paris, he gave concerts in a whole string of south German towns. In the French capital he studied composition with Paer and with Anton Reicha (1770–1836), the leading theory professor at the Paris Conservatory (where Liszt was refused admission because of his foreign nationality). After a sensational Paris debut in May 1824, Liszt conquered London with a program that featured the twelve-year-old prodigy, amid the sundry vocal and orchestral numbers that the "variety show" format of contemporary concerts required, showing off his talents in a concerto by Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778–1837), a set of orchestrally accompanied variations by his teacher Czerny, and an "Extempore Fantasia on a written Thema,

which Master Liszt respectfully requests may be given to him by any Person in the Company.”

All of this music, no doubt including the “extempore fantasia,” was virtuoso fare in the light and blithesome *style brillant* purveyed by the popular performers of the day, and so were Liszt's early compositions, as their very titles proclaim: *Variations brillantes sur un thème de G. Rossini*, or *Impromptu brillant* [i.e., a medley] *sur des thèmes de Rossini et Spontini*. His first noteworthy original composition, called *Étude en douze exercices*, consisted of twelve Czernyesque “concert studies,” display pieces without orchestra for use on the road, in which (in the words of Alan Walker, Liszt's biographer), “the boy makes the keyboard sparkle from one end to the other.”⁶ In probable collaboration with his other teacher, Paer, the young prodigy also fulfilled a commission from the Académie Royale de Musique for a one-act opera, *Don Sanche, ou Le château d'amour* (“Don Sanchez, or the castle of love”), premiered at the Salle Le Peletier on 17 October 1825, five days before the composer's fourteenth birthday. Though he lived another sixty years, it would be his only work for the operatic stage. His destiny lay on a stage of a different kind.

The image shows a page of musical notation for Franz Liszt's "Diabelli Variation" (Variation 24). The score is written for piano and is in 2/4 time, marked "Allegro". It consists of seven systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The piece is characterized by its rhythmic complexity and dynamic range, starting with a forte (f) dynamic and ending with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as accents, crescendos, and dynamic markings like "p", "f", and "ff".

ex. 5-3a Franz Liszt's "Diabelli Variation" (Variation 24 from Diabelli's "Patriotic Anthology")

And then came Paganini. “Quel homme, quel violon, quel artiste!” Liszt gushed in a letter to a friend. “What a man,

what a violin, what an artist! O God, what pain and suffering, what torment in those four strings!”⁷ The restless and ambitious prodigy had grasped something more than the rest of Paganini’s audience: he knew that in order to equal the Italian’s achievement and join him at the pinnacle of instrumental mastery he would have to submit to a tremendous test of endurance. He became obsessed with the famous response of the Italian painter Correggio, reported in Giorgio Vasari’s *Lives of the Artists*, to a masterpiece by Raphael: “Anch’io sono pittore!” (“I, too, am a painter!”). Although, like many others, Liszt misattributed the remark to Michelangelo, he understood it well; he knew that it was not a boast but an acknowledgment of responsibility, a promise of self-sacrifice.

The prodigy went into seclusion, a seclusion he described enthusiastically in a famous letter to his pupil Pierre Wolff, dated 2 May 1832. He was reinventing his technique from the bottom up, spending four to five hours a day on “trills, sixths, octaves, tremolos, double notes and cadenzas,” but also reinventing the expressive purposes the technique would serve, for which reason he spent an equal amount of time devouring Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, and Weber, along with the literary classics he never read in school (because he didn’t go to any): Homer, the Bible, Plato, Locke, as well as the latest romantic fare—Lord Byron, Victor Hugo, and especially *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* of the French poet Alphonse de Lamartine, which he tried at various times to “translate” into music. “If I don’t go mad,” he promised, at the end of the ordeal “you will find in me an artist! Yes, an artist such as is required today.”⁸

The first creative fruit of Liszt’s seclusion was a series of Paganini transcriptions in which the pianist sought equivalents on his instrument to the violinist’s sublime *diableries*. Before the year 1832 was out Liszt had composed a *Grande fantaisie de bravoure sur La Clochette de Paganini* (Big Bravura Fantasy on Paganini’s “Campanella”), based on one of the pieces he had actually heard Paganini perform, the finale of the Second Concerto. One little section is actually called “Variation à la Paganini,” and it is, inevitably, a study in leaping around the topmost register of the instrument, the way Paganini could do with his patented harmonics (Ex. 5-4). Elsewhere, Liszt makes no attempt actually to imitate the violin, preferring instead to create in pianistic terms the frightening atmosphere of “black romanticism” that Paganini uniquely evoked, at the very opposite extreme from the “brilliant” or “sparkling” style of traditional instrumental virtuosity.

There was, briefly, another side to this goal, as Liszt dabbled for a while in revolutionary politics. In the circles he frequented—notably the utopian religious socialists who called themselves “Saint-Simonians” (after Claude-Henri de Rouvroy, Comte de Saint-Simon, a philosopher who wished to marry traditional religion with modern science)—“an artist such as is required today” meant an artist willing to “seek out the PEOPLE and GOD, go from one to the other; improve, moralize, console man, bless and glorify God,” so that “*all classes of society*, finally, will merge in a common religious sentiment, grand and sublime.”⁹ These quotes, capitals, italics, and all, are from an essay by Liszt that appeared in a Paris newspaper during the years of his Paganinian self-transformation. Art, as he wished to practice it, would be an instrument of social transformation. The virtuoso would become a sublime, rabble-rousing public orator on behalf of social progress, much as the poet had become in the person of Victor Hugo.

Moderato

p leggiero e sempre staccato

poco crescendo

sf p scherzando

poco rallent.

rfz

m.g.

molto cresc.

*) All the notes with the stems turned downward must be played with the left hand.

ex. 5-4 “Variation à la Paganini” from Franz Liszt, *Grande fantaisie de bravoure sur La Clochette de Paganini*

While it cannot be said that Liszt actually played such a role in life, his imagining it is already powerful testimony to the new status and concept of musical virtuosity. The magnetic, socially engaged performer-virtuoso (which in those days implied a composer, too) was the public face of romanticism, as the Beethovenian or Schubertian ideal of withdrawn and concentrated subjectivity was the private face. While the national side of this dichotomy can easily be (and certainly has been) overdrawn, it nevertheless accords with a long tradition that Liszt's self-transformation, and its literary expression, were stimulated and realized in the French capital in the heady atmosphere of the July Monarchy.

Liszt's final tribute to Paganini was a new set of concert studies, *Études d'exécution transcendante d'après Paganini* (“Etudes for transcendental technique after Paganini”), first published in 1838 (by which time several of them existed in various manuscript versions) and reissued with revisions in 1851, reflecting refinements the composer had introduced over the years in the course of performing them. Besides a streamlined version of *La campanella*, the set included five of Paganini's Caprices freely transcribed, including two of these given above in Ex. 5-1a. Liszt's versions are shown in Ex. 5-5.

Liszt's transcriptions hew pretty close to the originals, while greatly magnifying their effect in the true spirit of emulation, succeeding brilliantly in having them sound as though they were originally conceived for the piano. They are especially full of surprises—in range, in texture, in harmony—for listeners who know the originals (and that makes it especially fun to follow Liszt's transcriptions from Paganini's score). In the E ♭ Etude, Liszt pulls off an especially apt surprise by accompanying Paganini's octaves (split between the two hands phrase by phrase) with some pseudo-Bachian imitative counterpoint by inversion, showing off “erudition” as an especially prizable aspect of the new virtuosity (Ex. 5-5b).

