Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Robert Schumann

Schumann: The music critic

WHAT IS A PHILISTINE?

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Critics
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

fig. 6-1 Robert Schumann, drawing from a daguerreotype by Johann Anton Völlner, Hamburg, March 1850.

The Philistines, in history, were a non-Semitic (probably Greek) people who settled on the Mediterranean coast, in a region now named Palestine after them, around 1200 bce. In the Bible, of course, they figure as the historical enemies of the Israelites, God's "chosen people." It is easy to see how the term could be applied to the opponents of any chosen, or self-chosen, group. In the early nineteenth century the name was applied by artists imbued with the ideals of romanticism to those perceived as their enemies, namely the materialistic, hedonistic "crowd," indifferent to culture and content with commonplace entertainment.

Already a tension within romanticism is exposed, because that crowd, with its "democratized" taste, was now the primary source of support for artists, and many romantic artists, notably Liszt, took sustenance from it and actively wooed it. For an idea of romantic ambivalence toward the public, we might recall that it was none other than Liszt who defined for us (in his memoir of John Field, quoted in chapter 2) the romantic ideal of subjective privacy and public indifference. It could hardly be said that Liszt practiced what he seemed there to be preaching.

Schumann, who as a critic did holy battle with the philistines more persistently, and more explicitly, than any other, was also not without ambivalences or inner conflicts on this score. He began his career as a would-be virtuoso of the new school, inspired by Paganini, whose *Caprices* he also arranged for piano around the same time as did Liszt, and whose musical portrait he painted over and over again. His pianistic ambitions came to grief in 1832, when he injured his right hand by overpractice with the aid of a mechanical contrivance intended to free the ring finger from its physiological dependence on the middle finger.

An alternative hypothesis is that Schumann's weakened fingers were the result of mercury poisoning induced during treatment for syphilitic symptoms, which ultimately affected his brain and led to the mental illness that finally incapacitated him. His frustration, and the "sour grapes" to which it gave rise, may have played its part in engendering the hyperbolic idealism that informed Schumann's criticism. But that was no impediment; rather, by attracting attention to him and making his work influential, Schumann's animus became the source of his power.

In one of his early reviews in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, for example, Schumann warned creative artists of the "poisoned flowers" (the temptations) in their path, namely "the applause of the vulgar crowd and the fixed gaze of sentimental women."[1] By the time he came to write his famous comparison of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* and Mendelssohn's *Paulus* (sampled in chapter 4), Schumann had no hesitation in condemning Meyerbeer's base motives, when the only evidence for that baseness was his success with "the masses."

Yet one need only compare the drawings of Liszt and Paganini, both of them artists without whom musical romanticism is inconceivable, in Figures 5-2 and 5-5, to savor the contrast between romantic theory and romantic practice. The situation becomes even more complicated when Schumann's stormy courtship (replete with elopements and lawsuits) and marriage to Clara Wieck (1819–96), his piano teacher's daughter and a famous virtuoso in her own right, is taken into account. Clara, who like Fanny Mendelssohn was a major composing talent quashed by antifeminine prejudices, seconded her husband's strictures against virtuosity and publicity with alacrity, and there is no reason to doubt her sincerity, or his. But neither she nor he ever lived up to them in life, or meant to. It was not hypocrisy but what psychologists call dissociation (or, more vulgarly, "compartmentalization") that allowed romantic idealists the ability to achieve sufficient compromise with reality conditions to survive, often very happily indeed.

It was in his fantasy life, to which he gave almost novelistic expression in his criticism, that Schumann lived up to his ideals, and inspired legions of romantic artists with similar fantasies. His reviews often took the form of narratives, little stories in the lives of the Davidsbündler, the members of the imaginary "Davidsbund," the "League of David" who fought the Goliaths of the Philistine press, on the one hand, and, on the other (no less menacing), the authoritarian mind-set of the conservatories.

The cast of characters included, in the first place, Florestan and Eusebius, Schumann's alter egos. The former, named after Beethoven's imprisoned freedom-fighter, represented his embattled "*innerliches 'Ich*,'" his "inmost I," a concept associated with German romanticism from its Beethovenian beginning. Eusebius, named after an early church historian later adjudged a heretic (as Schumann must have known), represented Schumann's gentler, more moderate nature in contrast and occasional opposition to the more choleric Florestan.

fig. 6-2 Robert and Clara Schumann (née Wieck), daguerreotype by Johann Anton Völlner, Hamburg, March 1850.

Thus Schumann acknowledged within himself the ambivalences endemic to the composer critic's role, torn between the artist's intransigence and the detachment of the public arbiter. A third regular character, Meister Raro, originally represented Schumann's teacher, Friedrich Wieck. Thus we have a virtual Freudian trinity: the rash and reckless Florestan (id), the milder, more sociable Eusebius (ego), and the reproving Raro (superego). As Freud constantly maintained, his psychoanalytic theory was strongly prefigured in romantic literature, and here is a choice bit of evidence.

A Schumannian review typically consisted not of a direct critique but of a reported conversation among the Davidsbündler—a public airing of private response, a comparison of subjective experiences in an imagined private space. By the use of what Sanna Pederson, a historian of music criticism, calls "framing strategies," Schumann encouraged his readers, first, to have (and to trust) strong empathic responses to the music they heard or played, and, second, to try to explain them in terms of the composer's achievement.[2]

Such a review, writes Pederson, is not so much informative or didactic as *performative*, promoting a model of behavior rather than advancing a specific opinion. The act of selecting a work for such a discussion implicitly raises it

to the level of high (or "autonomous") art, and the serious, confiding nature of the discussion serves as a counterweight to the mindless applause that validates music in the public marketplace. By aspiring to the model of behavior exemplified by the Davidsbund, Schumann's reading public could transcend philistinism and join his imagined elite community of disinterested artistic natures.

Above all, Schumann encouraged his readers to look for more than sensory stimulation in music, but rather seek in it the same mental and spiritual delight they sought in literature. In this he swam distinctly not only against the tide of philistinism but also against that of the Enlightenment, which had relegated music (in the words of Kant) to the category of "enjoyment more than culture."[3] By contrast, John Daverio, a Schumann biographer and a historian of romanticism, went so far as to identify Schumann's ideal as being one of "music as literature," meaning not (or not always) a music that has a literary plot line or "program," but rather music that has a complexity of meaning, an "intellectual substance," comparable to that of the most artistic literature.[4]

Notes:

(1) Robert Schumann, review of trios by Alexander Fesca, in Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. III ed. Heinrich Simon (Leipzig, n.d.), p. 115.

(2) Sanna Pederson, "Enlightened and Romantic German Music Criticism, 1800–1850" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995), p. 81.

(3) See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), pp. 170–71.

(4) See John Daverio, *Robert Schumann: Herald of a "New Poetic Age"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), Chap. 2.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Schumann: The Davidsbündler

Song cycle: Schumann and others

LITERARY MUSIC

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Critics
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Schumann most clearly and convincingly aimed at this complexity in his character pieces for piano and his songs, the private genres in which Schubert had set the standard. He was very conscious of Schubert as a forebear —exceptionally so for the time, when most German composers sought preceptors chiefly in Beethoven and (lately) in Bach, and were striving mightily to build a national repertory in the "public" forms of symphony and oratorio. Schumann venerated the great Bs, too, and emulated them in his large orchestral and choral works, which he wrote with increasing frequency as his career progressed, and especially after he succeeded Mendelssohn and Hiller as music director at Düsseldorf in 1849.

At the outset of his career, though, in his Davidsbündler period, Schumann was among the few who found special inspiration in Schubert, in whom he saw a sort of musical novelist. In a letter to Friedrich Wieck, Schumann compared Schubert directly to the popular romantic novelist Johann Paul Friedrich Richter (1763–1825), who wrote under the pseudonym Jean Paul. The comparison is especially revealing because Schumann is known to have secretly modeled some of his early piano pieces on favorite passages in works by Jean Paul, especially *Die Flegeljahre* ("years of indiscretion"), a long bildungsroman (novel of coming-of-age) in four volumes with which many young romantics ardently identified. Schumann's own identification with this novel was such that he consciously modeled the personalities of his literary alter egos, Eusebius and Florestan, on the twin brothers Walt and Vult, the novel's joint heroes.

More generally, if literary music was Schumann's ideal, he could have found no better model for it than Jean Paul's musicalized literature, in which musical experiences and occasions often trigger major *Erlebnisse* (emotional epiphanies, transcendental moments) in the novels. Jean Paul was a skilled amateur pianist who habitually put himself in the mood to write by improvising *Sturm und Drang* fantasias at the keyboard. Thus, music of a particular free-flowing style congenial to the romantic temperament may even have helped the writer find his unique and fascinating literary voice, with its apparently meandering, erratically digressive manner.

So this is what Schumann meant when he wrote to Wieck that "when I play Schubert, it is as though I were reading a composed novel of Jean Paul."[5] What was most remarkable in Schubert, he went on, was his "psychological" quality: "What a diary is to others, in which they set down their momentary feelings, etc., music paper really was to Schubert, to which he entrusted his every mood, and his whole soul, musical through-and-through, wrote notes where others use words." Schumann's choice of words ("momentary feelings") was surely an allusion, conscious or not, to Schubert's *Moments musicaux*, and we will find in Schumann a similar preoccupation with harmonic nuance and ambiguity. Indeed, prompted by Schubert's example, Schumann went further and became the master of the unconsummated harmonic gesture, one of the most potent of all romantic "musico-literary" effects.

Since we have approached Schumann by way of Schubert, it would make sense to look first at one of his song cycles ("novels in song"), in which he successfully emulated Schubert's most characteristic achievement—so successfully that it is fair to call Schumann's the only cycles that truly rival Schubert's in stature and in frequency of performance. Fully five of them were written in a single year, 1840, during which Schumann produced an astonishing sum of 140 lieder. The great "song year" was also the year of his marriage to Clara Wieck, who was about to reach majority, after years of legal travail.

As Schumann's Florestan once said, "I do not like those whose life is not in unison with their works."[6] Schumann's commitment to art song, that is to composing endless variations on the theme of love, can hardly be read any other

way than in light of Florestan's dictum. But whether it was a case of art spontaneously imitating life, as romantic doctrine would have it, or one of life imitating art in conformity with romantic doctrine, is more difficult to say. Hardest of all to decide is how much significance such biographical resonance should be accorded in our appreciation of the works. That is an unsettled, and unsettleable, debate of long standing. We will engage the issue, but don't expect solutions.

Variations on the theme of love must include some sad ones, of course, and this already casts some doubt, in the present instance, on the simple proposition that an artist's works, no matter how romantic, are the direct outgrowth and expression of lived experience. Indeed, the outstanding product of 1840, Schumann's year of long-deferred conjugal bliss, was *Dichterliebe* ("Poet's love"), op. 48, a set of love songs to lyrics by Heinrich Heine that trace the most dismal emotional trajectory imaginable, a painful saga of unrequited love.

fig. 6-3 Heinrich Heine as drawn by Wilhelm Hensel, 1829.

Dismal, yes, but not tragic, the way Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* is tragic, for the cycle ends not with suicide but (as Heine tells us) with renunciation and (as Schumann tells us) with eventual healing. Heine was the great master of emotional ambivalence, and that made him the perfect partner for Schumann. From chapter 2, we may recall Heine as the author of the weird ironic poems that drew from Schubert, in the last year of his life, some of his most

extravagant harmonic vagaries. Schumann was the first composer to set Heine's verse in quantity.