Andantino capriccioso

p

un poco marcato

ten.

poco rfz

ex. 5-5 Franz Liszt, *Paganini Etudes* (1851 ed.), no. 2, mm. 6-11

Poco più animato

f marcato

ten.

ten.

sf

meno f

cresc.

ex. 5-5b Franz Liszt, *Paganini Etudes* (1851 ed.), no. 2, mm. 24-28

Quasi Presto

ex. 5-5c Franz Liszt, *Paganini Etudes* (1851 ed.), no. 6, mm. 1-16

In the A-minor variations, which Liszt made the finale of his set just as Paganini had done, the pianist occasionally manages to set the theme off in one hand against Paganini's variation in the other, and in the last variation (Ex. 5-5d) reaches a level of sheer sonority that was in itself a pianistic breakthrough; one can easily imagine it being greeted with scenes of mass hysteria like the one shown in the famous Berlin caricature of 1842 (Fig. 5-5), manifestations such as had formerly been confined to the opera house. On the way, a number of witty allusions to past piano masterpieces pass in review; perhaps the most resonant is the reference to the rapt final movement of Beethoven's last sonata (op. 111) in Variation 10 (Ex. 5-5e). It was surely a matter to ponder and debate, whether by placing Beethoven in proximity with Paganini, Liszt had debased the former or ennobled the latter. Either way, the underlying point remained the same—the new virtuosity was a truly all-encompassing medium.

Caricatures like the one in Fig. 5-5, set beside the one in Fig. 5-2, are all the evidence we need that Liszt made fair claim to Paganini's mantle as demonic possessor of all who heard him. Concerts like his were cathartically purging in a way that only rock concerts have remained in our time, and the cult of worshiped personality that he inspired is something to which only rock musicians openly aspire now. His consciousness and cultivation of “dark forces” came most clearly to the fore, just as it had with Paganini, when after his self-transformation he made a *reprise de contact* with opera.

Two systems of musical notation for Franz Liszt's *Paganini Etudes*, no. 6, var. 11, mm. 1-4. The first system shows the right hand with a complex, rapid sixteenth-note passage under a slur, marked *sva* (sustained vibrato), and the left hand with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system continues the right hand's passage, which becomes more densely packed with notes, while the left hand accompaniment remains consistent.

ex. 5-5d Franz Liszt, *Paganini Etudes* (1851 ed.), no. 6, var. 11, mm. 1-4

Più moderato

Musical score for Franz Liszt's *Paganini Etudes*, no. 6, var. 10, mm. 1-8. The tempo is marked *Più moderato*. The right hand features a series of slurred sixteenth-note patterns, with a *sva* marking above the first measure. The left hand provides a simple accompaniment of chords and single notes.

ex. 5-5e Franz Liszt, *Paganini Etudes* (1851 ed.), no. 6, var. 10, mm. 1-8

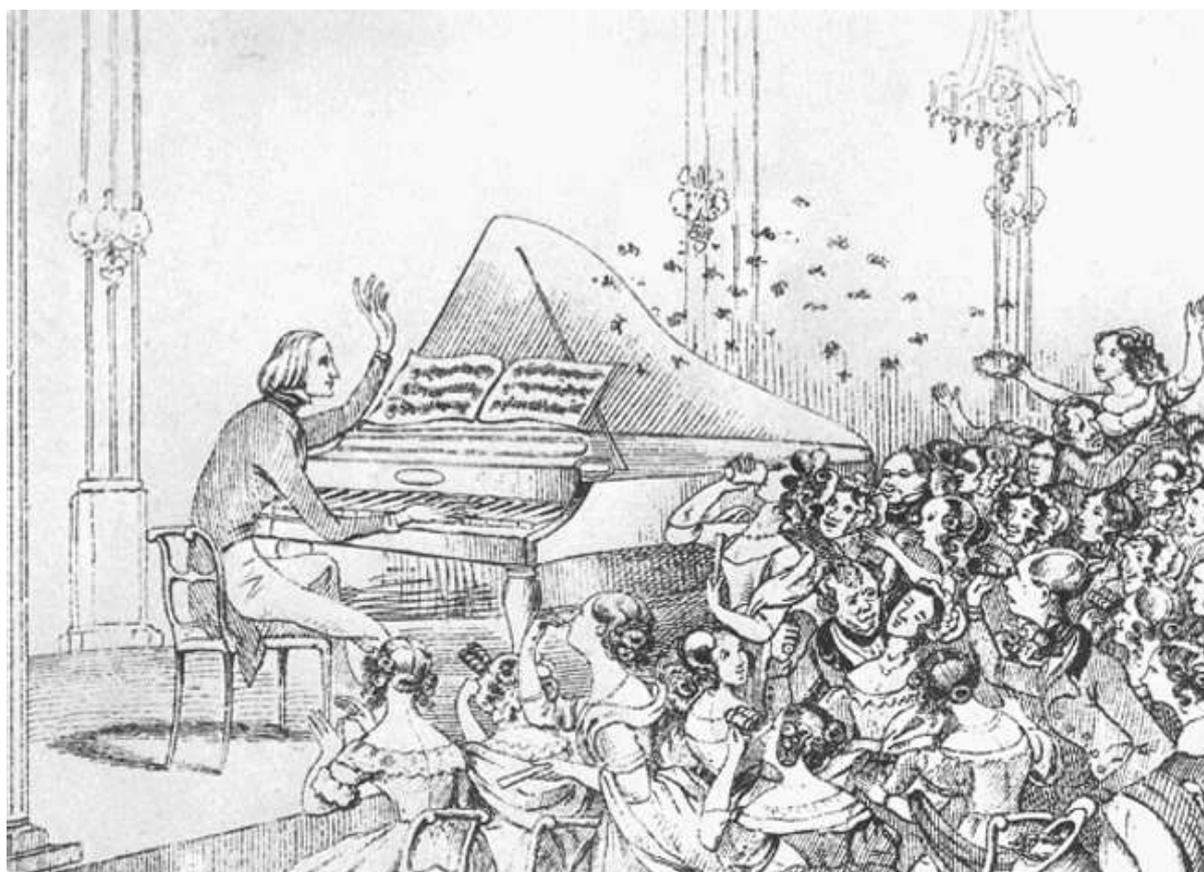


fig. 5-5 “Franz Liszt Exerts His Spell on the Ladies in the Audience,” caricature from the periodical *Berlin, wie es ist ... und trinkt* (mid-1840s). The name of the journal, “Berlin, as it is ... and drinks,” is a rather clumsy pun (*ist* means “is”; *isst* means “eats”).

His *Réminiscences de Don Juan* (1841), known informally as the “Don Juan Fantasy,” while ostensibly a potpourri on “airs” from Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, is quite obviously more than that. Charles Rosen calls it Liszt’s self-portrait (for, like many champion performers, though not the relatively old and unbeautiful Paganini, he nurtured a reputation as a “Don Juan” himself; Paganini’s turn came long after his death, in an endearingly ridiculous Viennese operetta by Franz Lehar).¹⁰ But Liszt’s Fantasy also makes an astonishing comment on the opera, and on the way romantic audiences interpreted it.

By juxtaposing the Don’s seduction of Zerlina, evoked through a set of variations on their duet, “Là ci darem la mano” (“There, give me your hand”), and the Statue’s seizure of the Don—which, as Liszt brilliantly reminds us by suddenly citing it (Ex. 5-6a), happens on an almost identical line (“Dammi la mano in pegno!” [“Give me your hand in pledge”])—Liszt casts Mozart’s hero as predator and prey alike, at once stalker and stalked. The medley starts right off with the Statue’s ghastly speech in the graveyard: “You’ll laugh your last laugh ere daybreak,” made more gruesome than Mozart had made it by eliding out the recitative that connects and harmonically joins its two tonally remote lines.