The sixteen songs in *Dichterliebe* (out of twenty originally composed in a single feverish week at the end of May) are all settings of poems from Heine's early collection, *Lyrisches Intermezzo*, which contains sixty-six poems. Schumann's selection begins with Heine's no. 1 and ends with Heine's no. 66, so that the cycle can be viewed as a sort of condensation of the book. Ex. 6-1 amounts to a condensation of that condensation, sampling the first pair of songs, the last song, and two *Erlebnisse* from within the cycle.

The first song, "Im wunderschönen Monat Mai" ("In the ravishing month of May"), is an especially good candidate for reading as a direct translation of lived experience, since it concerns longing that is felt during the very month in which Schumann, then longing for union with Clara, is known to have composed the song. A question, though: exactly what difference does it make to the listener to know these facts? And another: are the feelings of fictional characters, as embodied in art, less real than those of their creators? Whatever our response to these questions —hence whatever the "source" of the emotion expressed in the song (whether Schumann's life, Heine's life, or that of the fictional "poet" of the title)—the task of the "literary" musician remains the same. It is to find a musical embodiment of the emotion that will complement, and hopefully intensify, the verbal one, thus to arouse a sympathetic vibration in the beholder (for it is ultimately the beholder's life that is of greatest concern—at least to the beholder).

ex. 6-1a Robert Schumann, *Dichterliebe*, Op. 47 , no. 1 ("Im wunderschönen Monat Mai")

The nature of that embodiment is apparent from the very first downbeat, in which the entering left hand creates a strident dissonance, a major seventh, against the tied upbeat in the right. That dissonance we immediately recognize as a suspension. (We may even wish to call it an "unprepared" suspension since it is not preceded by a consonance between the parts, but only by a single note in one.) We know how a suspension must resolve. Therefore, we feel a "longing" to hear a B—a longing that by a common convention we may wish to ascribe to the C♯ itself, thence to the singer of the song (even though he has not sung anything as yet). Nor is our longing immediately satisfied: the dissonant note is held over an arpeggiation of five tones, three of them also dissonant against C♯, during which the suspension, the first harmonic gesture in the song, remains unconsummated.

To dispose of a common objection to "musico-literary" interpretation: our longing to hear the B is admittedly created not by the sounds alone and unassisted, but in response to cultural conditioning (that is, what we have learned from our previous experience with suspensions). That only makes the device more apt, since the association of amorous longing with springtime (on an analogy, stated in the poem itself, with the burgeoning of plant life, or in conditioned response to hearing the songs of the returning birds) is also a cultural construction, not an instinct. (Humans, after all, unlike most animals, do not experience natural "heat," or seasonal periods of sexual appetite.) These are not meaningful objections; it is no news to anybody that human beings live and act in a state of culture, not unmediated nature.

The local resolution of C♯ to B occurs during a larger progression that could be viewed as complementary in function: a B minor triad in first inversion moves to a dominant seventh on C♯. The repetition of this progression in mm. 3–4 produces another sort of frustrated longing, through another "unconsummated harmonic gesture," as the dominant seventh fails to resolve to its implied tonic, F♯. The song's key signature, that of F♯ minor, corroborates that aural impression. Even without looking at the music (but all the more keenly if we happen to be looking) we are conditioned to interpret the progression as iv_6–V_7 in F♯ minor.

In m. 5, where the voice enters, another frustrating oscillation between dominant and subdominant seems to get underway. But the vocal phrase reroutes the progression toward a cadence in A major, also a possible reading of the key signature. Now we are conditioned retrospectively to interpret the B minor triad as a pivot, changing its function from minor subdominant to major supertonic. This new implied cadence—ii_6–V_7–I—is confirmed in measure 6. It seems to identify the "real" key of the piece as A major, and the piano's four-bar prelude as a feint.

But lest we be lulled prematurely into a false sense of tonal security, let us recall that if the opening bars were a harmonic feint, then the dominant seventh of F♯ minor is still unresolved. It is still an unconsummated harmonic gesture, and still hangs over our perception of the apparent "perfect" cadence in m. 6, coloring it with a pesky sense of ambiguity (of possible "III-ness") that renders it fragile. And in fact it turns out to be impermanent. The voice repeats the cadence on A in m. 8, but then moves on (m. 10) to a cadence on B minor, achieved through an appoggiatura (another "longing" tone—and look what an assortment of appoggiaturas show up to second it in the piano part!), and finally (m. 12) to a cadence on D major to finish up the stanza, approached through another appoggiatura, G-natural, that actually contradicts the key signature. If D major is in fact the tonic of this song, then *everything* up to now has been a feint.

The returning piano figuration in m. 12 (in which the G♯-F♯ effectively cancels the voice's G-natural, which had proceeded to F♯ in the same register) shows the excursion to D major to have been the harmonic feint. D major in root position links up smoothly with the inverted B-minor chord from before, and the interrupted cadence—or rather, the unconsummated oscillation—of iv_6 and V_7 in F♯ minor is resumed to link the two strophes, the second being a harmonic replay of the first, repeating at the end (over the very word *Verlangen*, "desire") the unconfirmed—and unconfirmable—excursion to D major.

So what, then, is the function of the D-major triad, on which the voice makes its illusory cadence? Like the inverted B-minor triad—the other chord with D in the bass—it is a pivot that links the signature-sharing keys of F♯ minor and A major, and preempts their cadential fulfillment. The voice part begins and ends on harmonic pivots, hovering perpetually on a cusp between two keys, both sanctioned by the signature but neither cadentially confirmed. Since a pivot is by definition a harmony with a dual (or multiple) function within a piece or progression, the tonality of the song thus hovers undecidedly—and undecidably—in an unprecedented "in between" region, fraught with ambiguity in the most genuine and literal sense of the word. Which key is it in? Both and neither.

In its refusal to settle the matter of keys, the entire song thus prolongs a single unconsummated harmonic gesture —expressed most dramatically by the piano's forever-oscillating, never-cadencing ritornello—that finds its "objective correlative" (its fixed semantic counterpart) on the literary plane. That final line, "my longing and desire," has the last word in a profoundly musical sense, made palpable by the very last note in the song—a B that in context functions as an unresolved, unconsummated seventh. After it dies away the air veritably tingles with the longing and desire it has created/symbolized/embodied.

Of course this is only the first song in a cycle of sixteen. We can hope, like the singer (as we are left imagining him), that resolution and consummation will come in the next song (Ex. 6-1b). That is not only an emotional but an esthetic plus: the unresolved seventh demands that the cycle continue, heightening the sense of "organic" unity that binds it into an artistic whole transcending the sum of its parts.

But does resolution come? The first harmony in the second song consists of two notes: A and C♯. They are both part of the F♯-minor chord the first song leaves us longing for, but the defining root is missing. The same two notes are equally members of the A-major triad, the first song's undecidable alternative tonic. Thus Schumann has found another way to defer an unequivocal statement—which accords perfectly with the sense of the second song, which is one big "if." As the bass moves down the scale, the full F♯-minor triad is sounded briefly on the second beat. But this is no unequivocal statement: the chord occurs in a weak rhythmic position, and the bass moves right on down to D—the first song's dread pivot note. The "if" remains resolved.

It is never resolved at all in the poem, and yet we notice that eventually the song does cadence firmly—and repeatedly—on A, the "wrong" goal, disconfirming the first song's closing gesture and perhaps telegraphing the ultimate frustration of the poet's amorous longing. But do these cadences on A really give an answer, even if "wrong"? Does the music of the second song dispel the disquieting ambiguities of the first? A closer look at the relationship between the voice and the accompaniment shows that ambiguities remain, and that Schumann has merely found another way to leave harmonic gestures unconsummated.

Each of the singer's phrases contains two lines of the poem. Each verse couplet, though punctuated with commas rather than periods to maintain a sense of rhetorical urgency, contains a complete sentence, and each of them is punctuated in the setting, as we have seen, by a cadence. But the voice part ends every time on the supertonic, over a dominant chord, extended with a fermata. Every one of the singer's gestures, even the last, is thus demonstratively left unconsummated, preserving the open-endedness of the "if." Harmonic closure comes only in the accompaniment, *pianissimo*, like an echo—or perhaps a reflected thought, suggesting imaginary fulfillment of the singer's iffy wish.

From my tears spring up
many blooming flowers,
and my sighs become
a chorus of nightingales.

And if you love me, child,
I give you all the flowers,
and before your window shall sound
the song of the nightingale.

ex. 6-1b Robert Schumann, *Dichterliebe*, Op. 47, no. 2 (*Aus meinen Thränen*)

Like Schubert before him, Schumann had a special genius for expressing in music a condition contrary to fact—the

most subjective (hence romantic) thing that music can do. And so we are prepared to grasp the irony with which the most seemingly definite and unequivocally consummated musical gestures in the cycle are undermined, turning consummation itself into a species of unconsummation. This paradoxical effect is the one for which Heine was especially famous; and the most famous example of all examples of it is the huge complaint called "Ich grolle nicht" ("I'm not complaining"), which Schumann set as the seventh song in *Dichterliebe*. Ex. 6-1c shows its second half.

(I bear no grudge, even though my
   heart may break,
eternally lost love! I bear no grudge.
However you may shine in the
   splendor of your diamonds,
no ray of light falls in the darkness
   of your heart.)

I have long known this. I saw you in
   a dream,
and saw the night within the void of
   your heart,
and saw the serpent that is eating
   your heart
I saw, my love, how very miserable
   you are.

ex. 6-1c Robert Schumann, *Dichterliebe*, Op. 47, no. 7 ("Ich grolle nicht"), mm. 16-end

In this emotional turning point, the disillusioned poet lashes out at the love object who has rejected him. The poem is a rant, ably seconded by the pounding repeated chords in the pianist's right hand with their regular accents, and by the operatic ascent to the high note (famously an afterthought entered in proofs, but what of that?) to match the most extravagant poetic metaphor of the poet's rage. The setting is full of uncommonly straightforward word painting, sometimes verging on the corny (like the six-beat dilation on the word *längst*, "long"). All of this belaboring of the obvious can only be a signal that none of it is true.

fig. 6-4 Program of a subscription concert given in Düsseldorf (20 February 1851) at which Robert Schumann conducted Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and Clara Schumann played Weber's *Concertstück* (Concert Piece) in F Minor under her husband's baton. As was usual at the time, there are songs and piano solos between the orchestral offerings, including Schumann's "Ich grolle nicht."

And so the harmony confirms. The description of the poet's dream, in which the surface mood is what the Germans call *Schadenfreude* (gloating at another's misfortune), is undermined by the tortured harmony (every chord containing a dissonance!) that shows it is the singer, not the one figuratively sung to, who is truly *elend* (miserable). The most complete unmasking of the surface pretense, of course, comes right at the end, where the final refrain (Schumann's idea) is accompanied by the baldest IV-V-I imaginable, followed by a ranting postlude that does nothing except insist on the finality of the cadence, and capped by a quite gratuitously banged out . The most definite tonal assertion in the whole cycle accompanies its most flagrant lie—"I'm not complaining," indeed! If the truth is ambiguous, the implication seems to be, only ambiguity can be true.