Next comes the wild diminished-seventh chord that brings the Statue on stage for the final confrontation, and a repetition of the graveyard speech, now accompanied by the violin figuration that attends the Statue’s later appearance. Thus the two grimmest, most “diabolical” scenes in the opera are conflated in a devil’s brew that will eventually include the scary syncopations and scales familiar from the Overture’s introduction, the Statue’s horrifying line “It is not human food I eat,” and ending with a shuddering join (Ex. 5-6b), over a sustained harmony, between the Statue’s graveyard intonations and Don Giovanni’s lecherous “come hither” to Zerlina (“Vieni, vieni”).

The image shows a page of musical notation for Franz Liszt's *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, specifically the transition to the "Duetto" section. The score is written for piano and features several dynamic and performance markings. The first system includes a *rit.* marking and a *rinforz.* (ritardando) marking. The second system includes a *string.* marking, a *sempre ff* (fortissimo) marking, and a tempo instruction: *(Sans presser, mais très mesuré.)*. The third system includes a *marcatiss.* (marked) marking and a *sempre stacc.* (staccato) marking. The score is in G major and 2/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#).

ex. 5-6a Franz Liszt, *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, transition to “Duetto” (“Là ci darem la mano”)

The image shows a page of musical notation for Franz Liszt's *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, specifically the juxtaposition of Seduction and Perdition. The score is written for piano and features several dynamic and performance markings. The first system includes a *marc.* (marcato) marking. The second system includes a *rall.* (ritardando) marking. The third system includes a tempo instruction: *Andantino*. The fourth system includes a *dolce teneramente* (sweetly and tenderly) marking. The score is in G major and 2/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#).

ex. 5-6b Franz Liszt, *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, juxtaposition of Seduction and Perdition

That kind of intensifying conflation, the very opposite of the loose stringing of tunes implied by designations such as “medley” or “potpourri,” runs through the whole of Liszt's Fantasy. Later, the statue's creepy chromatic scales will rumble sarcastically beneath the coda of the seduction duet, where the Don sings to Zerlina, “Andiam, andiam, mio bene” (“Let's go, my sweet”), turning the line before our ears—provided we can recall the words when hearing the music—into the Statue's leering summons to perdition. Even more pointed is the irony when the grandiose bravura paraphrase of Don Giovanni's “Champagne” aria that finishes the medley, rather than providing the ultimate in “sparkling” virtuosity, is darkly framed by the Statue's chromatically tortured line, “Ah, tempo più non v'è” (“You're out of time”). As the aria races to its frenzied climax (marked *più animato* and *fortississimo*), one hears the Statue's clanking tread in the bass, represented by the violin figuration from the finale, inexorably keeping pace (Ex. 5-6c). The last word is the Statue's—a taunting reminder of his opening graveyard threat, transposed up a half step in

triumph.

George Bernard Shaw, who earned his living as a concert reviewer before his playwriting career took off, recognized the special quality of the “Don Juan Fantasy.”

When you hear the terrible progression of the statue's invitation suddenly echoing through the harmonies accompanying Juan's seductive *Andiam, andiam, mio bene*, you cannot help accepting it as a stroke of genius—that is, if you know your Don Giovanni *au fond* [through and through],

he wrote, paying tribute as well to the “riotous ecstasy” of the “Champagne” aria, and the way it is “translated from song into symphony, from the individual to the abstract,” by virtue of Liszt's transcendent virtuosity, recognized as an integral part of the poetic idea. That is music criticism of a high order.¹¹

ex. 5-6c Franz Liszt, *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, “Champagne” aria accompanied by “Statue's tread”

But so is the fantasy itself. While surely “readable” in conventional moralizing terms, as a divine judgment on the Don's lascivious conduct, Liszt's juxtapositions impose a new layer of romantic interpretation on Mozart's opera. Without the use of words, Liszt interprets the opera very much the way it was interpreted in the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's almost exactly contemporaneous tract *Either/Or* (1843), a bible of “existentialism,” where *Don Giovanni* is said to reveal the links between the erotic and the demonic, and between love and death as the only truly transcendent experiences.

Kierkegaard claimed that the opera disclosed the secret of all music, and its hold on us. Listening to Liszt's fantasy, one is hard pressed to disagree; but, if that is so, then it took the new virtuosity to finally unleash music's essential power. Nor should one allow this remark to pass without noting that in pursuit of the thematic or conceptual unity that would haunt romantic artists from then on, Liszt has allowed himself to forget all about tonal unity, up to now the chief criterion of coherence, at least for instrumental music. He quotes everything in its original key, which allows the piece to begin in fantasialike tonal limbo, proceed to A major, and end quite nonchalantly in B \flat major.

After emerging from his chrysalis of self-imposed labor, Liszt spent about a decade (1838–48) crisscrossing Europe in a cyclone of touring and concert-giving that revolutionized the musical life of the continent, and its music business as well. It was not just the level of his playing that was unprecedented. Liszt was the first virtuoso to dare appear solo for an entire evening, thus inventing the instrumental “recital” as we know it today. And Liszt was the first traveling virtuoso to retain the services of a personal impresario, or what we would now call a manager, an advance man who handled his professional correspondence, booked his halls, advertised his appearances, negotiated and collected his fees, and took care of his personal needs (even preparing his food) on the road. The powerful modern concert booking agencies and “artist managements” that run (and sometimes ruin) the lives of musical performers today are the descendents of Gaetano Belloni (“Liszt’s poodle,” as an envious Heinrich Heine dubbed him),¹² who served Liszt in this capacity from 1840 to 1847.

Belloni was also suspected of hiring claque (or paying “ovation expenses,” as Heine dryly put it), but there is no evidence that Liszt ever needed one—quite the contrary, if contemporary observers and reviewers are to be believed. The novelty of his solo recitals, and the nature of his touring repertoire, are both fascinatingly revealed in a memoir by Vladimir Stasov (1824–1906), a prolific Russian writer on the arts, who attended Liszt’s St. Petersburg debut in April 1842.

“Everything about this concert was unusual,” Stasov recalled:

First of all, Liszt appeared alone on the stage throughout the entire concert: there were no other performers—no orchestra, singers or any other instrumental soloists whatsoever. This was something unheard of, utterly novel, even somewhat brazen. What conceit! What vanity! As if to say, “All you need is me. Listen only to me—you don’t need anyone else.” Then, this idea of having a small stage erected in the very center of the hall like an islet in the middle of an ocean, a throne high above the heads of the crowd, from which to pour forth his mighty torrents of sound. And then, what music he chose for his programmes: not just piano pieces, his own, his true metier—no, this could not satisfy his boundless conceit—he had to be both an orchestra and human voices. He took Beethoven’s [concert aria] “Adelaide,” Schubert’s songs—and dared to replace male and female voices, to play them on the piano alone! He took large orchestral works, overtures, symphonies—and played them too, all alone, in place of a whole orchestra, without any assistance, without the sound of a single violin, French horn, kettledrum! And in such an immense hall! What a strange fellow!¹³

There were two pianos set up on the stage, and Liszt alternated between them, “facing first one, then the other half of the hall,” as Stasov recollected. In addition to the vocal numbers to which Stasov referred, the program included Rossini’s *William Tell* Overture, Liszt’s “Don Juan Fantasy,” and the sextet from Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor*, act II (Ex. 1-11). The only item that was not an arrangement from another medium was the grand finale, Liszt’s own showstopping *Galop chromatique*, a tour de force of velocity, but something of a throwback to the old *style brillant*. At his second St. Petersburg concert, the program included the “scherzo and finale” (including the storm) from Beethoven’s *Pastoral* Symphony. Only at the third concert, when he played Beethoven’s “Moonlight” Sonata, did Liszt play the sort of repertoire that is now considered standard “recital” fare.

The inclusion of so much orchestral repertory in keyboard arrangement was partly Liszt’s own predilection, partly a reflection of the “provincial” venue (an outlying capital with, as yet, no full-time resident orchestra), and partly a concession to the expectations of an audience used to variety entertainment at public concerts. (The kind of repertoire we now associate with solo recitals—sonatas and other “purely” instrumental compositions—were still reserved, in the main, for salons; Liszt played many, by invitation, at aristocratic St. Petersburg residences.) The program, in short, could be called a traditional one; all that was not traditional was the uniform medium—and, of course the unheard-of style of the playing, which caused Stasov and his companion at the recital to vow “that thenceforth and forever, that day, April 8, 1842, would be sacred to us, and we would never forget a single second of it till our dying day.”¹⁴

Notes:

(6) Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt*, Vol. I: “The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847” (New York: Knopf, 1983), p. 118.

(7) *Letters of Franz Liszt*, Vol. I, ed. La Mara, trans. Constance Bache (rpt. ed., New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1968), pp. 8–9.

(8) *Letters of Franz Liszt*, Vol. I, p. 8.

(9) Liszt, "Concerning the Situation of Artists and Their Condition in Society" (*Gazette musicale de Paris*, 30 August 1835), trans. Piero Weiss, in P. Weiss and R. Tauskin, *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, 2nd ed., p. 311.

(10) Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 528.

(11) Bernard Shaw, *Music in London 1890–94*, Vol. I (New York: Vienna House, 1973), p. 81.

(12) Quoted in Walker, *Franz Liszt*, Vol. I, p. 365.

(13) Vladimir Stasov, *Selected Essays on Music*, trans. Florence Jonas (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), p. 120.

(14) Stasov, *Selected Essays*, p. 121.

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Concerto, 19th century: The piano

Franz Liszt

THE CONCERTO TRANSFORMED

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 Virtuosos

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

It was inevitable that a new concept of instrumental virtuosity should have brought about a reconceptualization of the musical genre in which such virtuosity was traditionally exhibited. Accordingly, the nineteenth-century concerto—under the impact of the new virtuosity, but also under the impact of more general notions of romantic heroism and individualism to which the new virtuosity was itself a response—underwent a thorough transformation in form and conceptual content alike, and took on a new expressive significance.

Like so many other romantic reconceptualizations, this one can be traced back—if desired—to Beethoven. And of course such a tracing *was* desired by the protagonists of the change, for whom the titanic figure of Beethoven provided the ideal precedent and validation. Beethoven himself inherited the concerto—both as a form and as an “idea”—from Mozart. The directness of the succession can be seen most dramatically, perhaps, in Beethoven's Concerto no. 3 in C minor, op. 37 (1800), the first movement of which is so obviously modeled on that of Mozart's C-minor concerto, K. 491 (1786), by all odds Mozart's most “Beethovenian” work (Ex. 5-7a).

The image shows a musical score for the opening theme of Beethoven's Piano Concerto no. 3, I, mm. 1-8. The score is in C minor, 3/4 time, and is marked "Allegro con brio". It features a piano (p) dynamic in the first four measures and a forte (f) dynamic in the last four measures. The melody is primarily in the right hand, with a supporting bass line in the left hand. The score is written on a grand staff with a treble and bass clef.

ex. 5-7a Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Concerto no. 3, I, opening theme (mm. 1-8)

ex. 5-7b Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Concerto no. 3, I, first solo entrance

The Beethoven and Mozart themes are of course orchestral themes. The Mozartean concerto that Beethoven inherited was the “symphonized” variant of the old ritornello form, in which a full-blown (but harmonically static) orchestral “exposition” stands in for the first ritornello, to be repeated (now in harmonically dynamic form) with the participation of the solo instrument upon its entry. Even though, as we know from accounts of actual performances, the soloist participated in a supporting role in all the tuttis, and even though the featured solo entrance could be mighty dramatic (as can be certainly be seen in Example 5-7b), the delayed solo entrance, and the elaborateness of the orchestral preface to it, tended to equalize the roles of soloist and orchestra. The concept of concerto that Mozart's continued to uphold was one of cooperation or conspiracy—that is, “concerted action” (as per the Italian *concertare*: to plan together, to hatch a plot, etc.)—rather than one of contest or opposition (for which the relevant Italian verb is *contrastare*).

The new virtuosity decisively altered the balance of forces in favor of the soloist, the lonely romantic “hero.” And so the beginning of Beethoven's next concerto, the Fourth, op. 58 (1805), is widely regarded as a romantic watershed (see Ex. 5-8), as its proximity to the *Eroica* Symphony (op. 55) seems to advertise. To open with the soloist rather than the orchestra was indeed a novelty (though not wholly unprecedented), even if the quietness of the exchange gives little inkling of heroism. The entry of the orchestra on a “remote” harmony (“V of vi” only in retrospect!) does tend to put the two forces somewhat at odds, and can be justly read as “romantic.” (The opposition of forces is far more obvious in the second movement, known to have been intended by Beethoven as a portrayal of “Orpheus in Hades,” with the piano cast as the protagonist and the orchestral strings as the Furies: some scholars, notably Owen

The three mature concertos by Mendelssohn, by contrast, treat the new relationship of soloist and orchestra as standard operating procedure, requiring no special justification. The new relationship involves not only the sharing of thematic material between the forces, but also the nature and the role of the cadenza. In his two piano concertos—in G minor, op. 25 (1831), and D minor, op. 40 (1837)—the cadenza, rather than preceding the final tutti, forms a transition that joins the first and second movements in an unbroken continuity. In the Violin Concerto in E minor, op. 64 (1844), Mendelssohn's last orchestral work, the cadenza, fully written out (although marked *ad libitum*, meaning that the tempo should be free), is cast in the role of “retransitioner,” elegantly bridging the development and recapitulation. The reentry of the first theme against the soloist's continuing arpeggios is a justly celebrated moment.

Also very elegant is the way in which the solo violin and the orchestra share the thematic material in the exposition and recapitulation. At the outset, it is the violin, singing in its most brilliant register, that gets to announce the soaring opening theme. The second theme, by contrast, is played by a wind choir over a violin pedal (the new tonic key having been neatly calculated to coincide with the soloist's lowest open string). In the recapitulation, the orchestra gets both themes: the first scintillatingly accompanied by the violin's continuing figuration as noted, the second presented as it was in the exposition, but with enriched instrumental colors.

Hand in hand with the integration of solo and tutti, in Mendelssohn's influential conception, went the compacting and streamlining of the overall form by means of transitions, minimizing formal breaks and creating an impression of “organic” structural unity. Behind it stood an even more influential idea, enunciated by Goethe, Mendelssohn's (and Germany's) benevolent mentor, that artistic form should imitate the forms (*Gestalten*) of nature, first among which was the *Urpflanze*, the “primal plant,” nature's microcosm, all of whose parts were symbiotic.¹⁶ While scientific in “form,” this idea was quite mystically romantic in “content” (compare William Blake's *Auguries of Innocence*: “To see a world in a grain of sand/And a heaven in a wild flower”). Its influence led to new concepts of form founded primarily on thematic rather than tonal relations; we will be much preoccupied with them in chapters to come. But while romantic in its striving after organic unity, and while that organicism allows the soloist greater “thematic” prominence than previously the norm, Mendelssohn's concerto concept is nevertheless anything but heroic. The virtuosity it calls for is of the “brilliant,” ingratiating sort, and the soloist and orchestra are forever deferring to one another, graciously concerned that each get its share. That carefully maintained equality could even be called the perfection of the Mozartean concerto ideal. In any case it was a short-lived moment of amicable equilibrium, soon to be upended by the new virtuosity.