In song no. 12, of which the first half is given in Ex. 6-1d, nature becomes animate in good *volkstümlich* fashion. But Heine and Schumann remain incorrigibly urbane artists. Their folklikeness is never innocent. It continually veers

over into the Schubertian twilight world of morbid self-absorption, an adamantly bourgeois domain. The harmony described by the piano's first arpeggio is an old Schubertian ploy, most familiar to us from the *Moments musicaux* (Ex. 2-6), a German sixth that is homophonous with a dominant seventh and hence contains the promise of double meaning. Its first alternative resolution (that is, the first instance of "doubleness") comes in measure 9, at the moment when the flowers first speak to the poet from "their world" (meaning, of course, from his own "inner space"). Their actual words are set off later by a slower tempo and a modulation to the key of the diatonic submediant, itself an instance of doubleness since the German sixth occurs on the chromaticized ("flat") submediant, through which safe return to the tonic is made two measures later.

ex. 6-1d Robert Schumann, *Dichterliebe*, Op. 47, no. 12 (*Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen*), mm. 1-9

As so often happens in *Dichterliebe*, the voice part in this song ends on an unconsummated dominant, to be resolved "inwardly," in the accompaniment. That resolution takes place through one of the longest of the many extended piano postludes in the cycle. The postlude begins with a recapitulation of the piano's opening phrase, which had already recurred as a ritornello between the verses, thus suggesting that the poet's pensive stroll continues. But now he wanders wordlessly. It is as if Schumann were invoking Heine's own famous dictum, "When words fail, music speaks." By seeming to supplement musically the poet's uncompleted thought, the composer invites the listener to

complete them imaginatively, as a poet might do by ending a line with an ellipsis ("...").

The listener's imagination is called upon again, even more urgently and explicitly, at the very end of the cycle. The last song—in which the love born at the beginning of the cycle, having died, is buried—is bitter and angry, another rant. The singer mocks his own grief with a parody of a merry song, and puffs it up with hyperbolic comparisons between love's coffin and the most enormous things he can think of (beer casks, bridges, cathedrals). Only at the end does the mood begin to soften. But the voice drops out (as usual, on an unconsummated harmony) before the change of mood is consummated. It is transferred first to the "thought music" in the piano, where we are at first surprised to hear a reprise of the postlude from no. 12, putting us back, as it were, in the summer garden for more tranquil recollection (Ex. 6-1e).

ex. 6-1e Robert Schumann, *Dichterliebe*, Op. 47, no. 16 ("Die alten, bösen Lieder"), mm. 53-67

But then (m. 59) we are more than surprised; we may even be confused to hear what sounds like another song start up, but without the singer. This extra song is short but (unlike many of the actual songs in the cycle) melodically and harmonically complete. It does not allude to any previous song in the cycle. The texture, homophonic rather than arpeggiated, ineluctably suggests words, which we must supply (or at least whose import we must divine) in our imagination, influenced in part, to be sure, by the sensuous qualities of the music, but also, perhaps more strongly, by our own "take" on the situations conveyed by the whole cycle to this point.

So it is not just the beholder's imagination that is engaged, but the beholder's subjectivity, meaning the beholder's own unique combination of experience and inclination. As early as 1794, when the idea of the "esthetic" was new and romanticism was green, Friedrich Schiller commented on the need for this act of completion on the part of the beholder, and the way that it enriches the experience of art, when he wrote that "the real and express content that the poet puts in his work remains always finite; the possible content that he allows us to contribute is an infinite quality."7

By "poet," of course, Schiller meant to include all artists, and he surely meant to imply that all art inevitably shared the property to which he called attention. Nevertheless, once the idea was abroad there were many artists who were not content to leave the property latent or implicit. Romantic artists who wished most fully to realize Schiller's idea were the ones most inclined to leave important things deliberately unsaid. Among composers it was Schumann, with his boundlessly varied unconsummated gestures, who realized it in the highest and most principled degree. That is what the notion of "literary music," in the profoundest sense, connoted.

Notes:

(5) Quoted in Edward Lippman, "Theory and Practice in Schumann's Aesthetics," *JAMS* XVII (1964): 329.

(6) Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, Vol. I (Leipzig, 1854), p. 18.

(7) Friedrich Schiller, review of Friedrich Mattheson's landscape poetry, quoted in Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 93.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

HOW MUSIC POSES QUESTIONS

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Critics
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

To savor the experience of literary music without the concurrent medium of words we may consider two piano compositions from Schumann's freshest, most idealistic period, one of them tiny, the other grand. A proviso first: although words do not figure *concurrently* in piano music, they are often present in the form of titles, epigraphs, textual allusions, and so on. These definitely and purposefully mediate the effect of the notes and should be thought of as part of the work rather than as an "extramusical" expendable or a mere concession to "unmusical" beholders. The latter view gained a lot of currency in the twentieth century, owing to the confusion of the romantic idea of "absolute music" with a vein of antiromantic formalism that later invaded musical thought.

Schumann never intended any such strict conceptual segregation of media. He did not distinguish between the contribution of the music and that of words to the effect of his compositions. In fact he abhorred such distinctions, enthusiastically committed to the view (as he once put it in an aphorism) that "the aesthetics of one art is that of the others too; only the materials differ."[8] This little maxim of Schumann's could be looked upon as heralding the late-nineteenth-century ideal of media-synthesis or "union of all the arts" (sometimes designated *Gesamtkunstwerk* —"collective work of art"—based on a misunderstanding of one of Wagner's pet terms; see chapter 10). Schumann himself never aimed at anything so grandiose.

The nature of Schumann's interplay of words and textless music is very piquantly illustrated in the third number in the series of *Phantasiestücke* ("Fantasy pieces"), op. 12, a group of seven character pieces composed in 1837 (Ex. 6-2). Marked to be played "slowly and delicately," it is one of Schumann's most diminutive keyboard creations, only forty-two bars long (albeit with the last twenty-six repeated), consisting mainly of repetitions of a single motive, a dotted "neighbor progression" that is stated in the first measure and thereafter given various continuations.

The texture, like that of the piano's "extra song" at the conclusion of *Dichterliebe*, is clearly homophonic, especially at the beginning, and therefore lyrical. More than one voice seems to be singing, however. If we mark occurrences of the motive phrase, we can identify soprano and alto entries in the first section (up to the double bar), joined in the second section by a rather insistent bass whose entries are dramatized by the player's rather extreme crossing of hands at the keyboard.

All of this may be easily noticed, and even interpreted in light of the music's familiar harmonic trajectory (FOP in the midsection and a double return to conclude), without knowledge of the title, deliberately withheld from the music as printed in Ex. 6-2. That title is *Warum*?, German for "Why?" What does knowing it add to the experience of the music?

ex. 6-2 Robert Schumann, *Phantasiestücke*, Op. 12, no. 3

It certainly couldn't be said that the title clarifies or explains anything. A title that is itself a question only contributes another enigma. It prompts speculation, though, which is to say the active intervention of the beholder's imagination. One might speculate that the first phrase, which adds an unusual ascending major sixth to the neighbor motive, mimics an interrogative inflection. In that case, the "why" is the unsung text of the "song." One might speculate that the interplay of voices represents a lovers' colloquy. (But there are three voices—a ménage à trois?) One might speculate that the interrogative title is just a reference to the insistence with which the generating motive is propounded. Or one might even speculate that the title is ironically self-referential ("why this title?") in a way that Heine might have approved. Or one might speculate something else. (Here's one: is it by chance that the "motive

phrase" in Schumann's *Warum?* coincides with an urgent phrase in a then very popular opera by Francesco Morlacchi, an Italian working in Germany, in which the male lead, Tebaldo, sings a kind of duet with his absent beloved, Isolina, as shown in Ex. 6-3?) Chances are, though, that one will do more speculating with knowledge of the title than one would do otherwise. A mind engaged in speculation is a mind receptive and alert.

ex. 6-3c Francesco Morlacchi, *Tebaldo ed Isolina* (1822), Act II, Scena e romanza: "Caro suono lusinghier"

So it should not embarrass or perplex us unduly to find in the presence (or absence) of titles an added complexity rather than an explanation. That seems to be the idea. Schumann himself was inconsistent and sometimes vacillating about applying them. They were much more frequently afterthoughts than motivating concepts. In several cases the composer added, changed, or deleted them in successive editions of his works. Another set of piano pieces from 1837 carries an autobiographical collective title—*Davidsbündlertänze* ("Dances of the members of the League of David")—about which Schumann was profoundly ambivalent. In the first edition the individual pieces were "signed" by Florestan and Eusebius, and carried descriptive commentaries describing their antics. All of that disappeared in the second edition, and subsequent ones as well. This, too, prompts questions and speculations—as in this memorable passage from a celebrated article on Schumann's esthetics by Edward Lippman:

> Did Schumann come to feel that guides to the meaning of his works were really not necessary? that the content was sufficiently obvious without them? or that the public had become educated and no longer needed the help it did originally? Did he feel that the headings restricted the imagination, or that they were a danger because they might be misconstrued? or did he always regret having permitted any small glimpse into his personal affairs and feelings? Perhaps the headings did not give the significance of the music at all, or even provide an index to its significance; they might have arisen as an additional poetic expression inspired by the music, which the composer could easily feel to be expendable. Or again, in removing them, Schumann might actually have changed rather than concealed the meaning of the music; did the pieces in fact remain the same without their titles?[9]

One's head spins. And one is grateful to Lippman, who, by allowing his spinning head this unusual public exposure, gave one of the best insights ever into the nature of literary music.

The pinnacle was reached in Schumann's *Phantasie*, op. 17, a monumental three-movement work composed in 1836 and dedicated to Liszt, that is in everything but name a sonata on the most heroic Beethovenian scale. Between 1832

and 1838, Schumann wrote three actual piano sonatas, of which one is comparably grand. (He originally published it under the title *Concert sans orchestre*, "Concerto without orchestra.") The original working title of the *Phantasie* itself was *Grosse Sonate für das Pianoforte* ("Great big sonata for piano"). So why the change?

The change was dictated by the concept of literary music, or rather by Schumann's sensitivity to its implications. Unlike the other sonatas, this one was freighted from the beginning with a heavy cargo of literary ideas. The first movement was drafted in the early summer of 1836 as an independent composition called *Ruines: Fantasie pour le Pianoforte*. The work was temporarily renamed Sonata by late fall, when it picked up its additional movements. In this form it was envisioned as a memorial to Beethoven, inspired by the news (which Schumann had published in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*) that a committee had been formed in Bonn, led by the great literary scholar August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767–1845), to raise funds for the erection of a monument to the Master at his birthplace in Bonn, where Schlegel served as professor of art and literary history. Schumann's rather optimistic idea was to contribute the proceeds from the sale of a hundred copies of his *Grosse Sonate* to the monument fund, but the project foundered until Liszt rescued it with a promise to contribute his concert earnings. Thanks almost single-handedly to Liszt, the monument was finally erected in 1845 and unveiled on the seventy-fifth anniversary of Beethoven's birth.

In December 1836, Schumann proposed the piece to a prospective publisher under the name *Grosse Sonate f. d. Pianoforte für Beethovens Denkmal* ("Sonata for Beethoven's monument"), and listed the three movements as "Ruinen/Trophäen/Palmen" (Ruins, Trophies, Palms). The titles of the new movements were intended in their original, ancient Greek meanings, which resonated both with the antique aura of veneration suggested by the first movement, and with the idea of the Beethoven monument. Trophies were memorials (war spoils displayed on pillars) erected in commemoration of victory, the most "Beethovenian" of all concepts; "palms" were the ceremonial palm branches awarded at victory celebrations.

fig. 6-5 Friedrich von Schlegel, charcoal drawing by Philipp Veit, ca. 1805.