Liszt's long-gestating Concerto no. 1, cast not by any accident or oversight in the *Eroica-cum-Emperor* key of E ♭ major, was sketched five years before Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, and completed five years after it; but it seems to come from another “period” altogether (not to say another planet). It is dedicated to Henry Litolff (1818–91), a French pianist-composer of English birth, who was experimenting with a new and enlarged concerto concept that he called *concerto symphonique*.

In a way this new genre was a modernization of an old one: the *symphonie concertante* (or *sinfonia concertante*), a symphony with important obligato parts for a group of virtuoso soloists—itsself a modernization of an even older form, the concerto grosso. Haydn and Mozart had written examples (Haydn for a concertino of mixed winds and strings; Mozart, respectively, for woodwind quartet and for violin and viola in tandem). The *symphonie concertante* flourished especially in Paris, as a regularly featured attraction at the Concert Spirituel. It even had a specialist composer, the Italian-born violinist Giuseppe Maria Cambini (1746–1825), who wrote more than eighty.

Litolff's *concertos symphoniques* differed from *symphonies concertantes* mainly in medium: a single piano soloist and a large orchestra that carried most of the thematic weight. Liszt's debt to Litolff is evident not only in the dedication of the concerto, and in its weighty “bigness” rather than brilliance of conception, but also (and most specifically) in its colorful orchestration that included piccolo and triangle, instruments first used by Litolff in the context of a keyboard concerto. Yet where Litolff's concertos were expansive four-movement affairs, Liszt opted, in keeping with the new “Goethean” fashion, for an even greater “organic” compression than Mendelssohn's.

His model here, perhaps surprisingly, was Schubert, still a composer of fairly local Viennese reputation at the time. The point of contact was Schubert's *Wanderer* Fantasy, his most virtuosic piano work, which Liszt began including in his concerts in the 1840s, and even arranged later as a concerto with orchestra. As noted in chapter 2, its four movements are all linked by transitions, so that the work is played without interruption. The “organic” continuity thus created, moreover, proceeds through a complete (and typically Schubertian) circle of major thirds, the four movements cadencing respectively in C major, E major, A ♭ major, and C. As we shall see, Liszt became fascinated

with this harmonic procedure and made it “typically Lisztian,” in the process disseminating it widely, thanks to his enormous fame and prestige, and to the high-powered assertiveness with which his virtuoso manner could project substantive stylistic novelties.

Allegro maestoso, Tempo giusto

Picc.

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bn.

Hn.

Tpt.

Ttb.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

ff marc. deciso

ex. 5-9a Franz Liszt, Piano Concerto no. 1, mm. 1-4

It is that manner, and that assertiveness, with which we are mainly concerned at present, and they hit the listener like a cannon blast in the opening phrases of the First Concerto (Ex. 5-9a), modeled in their rhetoric so closely on the opening blast from Beethoven's Fifth that their novelty, in seeming paradox, is all the more vividly displayed. Two peremptory unison phrases in sequence, set off by fermatas: but where Beethoven's phrases were degrees of the diatonic scale, Liszt's are chromatic segments that give no hint of a tonal orientation in themselves. They speak, in short, the language not of the sonata but of the fantasia.

The image displays a musical score for a concerto, consisting of vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The score is organized into three systems.

System 1: Features four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a grand staff for the piano. The vocal parts are marked with *P dolce* and *più dolce*. The piano accompaniment includes a *p* dynamic marking and a *rit.* instruction.

System 2: Continues the vocal and piano parts. The piano accompaniment includes *mf marc.*, *p*, and *ten.* markings. A *pizz.* instruction is present in the bass line.

System 3: Shows a more complex piano accompaniment with a *rit.* instruction and the instruction *allargando il tempo a piacere* (rushing the tempo as desired).

The image shows a page of musical notation for Franz Liszt's Piano Concerto no. 1, measures 14-23. The score is in B-flat major and 3/4 time. It features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with "in tempo" and "p" dynamics. The piano accompaniment includes a bass line with "p" dynamics and a grand staff with "mf" dynamics. The score includes various markings such as "ten.", "pizz.", and "p".

ex. 5-9b Franz Liszt, Piano Concerto no. 1, mm. 14-23

Between the two of them they encompass four half steps descending two at a time, or (to put it the other way round) two whole steps that together descend a major third. At first Liszt chooses to interpret the final note of the descent as an enharmonically notated flat submediant (albeit disguised by the fermataed wind chord that harmonizes it as the fifth of an enharmonically notated “Neapolitan”), resolving straightaway to the dominant, on which the piano makes its *Emperor* Concerto-like entry, leading to a frankly marked cadenza (even more frankly labeled *grandioso*) that puts the opening chromatic idea through a little development section which circles back to the dominant to prepare for an orchestral reentry that (we have every reason to assume) will serve as expository ritornello.

ex. 5-9c Franz Liszt, Piano Concerto no. 1, mm. 25-37

And so it appears to do (Ex. 5-9b), until the piano cuts it off in measure 17 with another cadenza, which modulates to the Neapolitan key forecast in the opening bars. The orchestra tries again in the new key, only to be cut off for the third time by the piano (m. 23). By now there can be no doubt who is running the show. The soloist repeatedly, sometimes quite violently, seizes the spotlight, each time in order to display another facet of his personality—and the masculine pronoun seems justified not only by the aggressive nature of the pianist's interventions, but by his seductive advances on individual members of the supporting band. This third cadenza, for example, trails off into a long meditative episode (the second theme?) in which the piano is joined, beginning in measure 25, by several other solo instruments (clarinet, violins, cello) for confiding, seemingly amorous exchanges (Ex. 5-9c).

The overall form of the piece is likewise a display of various facets of a single entity: four linked episodes standing in (as per the *Wanderer* Fantasy) for movements, in which the last closes the tonal circle initiated by the first, and in which the middle episodes assume the characters of the traditional cantabile slow movement (*quasi adagio* at m. 99) and, abetted by the frolicsome triangle, the traditional scherzo (*allegretto vivace* at m. 175).

The image displays a page of a musical score for a concerto. The score is organized into three systems. The first system features four woodwind staves: Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Bn.), and Horn (Hn.). The Flute and Bassoon parts include an *a2* marking, and the Clarinet and Horn parts include an *f* marking. The second system is the piano accompaniment, consisting of a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. It begins with the instruction *con impeto* and *ff*. The piano part is characterized by dense, rhythmic patterns in both hands. The third system features four string staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello/Double Bass). Each string part includes a *pizz.* (pizzicato) marking. The score is written in a key signature of two sharps (D major or F# minor) and a 2/4 time signature.

The image displays a page of musical notation for Franz Liszt's Piano Concerto no. 1, measures 61-70. It is organized into three systems. The first system contains the woodwind and brass staves: Flute (FL), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Bn.), and Horn (Hn.). The second system is the piano part, featuring a complex texture of chords and arpeggios, with dynamic markings including *poco rit.*, *gründlos*, and *un poco riten.*. The third system shows the piano accompaniment, with a *poco rit.* marking at the bottom.

ex. 5-9d Franz Liszt, Piano Concerto no. 1, mm. 61-70

All of these facet-episodes, however, are motivically linked. The initial sequenced phrase, like the one that begins Beethoven's Fifth, shows up in the most various guises. Perhaps the most important is the one that first appears in the piano at m. 61 (Ex. 5-9d), a passage in bravura double octaves marked *con impeto* (with abandon), in which the chromatic descent is extended to encompass an entire octave—and then three octaves (!), so that the passage traverses the entire keyboard. It returns in m. 292 to form a bridge between the scherzo and the finale; and, played *presto* at m. 494, it returns again (this time in the tonic) to bring the whole concerto to a close.

At once “organic” and quite unconventional is the concerto's tonal organization or “key scheme.” The tonal space traversed by the original sequence, both in its four-half-step entirety (E \flat –B) and in its two constituent phrases (E \flat –D \flat ; D \flat –B), governs many of the concerto's defining tonal relationships. The most “local” of these is the harmonization given the octave passage just described in Ex. 5-9d. The full chromatic scale occupies three beats, each containing four notes. Thus each beat contains the four-descending-half-step motive, and each repetition of the motive is harmonized with a root position triad, thus filling out a complete Schubertian cycle of major thirds to match the melodic completion of the chromatic scale: F \sharp –D–B \flat –F \sharp . (On its last appearance the harmonization is “in the tonic” [i.e., E \flat –B–G–E \flat] exactly reproducing the root progression in the Sanctus from Schubert's Mass in E \flat major, cited in Ex. 2-11.)

The same relations at the “global” level define the tonal shape of the concerto as a whole. The work opens and

closes in its nominal tonic, E \flat . The Quasi adagio is cast in B major, and the bridge to the last movement (*allegro animato* at m. 292) is cast in C \sharp (=D \flat) major. This last, being a repetition of the octaves passage, is also harmonized by a circle of major thirds, C \sharp -A-F-C \sharp , one that exactly fills in the gaps, so to speak, between notes in the “tonic” circle described in the previous paragraph. The two circles of thirds are related exactly the way the opening pair of thematic statements relates to the chromatic scale: major thirds (four-half-step segments) subdivided into major seconds (two-half-step segments). Thus a thematic idea is interpreted harmonically to provide a tonal coherence based not on the generic circle of fifths but (as in some late works of Schubert) on an ad hoc circle of thirds. This is striking evidence indeed of the gradual shift from key to theme and motive as prime form-definer as the concept of “organic” unity took hold.

Particularly telling, from the standpoint of “organic” construction (or unity-within-diversity), are the thematic reprises in contrasting tempos and “characters.” The Concerto's finale contains four such reprises, turning it into a sort of “recapitulation” of the whole. Most radically altered are two: the solo flute theme that is first heard *piano* (and marked *dolce, espressivo*) at m. 155, the slow movement's quiet coda, returns *forte* (marked *appassionato*) at m. 321 to round off the mercurial transition (*poco a poco più animato*) into the finale.

Most striking of all is the reuse of the ruminative main theme of the Quasi adagio—utterly transformed in key, tempo, and articulation, differently harmonized, and differently continued—as the propulsive main theme of the finale (*allegro marziale animato*). Actually, the Adagio theme is divided into two new themes, each with an independent continuation: compare mm. 108–110 of the big piano solo in the Adagio with mm. 352 ff in the finale, and mm. 110–112 with mm. 368 ff (see Ex. 5-10).

The image shows a musical score for the Adagio movement of Franz Liszt's Piano Concerto no. 1, measures 108-112. It is written for piano solo in 12/8 time. The music is marked *p con espressione*. The score consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The melody in the treble staff is characterized by wide intervals and a slow, ruminative quality. The bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with sustained chords and moving lines.

ex. 5-10a Franz Liszt, Piano Concerto no. 1, Adagio, mm. 108-112

The image shows a musical score for the Finale of Franz Liszt's Piano Concerto no. 1, measures 352-56. It is written for winds and piano in 2/4 time. The music is marked *ff marcato*. The score consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for winds and a bass clef staff for piano. The winds play a rhythmic, propulsive theme, while the piano provides a complex accompaniment with triplets and chords.

ex. 5-10b Franz Liszt, Piano Concerto no. 1, Finale, mm. 352-56

The image shows a musical score for the Finale of Franz Liszt's Piano Concerto no. 1, measures 368-72. It is written for orchestra and piano in 2/4 time. The music is marked *ff marcato*. The score consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for orchestra and a bass clef staff for piano. The orchestra plays a rhythmic, propulsive theme, while the piano provides a complex accompaniment with triplets and chords.

ex. 5-10c Franz Liszt, Piano Concerto no. 1, Finale, mm. 368-72

Liszt eventually gave a name to this fusing of variation technique with that of symphonic development and recapitulation. He called it “thematic transformation” (*thematische Verwandlung*). He proudly described it in a letter to his uncle Eduard (also a pianist) as “the *binding together* and rounding off of a whole piece at its close,” and added that the idea “is somewhat my own.”¹⁷ Clearly, though, it drew on a great deal of existing lore, both compositional and “philosophical” or aesthetic, and synthesized it in a manner that, depending on the point of view, could be variously described as unprecedentedly free or unprecedentedly rigorous. Either way, it could all be traced back to Beethoven, whose achievement could be similarly (variously and contradictorily) described.

Such technical and formal observations could be multiplied practically *ad libitum*: consider, for example, the fairly long stretch (mm. 320–37), where in a footnote Liszt directs the conductor's attention to “the rhythm of the first theme in the kettledrum,” another idea (“abstracted rhythm”) plainly—and proudly—appropriated from Beethoven's Fifth. They evince—or advertise—not only a wish to achieve a tight “organic” construction, but its realization as well. They testify, too, and somewhat ostentatiously, to the composer's impressive organizational skills: virtuoso composing to match virtuoso playing. And yet the result, for all its tightness and control, is a unique and unpredictable form; and the impression the concerto makes (and is designed to make) in its unfolding is that of a spontaneously inspired fantasia, an untrammelled train of associative thought, in which the soloist, the dominant personality, enjoys a hitherto unprecedented freedom to lead the orchestra—and the audience—whither he will.

Notes:

(15) See Owen Jander, *Beethoven's “Orpheus” Concerto: The Fourth Piano Concerto in Its Cultural Context* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2009).

(16) See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären* (Gotha, 1790).

(17) *Letters of Franz Liszt*, Vol. I, p. 330.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Classical

Liszt: Style, reception, posterity

A DIVIDED CULTURE

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 Virtuosos

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

For these reasons, among others, Liszt's concerto, and the compositional approach it embodied, despite their claim of descent from Beethoven, were widely regarded by cultured musicians at the time as monstrosities. It is precisely at this point, in fact, that a chronic rift begins to open up between a compositional avant-garde, to which Liszt and many other “creative virtuosos” belonged, and a conservative establishment. This rift has been a constant factor in the history of European (and Euro-American) music ever since, and reached a crisis in the twentieth century. To a considerable extent, its story will be the main story of this book from now on.

Among the factors contributing to the rift was the wide and rapid spread of conservatories, to the point where they became the standard institutions of higher musical education everywhere, so that composers, no less than pianists and violinists, received a standard training administered with the aid of didactic texts. Conservatories are preservative institutions, both by etymology and by ideology: conservatories are called that because they were originally orphanages (*conservatorio* in Italian), preserving the lives of children, to whom musical training was given to make them employable. By the end of the eighteenth century, the word had lost that literal meaning, and designated instead a public institution whose primary purpose was the preservation of musical standards through standardized instruction.

As soon as those standards began to apply to composition, the idea of “classical music” (with a canonized “classical period” or golden age to validate its practices) was born, and with that came the notion of a classical tradition that had to be preserved through education in “classical forms.” The “classical period” received its official christening (from the Leipzig critic Johann Gottlieb Wendt) in 1836, the year of *Les Huguenots* and *A Life for the Tsar*. Most significantly, the theory of “sonata form” (as a tripartite or “aba” construction unfolding through a bithematic exposition, a development, and a recapitulation) dates from this period, not that of Haydn or Beethoven.