To all of this Schumann now added an epigraph from a poem, *Die Gebüsche* ("The bushes"), by A. W. von Schlegel's even more distinguished brother Friedrich (1772–1829). It has been suggested that Schumann knew these lines not from Schlegel's poem directly,[10] but only from Schubert's setting of it, to which the music of the *Phantasie's* final movement briefly alludes. But even if that is so, Friedrich von Schlegel was a culture hero with whom Schumann had to identify, if only by reputation. Famous both as a romantic philosopher and as a classical scholar, he was the author of *Die Griechen und Römer* ("The Greeks and Romans"), a long-standard survey of classical civilization, and he wrote lyric poetry as well. The range of his interests and writings, in other words, runs the gamut of moods in the *Phantasie* from the most public and monumental to the most inward, even secret. The epigraph tantalizingly invokes the latter, in a fashion reminiscent of the other occult or unfulfilled gestures we have encountered in Schumann's literary music:

Durch alle Töne tönet	Through all the sounds
Im bunten Erdentraum	In the motley dream of earthly life

| Ein leiser Ton gezogen | There sounds a soft, long drawn-out sound |
| Für den der heimlich lauschet. | For the one who overhears in secret. |

Many have guessed at the identity of this secret sound; one can never know for sure. But what made the "Ruins" fantasy an apt basis for the Beethoven tribute to begin with was the fact that, as we will shortly learn, it already contained a secret quotation from Beethoven, to which Schumann added others, even more veiled and less definite, when he came to write the Trophies and Palms. As usual, he toyed a good deal with the titles and headings. Shortly before the work was printed in 1838 he made a wholesale substitution, in which only the heading of the first movement survived: *Dichtungen: Ruinen, Siegesbogen, Sternbild* ("Poems: Ruins, Triumphal Arch, Constellation"). At the very last minute, when the music was already in proofs, Schumann suffered cold feet, changed *Dichtungen* back to *Phantasie*, and dropped the rest, even "Ruinen," the original motivating image.

This is quite a stew of representation and allusion, enigma and erasure, and the more we know of the work's history the thicker (and, it could seem, the more contradictory) the stew becomes. There are many who would claim that Schumann's right to withdraw the titles should be respected and that they should not be divulged lest they unduly influence, hence constrain, a listener's understanding. Indeed, the chance that listeners might think of the titles as constraints was probably what dissuaded Schumann from publishing them (although he kept the epigraph). But as long as we regard the titles as stimuli rather than as confines to the imagination they can function for us as "images that yet fresh images beget," the way Schumann, in his confident moods, intended. (The quoted line is from W. B. Yeats's nostalgic "Byzantium," a poem whose resonances for musical interpretation were first plumbed by Anthony Newcomb.)[11]

But in fact Schumann did not mean to withdraw the titles entirely. His actual direction to the publisher was to replace each title with an asterism—three stars in triangular formation (thus:), a device often used in nineteenth-century typography to signal an omission, often the name of an anonymous author, or a dedicatee. The Russian composer-critic César Cui, for example, used an asterism as his journalistic nom de plume throughout his career. Obviously, there is a huge difference between simply omitting a title (which may as well never have existed as far as the reader is concerned) and signaling its omission. To do the latter is to challenge the reader to guess it, or invent one. A new question is posed. Nothing is removed from the stew. Indeed, the stew only thickens with the revelation that something (presumably something private) is being concealed. The listener is again involved, again asked to speculate, again rendered receptive and alert.

The posthumous publication of Schumann's private correspondence in 1885 added a great deal to the pot willy-nilly. In 1838, he had written to Clara Wieck, his then distant beloved, that the original "Ruinen" fantasy was conceived as "a deep lament for you,"[12] implying that it was his own life that lay in ruins. A year later, after the whole *Phantasie* had been published, he wrote to her that in order to understand it, "you will have to transport yourself into the unhappy summer of 1836, when I renounced you."[13] A couple of months after that, he wrote, "Aren't *you* the 'tone' in the motto? I almost think so."[14]

We need not pounce at this or shout Eureka. In the first place, as Charles Rosen wisely reminds us, Schumann (perhaps teasingly, perhaps candidly) left the matter in doubt. "As a listener to his own music, not as a composer, he has understood how his love for Clara can be poured into the mold of his work,"[15] and left a model by which other listeners may pour their own loves into the music they hear, if that is their pleasure, for music, especially Schumann's "literary music," is "made to be filled with *our* experience" (italics added). And as Rosen rightly warns, "too firm an identification of an element in a work with an aspect of the artist's life does not further understanding but blocks it," as does any reading so definitive as to foreclose the begetting of fresh images.

Still and all, there is one spot in the first movement of the *Phantasie* on which every interpretive trajectory in the foregoing discussion can converge, and that is the spot marked Adagio, fifteen measures before the end (Ex. 6-4a). Comparison with Ex. 3-5e will reveal its identity as a variant of the opening/closing song in Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* ("To the distant beloved"). That, of course, *was* Clara in 1836. But it was also a Beethoven "ruin," a disfigured shard from the Beethoven composition that, perhaps more than any other, contained a poignant message for the composer of the *Phantasie*.

ex. 6-4a Robert Schumann, *Phantasie*, Op. 17, I, mm. 295-end

It has a poignant resonance for the music's secret overhearer, too, whether or not the listener is aware of any biographical resonances. For the music is contrived in such a way that the whole movement up to the point of recall seems to function as a gigantic upbeat to it. And here is the most decisive reason why the piece had to be renamed *Phantasie*, even after *Grosse Sonate* and *Dichtungen* had been tried out. "We are accustomed to judge a thing from the name it bears,"[16] Schumann had written in 1835 in the pages of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. "We make certain demands upon a fantasy, others upon a sonata." Thinking back now to other fantasies, notably those by C. P. E. Bach and Mozart in the eighteenth century, we cannot fail to identify "tonal vagrancy" as perhaps their most salient shared characteristic. What a sonata normally announces at the outset—a firmly settled, cadential establishment of the tonic—a fantasy only arrives at later, and sometimes not until the end. That is what we expect in a fantasy, or as Schumann would say, what we demand from it.

Now look at Ex. 6-4b, the beginning of "Ruinen," marked "to be played in an extravagant and passionate manner throughout." There can be no doubt that that turbulent swirl, consisting of a root, fifth, seventh, and ninth, is expressing a dominant function, "longing" extravagantly and passionately for the tonic. (With two "unprepared" dissonances, moreover, and one more—C, a fourth—that enters with the melody, the harmony seems to begin not at the beginning but in process, as one might expect in a fragment or shard—or ruin—torn off from some larger unheard entity.) It would make an instructively frustrating exercise to pursue the harmonic implications of the opening gesture through the movement to find the moment where the gesture is consummated. But as the reader has probably guessed, that moment does not happen unequivocally until the allusion to *An die ferne Geliebte* makes its tranquil, consoling C-major close in m. 299.

ex. 6-4b Robert Schumann, *Phantasie*, Op. 17, I, mm. 1-19

In between, every threatened consummation is provocatively attenuated or evaded: in m. 13 by an ordinary deceptive cadence made a little garish by the application of a diminished seventh; later by the use of modulating pivots that introduce long roving episodes; elsewhere by turning I at the last minute into V of IV (a notorious anti-sonata digression into the subdominant); and so on. About one-third of the way through, the opening material, both melodic and harmonic, returns. Some, noting the double return, have called this a recapitulation; but to give such a name to the resumption of a still-unconsummated dominant is not to uphold but fatally to undermine everything "sonata form" has ever stood for.

Something else "fantasia" has historically stood for has been the seemingly random or illogical extemporaneous introduction of new material (often harmonically stable) to disrupt and destabilize the thematic and harmonic continuity of the whole. A classic instance takes place about half-way through Schumann's first movement, where the still-unresolved dominant harmony dissolves into an out-of-time arabesque or curlicue (incongruously played low and slow), and is succeeded by what can only be described as a lengthy interpolated character piece in C minor, which Schumann originally marked "Romanza" (romance, normally a vocal form), then changed to "Erzählend im Legendenton" (told in the manner of a legend), which was finally printed simply as "Im Legendenton."

The functional relationship of its key to the sought-after tonic resolution is attenuated by a connecting phrase in G minor, so that C minor, when it comes, no longer sounds like the resolution of the harmony, but instead like another—*yet* another—feint. The theme that articulates it has some connection with the main body of the movement (specifically, with some episodic material first presented in the "alto" in mm. 33–37). But its quality of interpolation, of downright intrusion, is patent, and amply confirmed at its conclusion, almost a hundred bars later, where the "main body" resumes just where it had broken off—or rather, *been* broken off by the intruder. If the whole "Im Legendenton" episode were spliced out, an unbroken continuity would be restored. The interpolation makes no contribution at all to the clarification of the structure. It answers no questions, only poses new ones, further thickens the stew.

And so it is that when the opening material recurs a second time at m. 286, it *still* has the character of an unconsummated gesture, and the quotation from *An die ferne Geliebte* can function as the single consummation toward which the entire movement has been striving. It is a thematic consummation as well as a harmonic one, for as Charles Rosen and John Daverio have both convincingly pointed out (and as the reader can easily confirm by listening), most of the main themes in the first movement of the *Phantasie* are related motivically (if sometimes somewhat indirectly) to the melody of the final song in *An die ferne Geliebte* (albeit not always to the part quoted), and can be construed as derivations from it.

Seeing the whole movement in this light accords even better with the motto from Schlegel, which speaks of a tone sounding *throughout*, not just at the end. (And just to multiply possibilities, consider in the light of the Schlegel motto the enigmatic single tones that sound softly forth as weak local harmonic resolutions at two spots, of which the first is shown in Ex. 6-4c.) What is provided at the end, then, is not a new idea but a synthesis: the simplest, most concentrated possible statement of ideas that have been formerly propounded in a diffuse and complicated manner, with varied or even contradictory implications. The quotation from Beethoven is no longer merely a quotation—that is, something brought in from outside—but the realization of impulses from within, and their reconciliation.

ex. 6-4c Robert Schumann, *Phantasie*, Op. 17, I, mm. 77-81

More "organic" than that form can hardly get. It is a compositional tour de force. And yet while the movement could not be more clearly articulated or "directional" from the dramatic or gestural standpoint (that is, as an unfolding of thematic and harmonic impulses in time, and their ultimate convergence in repose), it is enigmatic in the extreme when approached from the standpoint of traditional conservatory "Formenlehre" (textbook study of form), which emphasizes the standardized arrangement of sections within a whole.

The first movement of the *Phantasie* thus has a doubly enigmatic status: originally a self-contained composition, when contemplated in isolation from its companion movements it becomes a "fragment" or a ruin in a new sense. Friedrich von Schlegel himself called attention to the romantic mystique of fragments. "Many of the works of the ancients have become fragments,"[17] he noted. But then he added, "Many of the works of the moderns are fragments as soon as they are written." This may sound like a complaint. Some, indeed, might have wished to say it in complaint, as Schlegel was mockingly suggesting. But Schlegel heartily approved. His love of fragments is closely related to Schumann's obsession with unconsummated gestures, withheld information, and the rest. The notion of a fragment demands that the beholder relate it to something larger, yet absent, to be supplied by an engaged imagination.

The beholder, in other words, must *add* something, once again confirming Schiller's marvelous insight that art's hold on our imaginations comes not (or not only) from what the composer puts in, but from what we ourselves are forced to contribute before we can take anything out. It follows from this that our perception of an artwork is never entirely

objective. That much is a truism. But what also follows is the less common admission that it is never entirely subjective, either. Artistic engagement, and whatever knowledge (or self-knowledge) may emerge from it, is therefore the product of an interaction between the object submitted to the public gaze and the subjects who do the gazing. Neither can ever be excluded. Or so Schiller and Schumann (and every other romantic artist) insist.

Far from a truism, this has always been a hotly debated issue, for its implications are vast and potentially very disquieting. If we can never know or understand an artwork with complete objectivity (or with any other kind of completeness), where does that leave us with respect to other kinds of knowledge? Perhaps the intentionally incomplete statements with which romantic artists insist on tantalizing us do not really differ in kind from other statements, including those that purport to be entirely complete and unproblematical. Perhaps completeness of utterance is only a disguise worn by partiality. Perhaps romantic techniques of propounding intentional and unanswerable questions within the experience of art products, while seemingly novel and even radical, are only an extreme manifestation of a universal condition of knowledge. That would make romantic artists the greatest realists of all.

Notes:

(8) Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I, p. 39.

(9) Lippman, "Theory and Practice in Schumann's Aesthetics," p. 314.

(10) John Daverio. "Schumann's 'Im Legendenton' and Friedrich Schlegel's *Arabeske,"* *19th-Century Music* XI (1987–88): 151.

(11) See Anthony Newcomb, "Those Images That Yet Fresh Images Beget," *Journal of Musicology* II (1983): 227–45.

(12) Clara Schumann, ed., *Jugendbriefe von Robert Schumann* (Leipzig, 1885), p. 278.

(13) *Ibid*., p. 302.

(14) *Ibid*., p. 303.

(15) Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, p. 101.

(16) *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 31 July 1835; trans. Paul Rosenfeld in Robert Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*, ed. Konrad Wolff (New York: Pantheon, 1946; rpt. Norton, 1969), p. 64.

(17) F. von Schlegel, "Fragments" (1798), quoted in Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, p. 50.

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ANXIETY AND RECOIL

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Critics
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

We have already noted that as Schumann's career progressed, his activities became more public. In his case publicity seems to have acted as a restraint. His later music showed increasing mastery of technique, but also a tendency to conform to public expectations. As a hotheaded Davidsbündler and maverick journalist, he summed up his attitude toward such expectations in a quintessentially romantic aphorism: "People say, 'It pleased,' or 'It did not please'; as if there were nothing higher than to please people!"[18] (Imagine Mozart's reaction to this!) As a civic music director and the head of a large family, Schumann inclined toward "classicism," as the term was then beginning to be understood.

A subtle and revealing illustration of the change in Schumann's attitudes and their "socio-esthetic" implications was the fate of another fantasy that became a fragment. What began life as a one-movement *Fantaisie* in A minor for piano and orchestra, composed in 1841, later found a home as the first movement of a conventional three-movement concerto (op. 54), completed in 1845. The complete concerto is a justly popular repertory item. It has perhaps the most perfectly realized balance of forces of any standard piano concerto, with the soloist and the orchestra cooperating in all the thematic presentations, as well as in the transitional, episodic, and developmental passages. The only concerto that may be said to surpass it in these respects is Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, completed two years later and possibly under its influence.

When it functions as the first movement of a "normal" concerto, what we are most apt to notice about the former *Fantaisie* is what is most normal about it. Unlike the opening movement of the *Phantasie* for piano solo, its unfolding can easily be reconciled with the conventions of "sonata form," which is what made it potentially an appropriate beginning for a "classical" concerto in the first place. Tearing it loose from that context, at once turning it into a fragment and returning it to its former estate as a freestanding composition, will expose its more experimental side.

The first thing we are apt to notice now is that its various sections, all of which may be related, if desired, to the conventional sonata design, have different, sometimes highly contrasting, tempos: *allegro affettuoso* to begin; *animato* at m. 67; *andante espressivo* at m. 151; *più animato* at m. 200; *tempo primo* at m. 249; and, after the written-out cadenza, *allegro molto* at m. 448. But then, in seeming contradiction, we notice that at each of these highly contrasted spots, the thematic material is the same: or rather, that (with the exception of the "tempo primo" that functions as a literal restatement or "recapitulation") each section is based on a variation—or, to speak Lisztianly, a "transformation"—of the same thematic idea, in which a common opening phrase is given a new continuation each time (Ex. 6-5).

ex. 6-5 Thematic transformations in Robert Schumann's *Fantaisie* for Piano and Orchestra

Viewed this way, the *Fantaisie* looks less like a sonata movement than like a set of linked character pieces that might have been variously signed "F" (for Florestan) or "E" (Eusebius). Yet considering the placement of the slowest and the fastest tempos, the *Fantaisie* seems at the same time to sum up within itself the outward shape of a complete and conventional three-movement concerto, making its later incorporation into such a work seem a redundancy. In its sui generis yet elaborately overdetermined form, the concerto can support many interpretations, which is to say that there are many plausible answers to the implicit questions it poses.

fig. 6-6 The old pontoon bridge over the Rhine at Düsseldorf, from which Schumann plunged in a suicide attempt on 27 February 1854.

Ultimately, that is the point. The one-movement composition, which seems in effect to anticipate Liszt's innovations (though far less flamboyantly) in its compression and its thematic transformations, asks far more of its hearers than the popular three-movement concerto in which it was eventually embedded, and which Clara Schumann premiered (with Mendelssohn conducting) at the Leipzig Gewandhaus on New Year's Day 1846. By then, the enigmatic "literary" quality he had prized as a youth had come to trouble and torment the composer, who was increasingly given to fits of nervous tension and melancholy that (as he noted in his diary) gave his life "an *idée fixe*: the fear of going mad."[19] This "fixed idea" or obsession made Schumann morbidly sensitive to symptoms of "irrationality" in his early output, and even caused him to revise some of his most remarkable compositions to render them more conventional, hence less threatening to his own peace of mind. It was almost as if the romantic conviction that his life and his work were esoterically commingled gave Schumann the idea that altering the work might alter his fate—a neurotic symptom in itself. His fears were eventually borne out, or perhaps fulfilled themselves: Schumann spent his last two years in an asylum following a suicide attempt. "Classicism," for him, was a retreat from a threatened abyss. In this he was the first of many.

Notes:

(18) Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I, p. 43.

(19) John Daverio, *Robert Schumann: Herald of a "New Poetic Age"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 301.

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Classical

Hector Berlioz

Berlioz: Symphonies

Idée fixe

INSTRUMENTAL DRAMA

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Critics
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

More forthright, less inhibited, in fact downright exhibitionistic (many thought) was the self-dramatizing romanticism of Berlioz, Schumann's closest French counterpart. His was the dynamic, scathing, somewhat scandalous romanticism of Victor Hugo, whose works were known to cause riots in the theater. Civic engagement was what French romantics sought in the afterglow of their heroic revolution, which surrounded the word *citoyen* (citizen) with an aureole. Berlioz the citizen-composer followed in the footsteps of his teacher, Jean-François Le Sueur (1760–1837), who had been the Inspecteur du Conservatoire from the very founding of that great institution in 1795. That job obligated Le Sueur to furnish the grand hymns for mass singing at the yearly revolutionary commemorations (*Fêtes de la Révolution*).

The French tradition of civic ceremonial music reached its very height in Berlioz's *Grande messe des morts*, op. 5 (1837), a colossal requiem Mass for tenor solo, six-part chorus, and orchestra augmented by eight pairs of timpani and four separate brass bands placed at the four corners of the performing space for the Dies Irae sequence, an epic evocation of the last judgment replete with trumpets to wake the dead. It was performed in the mammoth Dôme des Invalides, burial place of France's national heroes, on 5 December 1837 at a commemorational ceremony organized by the July Monarchy's ministry of the interior.
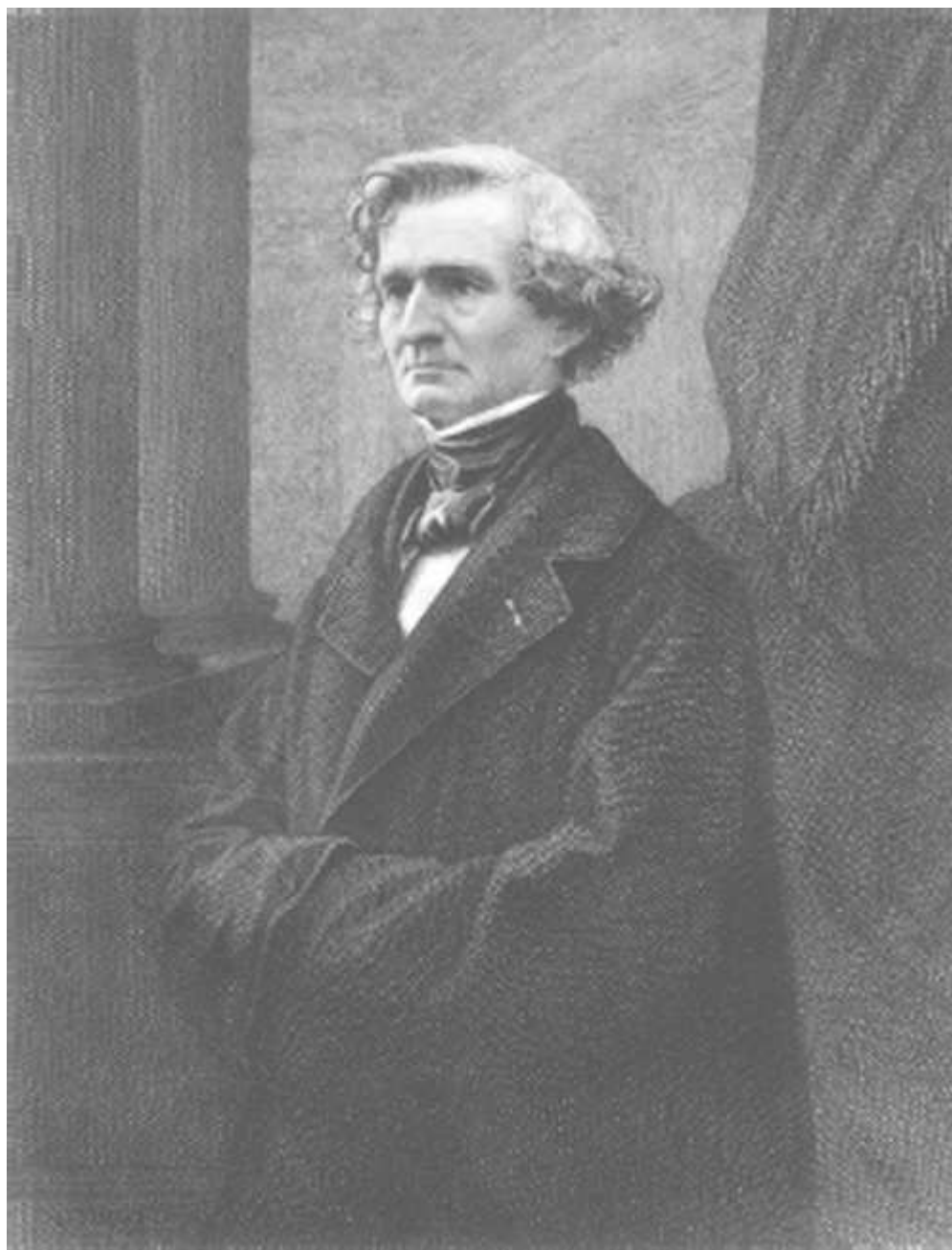
fig. 6-7 Hector Berlioz in an engraving by E. Metzmacher after a photograph by Félix Nadar (1857).