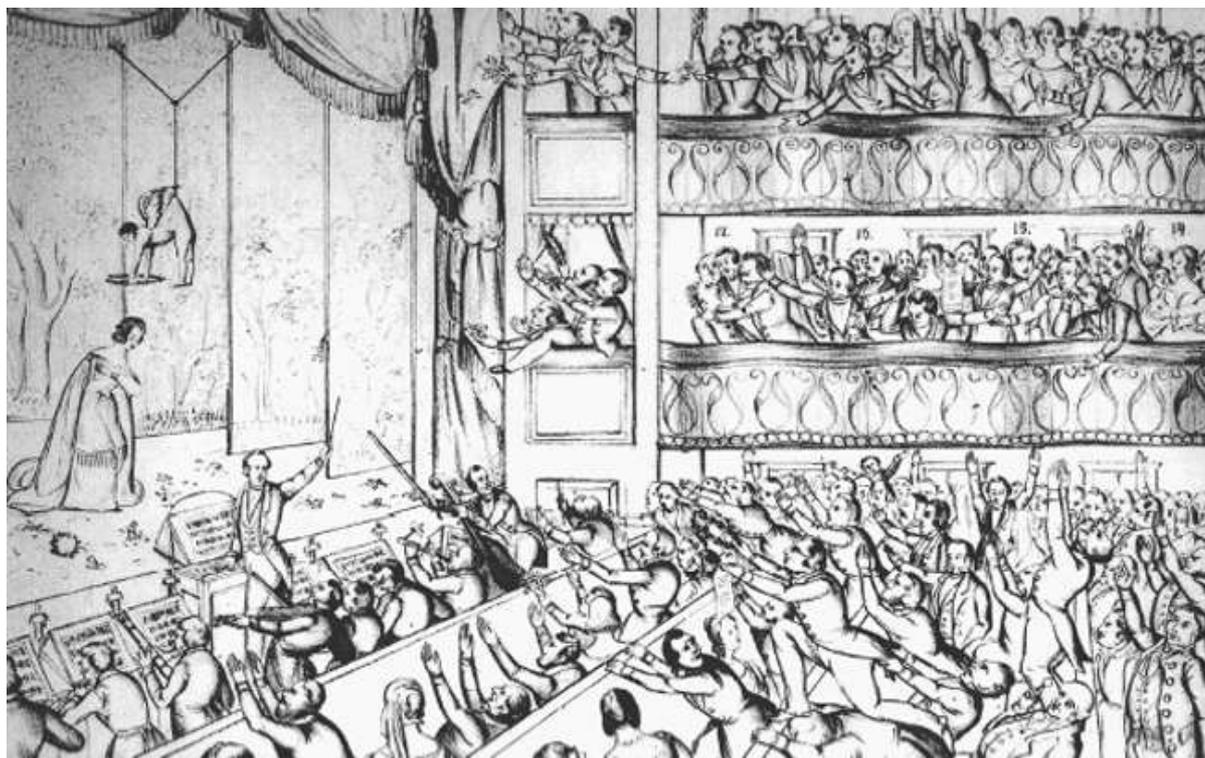


fig. 5-6 “We’re delighted! Held in thrall! Jenny has turned the heads of all,” caricature of a concert by Jenny Lind (the “Swedish nightingale,” as P. T. Barnum dubbed her), Hamburg, 1845. Now it’s the gentlemen’s turn to run amok.

The books that first describe the form in these terms and give instruction in composing along these lines were the textbooks written by the transplanted Bohemian Anton Reicha for use at the Paris Conservatory (*Traité de haute composition musicale*, 3 vols, 1824–26) and Adolf Bernhard Marx for Berlin and Leipzig (*Die Lehre von der musikalischen Composition*, 4 vols, 1837–47). Thus by 1847, one could say that the conservatory canonization of the classical period, and of classical forms, was complete. Its dominant historical idea was that of a sacralized heritage—a golden age, a “classical period”—from which no advance was possible, only propagation or decline. Tradition meant maintenance.

As against that pessimistic view was another idea of history—the one vouchsafed by nineteenth-century science (Darwin, Comte)—that saw history as perpetual progressive evolution. According to this happy, self-confident outlook, tradition meant advance, and the heritage of the past was raw material to be transformed. That was the idea Liszt espoused in word and musical deed. It, too, claimed validating descent from Haydn, Mozart, and (especially) Beethoven, as Liszt’s deliberate allusions to Beethoven emphatically attest, but it regarded their legacy not as a perfected heritage but as part of a dynamic process that continued into the present.

The conservatory view, it could seem, was an Enlightened backlash: a *sui generis* form such as Liszt achieved in his concerto was something atrocious rather than admirable, no matter how demonstrable its thematic coherence, because it represented merely subjective rather than universal truth. Its arbitrary freedoms were merely “liberties” that diminished the value of the product. And the attempt to create the impression of “improvisatory” spontaneity of gesture is unmasked as contradictory, even ludicrous, the moment someone other than the composer plays the piece. In an even tougher, more literalistic variant of such a stricture, the very participation of the orchestra makes pretentious nonsense of the composition’s—that is, the composer’s—willful uniqueness.

But while such criticism surely underestimates an audience’s powers of empathy (or of what writers and critics of fiction call “the willing suspension of disbelief”),¹⁸ it contains a nub of truth that points to a genuine paradox. What Mendelssohn’s jeweled Violin Concerto and Liszt’s impetuously “temperamental” Concerto in E♭ have in common—and where they differ from every previous “classical” concerto we have examined (including Mendelssohn’s own piano concertos, intended as vehicles for his own performances)—is that they contain no provision at all for actual improvisation. Their every note is preplanned and put in place, hence controlled, by the composer—even (or should we say especially?) their cadenzas, which now take on a previously unappreciated

“structural” role. Mozart, who lived at a time, and played before audiences, that valued truly spontaneous behavior at musical performances (both from the player and from the listener), would have been quite dumbfounded, not to say aghast.

Mendelssohn and Liszt were brought up at the tail end of that “Mozartean” time. They were both steeped in the art of genuine improvisation, and displayed it with alacrity. In a fascinating letter to his sister Fanny, dated 30 January 1836, Mendelssohn described his cadenzas to a concerto by Mozart (the D-minor, K. 466), performed *ex tempore* the day before to great success. After jotting down a few passages to show how he had cleverly juxtaposed and developed two of Mozart's themes, he added that one of the second violin players,

an old musician, said to me afterwards, when he met me in the corridor, that he had heard it played in the same hall by Mozart himself, but since that day he had heard no one introduce such good cadenzas as I did yesterday—which gave me very great pleasure.¹⁹

As for Liszt, we not only have the evidence of his London program, already quoted, that he was in the habit early on of ending his appearances with “*Extempore Fantasias*” on submitted themes, but also a curious complaint from Glinka, quoted by Stasov, that

sometimes Liszt played magnificently, like no one else in the world, but other times intolerably, in a highly affected manner, dragging tempi and adding to the works of others, even to those of Chopin, Beethoven, Weber, and Bach a lot of embellishments of his own that were often tasteless, worthless and meaningless.²⁰

This remark of Glinka's is wonderful testimony to the change of taste (perceived as a change in ethics) that was taking place under the impact of changing customs and institutions, and in response to the new musical “work-concept” that arose in the wake of Beethoven and his romantic reception. Glinka, as we learned in the previous chapter, had spent a year in Berlin, where he had “had his ideas on music put in order” by Siegfried Dehn, an apostle of the new “classicism” that was passing itself off as antiquarianism, a return to old (or eternal) values.