Two years later, Berlioz received another official commission, to accompany the solemn tenth-anniversary commemoration of the July Revolution itself on 28 July 1840. This time Berlioz dispensed with the chorus, aiming in by-then time-honored romantic fashion at the more elemental and "universal" message that the "metalanguage" of instrumental music alone could convey. The result was the *Grande symphonie funèbre et triomphale* ("Grand funereal and triumphal symphony"), scored for an enormous yet ambulatory military band, and performed in procession through the streets of Paris (thanks to which, as Berlioz recalled in his memoirs, the piece turned into an unintentional canon between the front instruments and the rear). The first and last movements are marches, the first lugubrious and the second—headed "Apothéose" ("Apotheosis"), from the Greek for exaltation to godly rank—ebullient. In between came the masterstroke: an "Oraison funèbre," or eulogy to the revolutionary dead, declaimed by a solo trombone from the steps of the Invalides, to music originally composed for a scene from an abandoned historical opera, *Les francs-juges* ("The judges of the secret court").
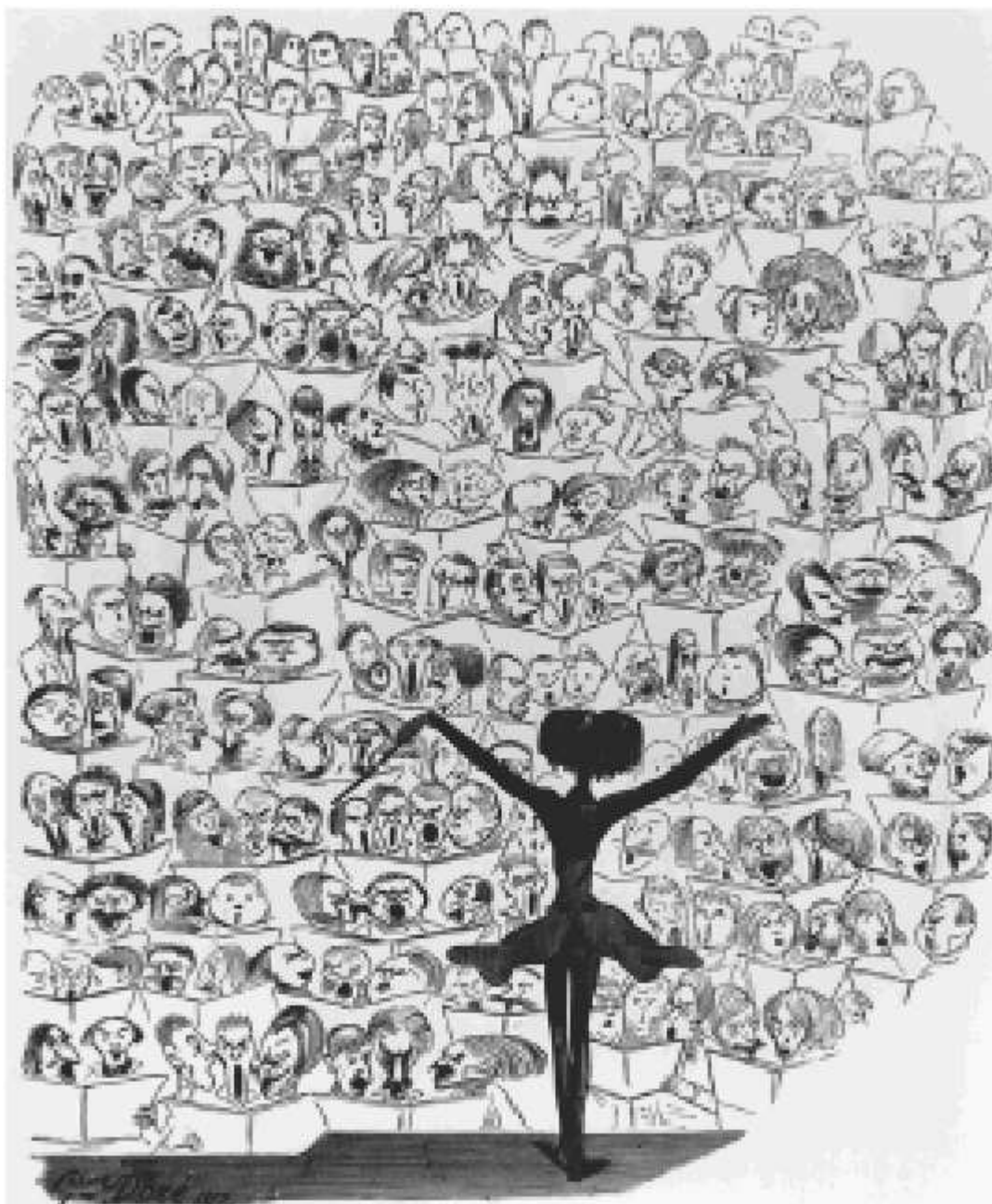
fig. 6-8 Berlioz conducting massed choruses; caricature by Gustave Doré (1832-1883) in *Journal pour rire*, 27 June 1850.

Berlioz's seminal work, however, was one in which he summoned all the techniques of public address for the purpose of private disclosure. It is officially titled *Épisode de la vie d'un artiste, Symphonie fantastique en cinq parties* ("Episode in the life of an artist: a fantastic symphony in five movements"). The title may be translated as the "Symphony of Fantasies," but the word *fantastique* also had for Berlioz and his contemporaries a wealth of "Hoffmannesque" resonances, denoting something strange, grotesque, uncanny, unearthly—in short, romantic. The whole symphony was composed in a "mental boil"[20] (as Berlioz later recollected in tranquility) from January to April 1830. Inspired by biographical circumstances comparable to those that surrounded Schumann's *Phantasie*, and perhaps having comparable artistic ends, Berlioz's symphony nevertheless differs so completely from Schumann's work in its artistic means and "ethos" (moral tone) that between them the two works represent a sort of gamut. Comparing them will be an exercise in what the intellectual historian Arthur Lovejoy called "the discrimination of romanticisms."[21]

Like Schumann a few years later, in 1827 Berlioz conceived an all-consuming passion for what then seemed an unattainable object. In September of that year he attended a performance of *Hamlet* by a touring English company performing in the original language; and, though he knew no English at the time, he was smitten both by

Shakespeare, who would thereafter be (with Virgil) his model of all artistic models (thus making Berlioz, like Schumann, a "literary" musician to the core), and by Harriet Smithson, the Irish actress who played Ophelia.

Shakespeare was available for immediate possession: over the course of his career Berlioz composed three major works on Shakespearean subjects—a concert overture, *Le roi Lear* (King Lear, 1831); a "dramatic symphony," *Roméo et Juliette*, actually a sort of secular oratorio for soloists, chorus, and orchestra, in which all the love music, significantly, is wordless (1839); and finally a comic opera, *Béatrice et Bénédict* (1862), after *Much Ado About Nothing*. Miss Smithson was not available. Berlioz spent the next two years in vain and hopeless pursuit, which culminated (just as it had with Schumann) in a temporary embittered renunciation that bore immediate musical fruit, in Berlioz's case the *Symphonie fantastique*.

fig. 6-9 Harriet Smithson as Juliet to Charles Kemble's Romeo, Paris, Odéon Theater, September 1827.

(Eventually he succeeded, against all expectation, in wooing Miss Smithson. They were married in 1833. But, as his biographer Hugh Macdonald puts it,

for Berlioz there was no clear distinction between the real Harriet Smithson and the idealized embodiment of

Shakespeare's heroines.... [A] relationship that had begun on an ideal level could only spoil in the glare of everyday reality, and the wholly Romantic conjunction of the artist with the ideal woman came to a bitter end.[22]

They never divorced, but separated around 1842; she died in obscurity in 1854.)

Where Schumann sought to sublimate the biographical stimulus that motivated the *Phantasie* to the point where it is arguably no longer essential or even relevant to the work's interpretation, and was careful to enfold its subjective content in a sphinxlike sheath that engaged the listener's own subjectivity, Berlioz let everything hang out, leaving nothing, or so it seemed, to the imagination. What was billed as the symphony's motivating scenario was actually distributed to audiences in their program books (hence the word "programmatic" to describe the relationship between the work's verbal and musical dimensions). Although the composer had his qualms and vacillations about the program leaflet (or, simply, the symphony's "program," as we usually say now), rewrote it three times, and occasionally decided not to have it handed out, he eventually had it published in the first edition of the score in 1845, and since then it has been unquestionably (and by the composer's express avowal) as essential a part of the symphony as the libretto is in any opera. An explicit and occasionally detailed narrative, it goes far beyond anything Schumann ever attempted with his titles or headings:

> NOTE
>
> The composer's intention has been to develop, insofar as they contain musical possibilities, various situations in the life of an artist. The outline of the instrumental drama, which lacks the help of words, needs to be explained in advance. The following program should thus be considered as the spoken text of an opera, serving to introduce the musical movements, whose character and expression it motivates. The distribution of this program to the audience, at concerts where this symphony is to be performed, is indispensable for a complete understanding of the dramatic outline of the work.
>
> PROGRAM
>
> 1. *Reveries—Passions*. The author imagines that a young musician, afflicted with that moral disease that a well-known writer [Chateaubriand] calls the *vague des passions* ["surge of indefinite passion," roughly, readiness for a big emotional experience], sees for the first time a woman who embodies all the charms of the ideal being he has imagined in his dreams, and he falls desperately in love with her. Through an odd whim, whenever the beloved image appears before the mind's eye of the artist it is linked with a musical thought whose character, passionate but at the same time noble and shy, he finds similar to the one he attributes to his beloved.
>
> This melodic image and the model it reflects pursue him incessantly like a double *idée fixe*. That is the reason for the constant appearance, in every movement of the symphony, of the melody that begins the first Allegro. The passage from this state of melancholy reverie, interrupted by a few fits of groundless joy, to one of frenzied passion, with its stirrings of fury, of jealousy, its return of tenderness, its tears, its religious consolations—this is the subject of the first movement.
>
> 2. *A ball*. The artist finds himself in the most varied situations—in the midst of the tumult of a party, in the peaceful contemplation of the beauties of nature; but everywhere, in town, in the country, the beloved image appears before him and disturbs his peace of mind.
>
> 3. *Scene in the country*. Finding himself one evening in the country, he hears in the distance two shepherds piping a *ranz des vaches* [Swiss cow call] in dialogue. This pastoral duet, the scenery, the quiet rustling of the trees gently brushed by the wind, the hopes he has recently found some reason to entertain—all concur in affording his heart an unaccustomed calm, and in giving a more cheerful tint to his ideas. He reflects upon his isolation; he hopes that his loneliness will soon be over.—But what if she were deceiving him!—This mingling of hope and fear, these ideas of happiness disturbed by black presentiments, form the subject of the Adagio. At the end one of the shepherds again takes up the *ranz des vaches*; the other no longer replies.—Distant sound of thunder—loneliness—silence.
>
> 4. *March to the scaffold*. Convinced that his love is unappreciated [or as the first draft had it, "Convinced not

only that his adored one does not return his love, but that she is incapable of understanding it and moreover has become unworthy of it"], the artist poisons himself with opium. The dose of the narcotic, too weak to kill him, plunges him into a sleep accompanied by the most horrible visions. He dreams that he has killed his beloved, that he is condemned and led to the scaffold, and that he is witnessing his own execution. The procession moves forward to the sounds of a march that is now sombre and fierce, now brilliant and solemn, in which the muffled noise of heavy steps gives way without transition to the noisiest clamor. At the end of the march the first four measures of the *idée fixe* reappear, like a last thought of love interrupted by the fatal blow.

5. *Dream of a Witches' Sabbath*. He sees himself at the Sabbath, in the midst of a frightful troop of ghosts, sorcerers, monsters of every kind, come together for his funeral. Strange noises, groans, bursts of laughter, distant cries which other cries seem to answer. The beloved melody appears again, but it has lost its character of nobility and diffidence; it is no more than a dance tune, mean, trivial, and grotesque: it is she, coming to join the Sabbath [or, according to the first draft, "it is the loved one coming to the Sabbath to attend the funeral procession of her victim; she is now only a prostitute, fit to take part in a debauch"].—A roar of joy at her arrival.—She takes part in the devilish orgy.—Funeral knell, burlesque parody of the *Dies irae* (the hymn sung in the funeral rites of the Catholic Church). Sabbath round dance. The Sabbath round and the *Dies irae* combined.[23]

The degree to which this program was truly autobiographical is of course unknowable, and (many would say) irrelevant. Berlioz, to begin with, is not known to have been a "substance abuser," but he is known to have been fascinated with Thomas De Quincey's pseudo-autobiographical *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822), a novel replete with dream visions every bit as bizarre and spectacular as the composer's. (Berlioz read it in Alfred de Musset's translation in 1828.) Besides, the program follows too many literary and dramatic conventions to have been wholly spontaneous or life-prompted. (In any case, the most spontaneous moments in the first draft—namely the misogynistic outbursts against the beloved, here most clearly identifiable with the actual Harriet Smithson who had wounded the actual Hector Berlioz—were removed on reflection.) The five-movement format is often traced back to Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony, also a descriptive work (though on nothing approaching such a level of detail). It may indeed have served as a model—or a "validator," as Beethoven so often served his varied progeny. The Beethoven symphony is neither narrative nor enactment, however, but a series of mood pictures in the eighteenth-century tradition of the *sinfonia caratteristica* ("characteristic" or descriptive symphony). There really was no musical precedent for a scenario-symphony such as Berlioz was offering, and so it may be more appropriate to seek its precedent in the contemporary theater, where the five-act "Shakespearean" tragedies and histories of Hugo, Berlioz's almost exact contemporary, were setting the pace. The incipient *grand opéra* was also a five-act affair, and it seems right to regard the *Symphonie fantastique* as a sort of opera—or "instrumental drama," as Berlioz calls it himself—for orchestra.

But what an orchestra! Whether in terms of sheer size or diversity of timbres, this was at the time the biggest band ever assembled outside an opera house (though Berlioz himself would exceed it in his choral works). To balance the unprecedented twenty-three wind and brass players (including parts for two ophicleides, now played on tubas), Berlioz specified a minimum of sixty strings. In addition the score calls for two harps and five percussion players, four of whom must simultaneously produce timpani rolls at the end of the third movement, with its famous depiction of distant thunder. (They also perform on two other kinds of drum, cymbals, and tubular chimes; all five players have their hands full at the end of the fourth movement.)

Thus a total of not less than 91 musicians is called for, including the virtuoso conductor. At the first performance, Berlioz had hoped for about 220 but settled for 130. The mastery—not only of mass but of detail—with which he handled this gargantuan band, even at this early stage of his career, has unquestionably been his greatest legacy. "Berlioz's sound," as Edward T. Cone, a later composer-critic, put it, "has been in the ears of composers ever since, even when they have reacted most strongly against it," or when they felt (as many people once felt about movies, and some still do about TV) that its colorfulness and realism preempted, and thereby stunted, the listener's imaginative faculties.[24]

The first performance was conducted by François-Antoine Habeneck (1781–1849), an old-fashioned violinist-conductor, who beat time with his bow. Dissatisfied, Berlioz resolved to learn to conduct himself, and became one of the earliest virtuoso baton conductors. The orchestra, in fact, was the only instrument he played well. Almost alone among major composers in having virtually no keyboard skills, he was most competent on flageolet (or whistle-flute)

and guitar, both instruments associated mainly with nonliterate repertories, and both as a result instruments for which he never had occasion to write. Thus Berlioz, far more than pianistically skilled composers, had to think directly in terms of orchestral colors, for which he developed an unparalleled ear.

As a result, however, his manner of writing often transgressed the usual rules of voice leading, traditionally learned at the keyboard. Because of his huge ambition in the face of seeming technical liabilities, Berlioz could never entirely shake the reputation of a crank, or of flaunting his "originality in italics," as the fastidious Mendelssohn put it.[25] As if to compensate for his lack of more traditional skills, Berlioz's expertise in the newest techniques of orchestration and conducting was phenomenal, and pathbreaking. In 1843 he published a textbook on orchestration, only the third book of its kind and the first to give a full description of all contemporary instruments and their possibilities, many of them pioneered in his own work. As updated by Richard Strauss in 1904 the book is still in print. Berlioz, in short, was the prototype of the avant-garde or antitraditional composer. (Not that he, a worshipper of Beethoven and Gluck, would have so characterized himself.) If the size and timbral variety of the orchestra in the *Symphonie fantastique* is another reason for associating it conceptually with dramatic rather than traditionally "symphonic" music, the really decisive reason for doing so is the way in which Berlioz adapted the specifically operatic device of the "reminiscence motif" to organize the symphony in both narrative and formal dimensions. As the program states, the image of the beloved haunts the symphony from start to finish in the form of an obsessively recurring melody, which Berlioz, using a phrase we have already encountered in Schumann (though not as a musical term), called the idée fixe. It is, in short, a musical symbol that could perhaps be compared, not only in its deployment but in its object of depiction, with Schumann's symbolic quotation from Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* in his *Phantasie*.

Again, though, it should be kept in mind that what in Schumann was a nebula (or "stew") of potential meanings becomes with Berlioz an explicit, sharply focused image whose unequivocal referent is given within the work itself —signaled first in the program, then corroborated in the music—and which may be apprehended "objectively" by the beholder. Indeed, thanks to Berlioz's orchestral skills, our first experience of the idée fixe is almost physically palpable. The best entrée into the symphony, both as an object and as an idea, would be to trace its peregrinations through the work, much as one might trace a character's appearances in a drama or even a novel.

The first presentation of the idée fixe, given in Ex. 6-6 in Franz Liszt's concert transcription, is a most graphic piece of "body portraiture," and the body portrayed is not "hers" but "his," that is, the smitten "artist's." It is the physiological reaction—the irregular heartbeats or "palpitations" in the accompanying parts—rather than the melody itself that is the real tour de force of "imitation" here, reminding us that before taking courage and staking everything on his musical vocation Berlioz had spent two years, at his father's behest, as "a reluctant and unsatisfactory medical student" (in the words of his biographer D. Kern Holoman).[26]

ex. 6-6 Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, the idée fixe in Liszt's transcription

Or rather, we have here a fairly complicated interplay between an abstract and arbitrary symbol (the idée fixe melody) and the realistic imitation of nature (the palpitating accompaniment). Berlioz's music will play on the blurry cusp between these two types of representation throughout the symphony. That is what lends it such fascination. The "beloved" melody, which needs to be instantly recognized on every recurrence, is given a very distinctive, arching profile, rising up in quick fitful leaps, then making slow, smooth, syncopated descents that seem to hover out of time. In its skittish avoidance of surface symmetries, in its rhythmic contrasts, and in its slow, laborious progress to its climactic high C, this forty-bar arialike melody is plainly intended as a sort of stylistic archetype, in keeping with its role as romantic "ideal." The whole first movement in which this instrumental aria occurs is a C-major sonata allegro thoroughly recast in operatic terms. The extended slow symphonic introduction in the parallel minor, evidently intended as a representation of the *vague des passions*, is in fact a little da capo aria with coda whose melody was originally that of a song Berlioz had composed at the age of twelve in response to his own first passionate stirrings; its "objective" suitability to the expressive purpose was thus putatively assured. The coda, in a technique well-learned from Beethoven, is built over a submediant pedal that will resolve to the Allegro as a "flat" submediant.

The exposition begins (as the program states) with the idée fixe. Its melody, too, was adapted from an older, discarded vocal composition: *Herminie*, a cantata Berlioz had composed to a prescribed "neoclassical" text in 1828 in an unsuccessful bid for the Nine Prix de Rome, a stipend given by the government to support promising young musicians during a two-year creative sojourn in Italy. (Berlioz won it in 1830 with another neoclassical cantata, *Sardanapale*.) In its original context, the melody that symbolized an idealized Harriet Smithson had expressed the hopeless love of Erminia, a Saracen woman, for the Christian knight Tancred, as related in *Gerusalemme liberata* ("Jerusalem delivered"), Torquato Tasso's sixteenth-century epic of the Crusades.

The second theme is a long while a-borning, but makes its decisive cadence on the dominant exactly where Berlioz marks the first ending. The two themes of the exposition, the "instrumental drama's" protagonists, stalk one another through the rather meandering development section. The process of the meandering seems, incidentally, to have

been modeled directly on the beginning of the development section in the first movement of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony, first performed in Paris under Habeneck only two years earlier: compare Berlioz's modulations by ascending half steps at measures 168 ff, each stage prepared by a flat submediant, with Beethoven's right after the first movement's double bar (Ex. 6-7). The technique of modulation by half step, only a starting point for Beethoven, is maintained by Berlioz through the development section with unprecedented consistency. Rarely if ever had a stretch of music of comparable length so relied on half-step rather than fifth relations for its harmonic coherence.

ex. 6-7a Ludwig van Beethoven, Symphony no. 3, I, mm. 182-90
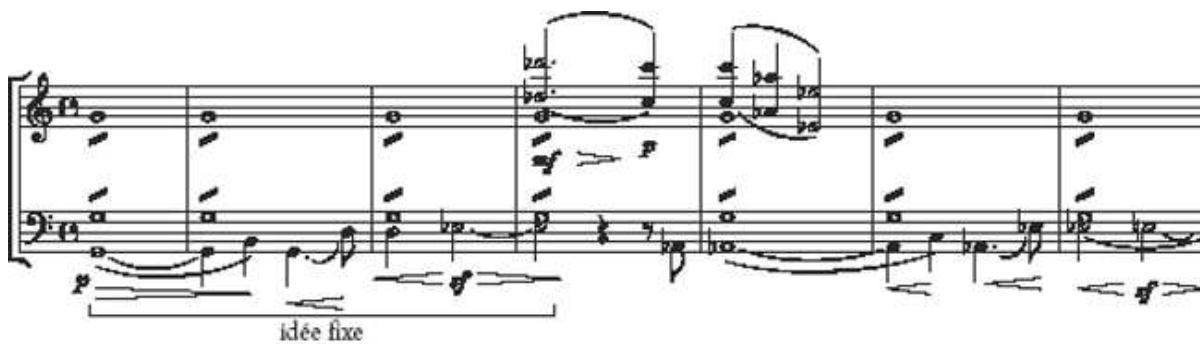
ex. 6-7b Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, I, mm. 168-81

This is a purely thematic development on the new textbook model, which Berlioz must have learned from Anton Reicha, his conservatory professor, who had literally "written the book" on the subject. Its technique of constant half-step motion precludes the reaching of any well-defined FOP (harmonic "far out point"), nor is the retransition defined by much of a dominant pedal (just four bars, mm. 408–411). There is a completely unexpected (and, in terms of "normal" sonata procedure, unexpectable) reprise of the idée fixe in the dominant right in the midst of things, and a double return that comes not as the resolution of a long-building tension but as the culmination of another series of ascending half steps, intensified by the use of a motivic sequence and a long crescendo, both long-established devices for producing operatic climaxes.

Lastly, when it comes time to wind things down for the "religious consolation" at the end, the half steps turn around and begin descending through another motivic sequence ingeniously derived from the idée fixe by flattening out its rhythmic design into undifferentiated quarter notes. The crescendo becomes a diminuendo, and the tempo gradually slackens into long-sustained chords played "by the whole orchestra as softly as possible." The theme-based development, while it no longer betrays its genetic link to the binary dance form of old and no longer charts a

compelling tonal course, acquires in compensation a new narrative flexibility. At the very least it effectively indoctrinates the audience to respond like the artist himself to every strategic recurrence of the idée fixe. From here on to the end of the symphony, the general tactic will be to have the idée fixe impinge upon a new dramatic "terrain," in each case evoked by the use of "characteristic" music—that is, generic music associated "in life" with a specific place or function. The function of the idée fixe in every case except the last will be to make a familiar environment seem suddenly strange, transformed by the injection of strong emotion. In the last case, the process will work in the opposite way, the environment (not familiar this time but "fantastic") serving to transform the idée fixe.