His strictures against Liszt were not received all that well by Glinka's Russian interlocutors, one of whom commented (in the language of Russian high society), “*Allons donc, allons donc, tout cela ce n'est que rivalité de métier!*” (“Come now, come now, all that is just professional jealousy”). But eventually the idea that musical scores are inviolable texts, and that improvisation is a debased form of musical art, affected even Liszt, as his meticulously notated, “organic” piano concerto confirms. By 1849, not even spontaneity could be “merely” spontaneous. And pianists trained in conservatories spent all their time (like Liszt in 1832) on “trills, sixths, octaves, tremolos, double notes and cadenzas”—but not on their own cadenzas. Improvisation was no longer part of the curriculum, and by the end of the century, for artists in the European literate tradition, it had become a lost art—which is to say, the literate tradition had become more truly and literally and exclusively literate. There are now probably hundreds if not thousands of conservatory-trained pianists in the world whose techniques at trills, octaves, and double notes are the equal of Liszt's, but hardly a one who can end a concert with an *extempore fantasia*. Should we call this progress?

Notes:

(18) See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Chap. 4: “That willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constituted poetic faith.”

(19) Felix Mendelssohn, *Letters*, ed. G. Selden-Goth (New York: Vienna House, 1973), p. 257.

(20) Stasov, *Selected Essays*, p. 121.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 6 Critics

Schumann and Berlioz

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Critics

Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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THE PUBLIC SPHERE

The same explosion of musical activity into public life that gave rise to the new virtuosity (or found an outlet in it) also gave rise to a new musical profession altogether: that of critic, someone who evaluates music and musicians professionally, for the benefit of nonprofessionals and nonpractitioners.

This last proviso is necessary in order to distinguish the music critics who flourished in the nineteenth century in response to a new public need from other writers about music, such as theorists and pedagogues. Theoretical and didactic writings have existed as long as there has been a literate tradition of music, but they address an audience of professionals, would-be professionals, and amateur practitioners on matters of professional or practical concern. It was a new musical market—new patterns of musical consumption by a broad nonprofessional public—that required the mediation of public advisers and public spokesmen.

The very idea of a “public sphere”—an arena of free speech and debate, a “marketplace of ideas” in which everyone had, at least in principle, a stake and therefore a right to participate—was a novelty in continental Europe. In England it had a longer history, traceable as far back as the time of Handel; but on the Continent it was an idea associated above all with the Enlightenment and the faith it placed in the dissemination of knowledge, and the exercise of reason, as guarantors of political freedom. In the public sphere privileged status was accorded, at least in theory, not to wealth, not to birth, but to persuasiveness; and persuasion, ideally, flowed from expertise. Power flowed to the expert from the ability to influence or even mold public opinion. As the concept of the public-at-large grew by leaps and bounds during the nineteenth century owing to urbanization and educational reform, and as the idea grew popular that ultimate political power resided in it, many vied for the power to shape its views.

The supreme instrument for the exercise of this power in an age of exploding literacy was the press, and the role of musical expert molding public opinion on music and musicians was exercised both in the columns of daily newspapers and in specialized musical journals addressed not only to musicians but to the concertgoing and music-purchasing public at large. To become a public expert and a power in the public sphere of music, one either gained employment at a newspaper or founded a journal. Perhaps the earliest musical journalism that looks like what we now think of as criticism in the modern sense was the columns of Joseph Addison about the London (Italian) opera stage, which appeared in *The Spectator* beginning in 1711. The first specialized music journal was *Critica musica*, published and edited in Hamburg (Germany's main commercial center) by the composer and theorist Johann Mattheson between 1722 and 1725.

Addison, a lawyer and politician and definitely not a musician (although he did write a libretto or two), was the prototype for the “critic as public spokesman.” Mattheson, who was a very distinguished musician indeed, was the prototype for the “critic as public adviser.” The two types have coexisted ever since. Their interests (in both senses of the word) do not necessarily coincide. In the 1940s in New York, for example, the two most influential music reviewers classically embodied the dichotomy. Olin Downes (1886–1955), who wrote for the *New York Times*, was a musical amateur whose previous paid involvement with the art had amounted to playing the piano to accompany exercise classes and singing lessons. Virgil Thomson (1896–1989), who wrote for the *Herald Tribune*, was an important composer who remained active as such throughout his tenure with the newspaper. The one was as militant a public representative or mouthpiece as the other was a public preceptor. It was a rare day when their reviews agreed about anything.

It is Thomson whose writings have remained in print and are considered in retrospect to be a significant ingredient

in the history of their times. This may not be altogether fair; Downes, who wrote for the more powerful paper, probably had a more decisive impact at the time on musicians' careers and composers' reputations. But it is understandable that history has favored Thomson. It is the very conflict of interest in composer critics that claims the attention of history. Their words are inevitably read as advocacy—even propaganda—rather than objective judgment.

This may lessen their effectiveness in the short run, but it serves in retrospect as a lens through which to consider not only their own work as composers, or that of their subjects, but also, more broadly, the nature of the relationship between the creator of musical works and the audience that received them—the relationship, to put it in “market” terms, between producer and consumer. As already intimated in the previous chapter, that relationship was subject to strains during the nineteenth century owing to the contradictions that emerged, not only between the ideals of romanticism and the realities of the market, or between romanticism and Enlightenment, but even within romanticism itself. As a result, composer critics tend to be profoundly ambivalent figures, and fascinating ones.

There were many interesting composer critics over the course of the nineteenth century, including Alexander Serov (1820–71) and César Cui (1835–1918), both opera composers, in Russia, and Hugo Wolf (1860–1903) in Germany. Liszt himself published a good deal of critical prose (often ghostwritten by his aristocratic mistresses, the Comtesse d'Agoult and the Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein). There were also, to be sure, some very influential and culturally significant noncomposing critics, including Eduard Hanslick (1825–1904) in Vienna and George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) in London.

The birth of modern musical criticism is usually traced to the founding at Leipzig, in 1798, of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (“Universal music news”), a “musical newspaper for the general public,” to give its name the proper nuance. Friedrich Rochlitz (1769–1842), its first editor, was an amateur musician, trained as a theologian, who had worked as a professional journalist and translator before specializing in music criticism. Rochlitz kept his post at the helm for two decades, and became the most influential musical tastemaker in Germany. The journal itself lasted until 1848. The momentous early articles on Beethoven by E. T. A. Hoffmann, which played such a crucial role in defining the romantic outlook on music, were all published in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* during Rochlitz's tenure.

Two early composer critics stand out as historical figures by reason of their eminence in both their domains. As it happens, one of them went the newspaper route and the other founded a journal. Hector Berlioz (1803–69) worked regularly as reviewer and essayist for the *Journal des débats*, the leading Paris daily, from 1834 to 1863, and wrote for a number of other publications besides. He did it for a livelihood, and (so he said) reluctantly, since his composing earned him little or nothing until the last decade of his life.

Robert Schumann (1810–56) became involved in criticism at just about the same time. He planned and wrote a prospectus for his Leipzig magazine, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (“New music journal”), in 1833. As the place of publication already suggests, Schumann's journal was intended at the outset as a direct challenge or alternative to the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, which had grown conservative and “philistine,” and hostile to the elite faction Schumann wished to champion. The first issue appeared on 3 April 1834. Schumann edited it single-handedly (and filled its columns almost single-handedly) throughout its first decade. Since 1844 it has had many other editors, and still exists, at least in name.

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