Thus, in the second movement or "act," the ball scene is evoked in the most direct way possible, by the use of actual ballroom music, in this case a waltz (by then a commonplace in operatic ballets). The harp music, too, is an element of characteristic "setting." A ubiquitous instrument at domestic soirées and parties (especially in France), and lately a standard presence in the theater, the harp was making its symphonic debut in this movement. (As a concerto soloist it had a minor eighteenth-century history, again mainly French.) As late as 1886, César Franck's use of the harp in a nonprogrammatic symphony gave rise to controversy.

fig. 6-10 Double-action harp by Erard, ca. 1860.

The idée fixe occurs twice in the movement, with strikingly different dramatic effects. A sudden modulation

to—where else?—the flat submediant prepares its first appearance, and the cellos and basses react, as before, with palpitations. These, however, are quickly subsumed into the waltz figuration and the oompah-pah accompaniment; the beloved is spotted dancing from afar. Toward the end, however, the artist and his beloved come suddenly face to face, and the surrounding music suddenly disappears (save a slight ripple of half-heard harp music, inserted for verisimilitude). It is a classic "moment out of time" of a type we have encountered before in instrumental music only in Schubertian trances, represented here by the usual dip into the flat submediant, and also by some "uncountably" sustained tones in the flute and horn. In opera, of course, juxtapositions of "real time" and "stop time" had been of the essence from the very first.

In the third movement, the ambient sounds are provided by the "pipers" (oboe and English horn), and the thunder (timpani and tremolando strings). There is a long rounded aria that represents the artist's presence, even though it is not always in "his" vocal range. (Compare the movement titled "Roméo seul"—Romeo alone—in the *Roméo et Juliette* symphony.) It is first sung by the first violins and flute in unison; its reprise in the dominant (mm. 69 ff) takes place an eleventh lower, strategically placed in the "male" register so that when interrupted by the idée fixe it can continue to play "the artist" in reaction to it. Their collision comes somewhat in advance of the beloved's actual musical appearance, signalled by the artist's agitation at the thought of her. Berlioz marks a *tremolo très serré*—"very close" or "unmeasured" tremolo—and in so doing once again becomes one of the first to transfer an orchestral effect from the opera house (where its history goes back seventy years to the days of Gluck and Piccinni) to the "pure" instrumental domain (Ex. 6-8).

ex. 6-8 Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, III, mm. 87-92

The thunder, we are thus given to understand, has gone "within." The impassioned duet between the idée fixe and the rhythmically erratic interjections of the panting, stammering protagonist is violently cut off on a note of irresolute despair—literally a chromatic note (cf. m. 24in Ex. 6-6) that allows the harmony to veer off in a dangerously flatward direction before equilibrium is laboriously regained. At the recapitulation, Berlioz succeeds in investing timbre alone with representational significance. The pizzicato strings play an embellished reprise of the opening aria, while the flute and clarinet, the instruments that had just played the idée fixe in unison, contribute countermelodies.

To speak the language of the program, hope gains the upper hand over fear at the beginning of the coda, where motives from the protagonist's aria in the strings are allowed to coexist in harmonically peaceful counterpoint with motives from the idée fixe, still in the flute and clarinet. But the equation of inner and outer turmoil through the use of tremolo reintroduces a note of forlorn disquiet when the English horn resumes the *ranz des vaches* and is answered not by the oboe, its erstwhile partner (identified since then with the idée fixe, another absent partner), but by the distant thunder of the four timpani.

The fourth movement, the "March to the Scaffold," enjoyed a separate popularity during the nineteenth century as an orchestral showpiece in its own right, which seems fair enough given the frequency with which colorful orchestral excerpts from operas are performed at concerts. (But many nonprogrammatic symphonic movements were similarly extracted in those days: a special favorite, as already implied in an earlier chapter by Lami's painting [Fig. 2-7], was the Allegretto from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, which Berlioz himself first encountered as the slow movement

of the Fifth, thanks to Habeneck's substitution.) In fact, the movement began life as an operatic excerpt. Like the middle movement of the *Symphonie funèbre et triomphale*, it was lifted from the abandoned score for *Les francs-juges*.

All Berlioz had to do in order to adapt it to its new purpose was change the ending, which now contains the movement's single fleeting reference to the idée fixe (Ex. 6-9). What follows is perhaps the most explicitly illustrative music in the score: the short sharp shock of the guillotine blade in m. 169; the head rolling into the basket (pizzicati in the same measure); and the hats-in-the-air fanfare to conclude, reminding us that public executions were once a form of popular entertainment. Like the similarly literalistic representation of the plagues in Handel's oratorio *Israel in Egypt*, this is inevitably a moment of high comedy despite the grisliness of the subject and the ostensible seriousness of the program.

Notes:

(20) Hector Berlioz, *Correspondence générale*, Vol. I, ed. Pierre Citron (Paris, 1972), p. 182.

(21) See Arthur O. Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association of America* XXIX (1924); reprinted in *Essays on the History of Ideas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948).

(22) Hugh Macdonald, "Berlioz," in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. III (rev. ed., New York, Grove, 2001), p. 386–87.

(23) Hector Berlioz, *New Edition of the Complete Works*, Vol. XVI, trans. Piero Weiss (adapted) (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1972), pp. 3–4.

(24) Berlioz, "The Composer and the Symphony," in *Fantastic Symphony*, ed. Edward T. Cone (Norton Critical Scores; New York: Norton, 1971), p. 9.

(25) Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Briefe einer Reise durch Deutschland, Italien und die Schweiz* (Zürich, 1958), p. 124; quoted in David Cairns, *Berlioz: The Making of an Artist* (London: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 1989), p. 489.

(26) D. Kern Holoman, *Berlioz* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

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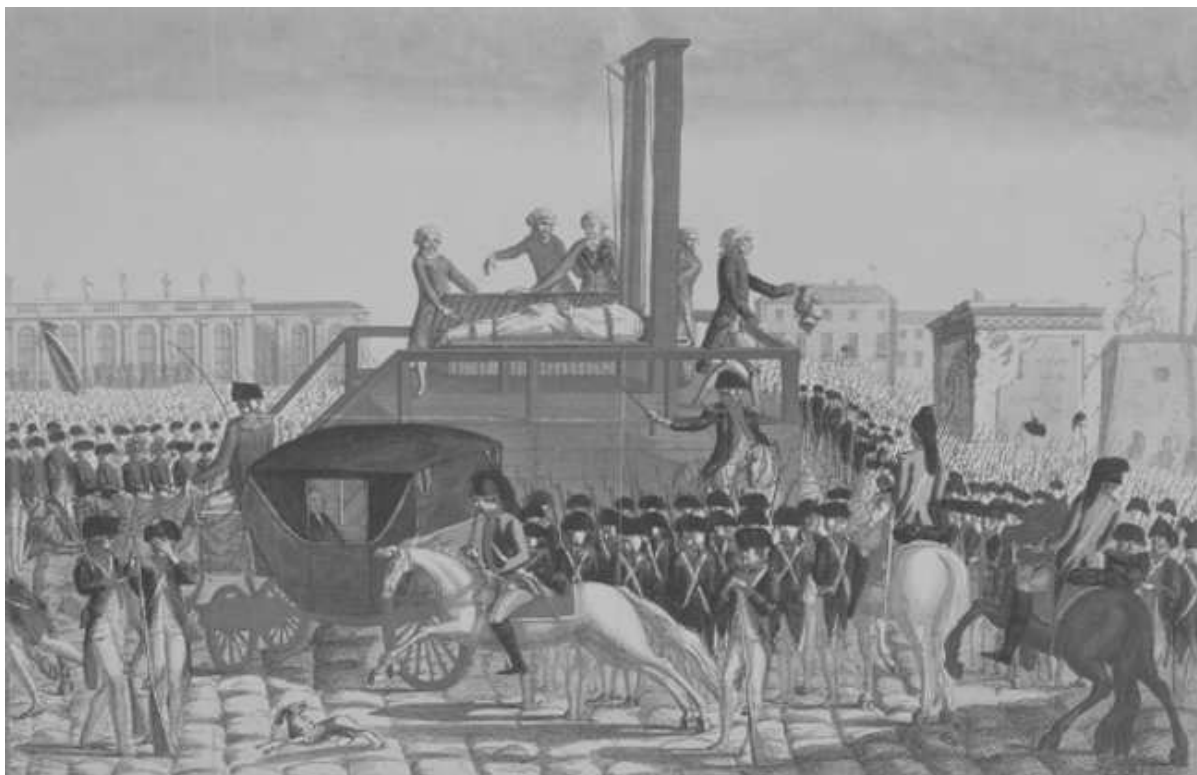**Source:** MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

fig. 6-11 Execution of Louis XVI by guillotine, 1793 (anonymous engraving, late eighteenth century).

ex. 6-9 Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, IV, mm. 174-end

The comic literalism of the ending to the March to the Scaffold gives us our opportunity, before turning to the symphony's wholly fantastic concluding movement, briefly to compare romantic theory and practice. When wearing his critic's rather than his composer's hat, Berlioz was known to rail at literal depiction as a lapse of style or taste, and a transgression against the true spirit of romanticism. In a fascinating essay of 1837, "De l'Imitation musicale" ("On imitation in music," or as aptly paraphrased by its translator, Jacques Barzun, "The limits of music"), he tried to formulate a romantic theory of musical depiction, supporting it with examples, both positive and negative, from the literature. It is easy to see that the article was motivated not only by the failure of previous writers (such as Giuseppe Carpani, whose biography of Haydn furnished the immediate pretext) to come up with an adequate theory, but also by the criticism that the *Symphonie fantastique* had been receiving from conservative musicians, in particular from François-Joseph Fétis (1784–1871), the influential editor of the *Revue musicale*, the leading Paris music magazine.

Berlioz begins by admitting that misconceived or inappropriate imitations of nature can produce unintentional comedy, and not only in music. Writing of the great tragedian François-Joseph Talma (1763–1826), whose portrayal of Orestes in Racine's *Andromaque* was considered by many the most glorious achievement of the French dramatic stage, Berlioz had the effrontery to remark of the recently deceased tragedian that when he

used to hiss the *s*'s as he exclaimed, "*Pour qui sont ces serpents qui sifflent sur vos têtes*? [For whom are those snakes that hiss around your heads?]," far from being terrifying he always made me want to laugh. For it seemed to me clear, then as now, that this solicitude of Orestes to imitate the hissing of serpents when his soul is filled with terror, his heart with despair, and his head with ghostly visions, was directly opposed to any idea we may form of what is dramatically natural and likely. Obviously Orestes is not *describing* the Furies; he imagines that he is actually seeing them. He hails them, pleads with them, defies them; and one must be a very docile spectator not to find comic a piece of imitation ascribed to such a sufferer at such a juncture.[27]

Berlioz hazards four rules to govern the use of descriptive or illustrative devices in music: If we are to accept imitation among musical devices without detracting from music's independent power or nobleness, the first condition is that imitation shall virtually never be an *end* but only a *means*; that it shall never be considered (except very rarely) the main musical idea, but only the complement of that idea, joined to the main idea in a logical and natural manner.

> The second condition to making imitation acceptable is that it shall concern something worthy of holding the listener's attention, and that it shall not (at least in serious works) be used to render sounds, motions, or objects that belong outside the sphere which art cannot desert without self-degradation.
>
> The third condition is that the imitation, without aping reality as by an exact substitution of nature for art, shall nonetheless be close enough for the composer's intent to avoid misconception in the minds of an attentive audience.
>
> The fourth and last condition is that this physical imitation shall never occur in the very spot where *emotional* imitation (expressiveness) is called for, and thus encroach with descriptive futilities when the drama is proceeding apace and passion alone deserves a voice.[28]

When it comes to the examples, we are not surprised to find Beethoven cited at first as a model of correct procedure.

But then Berlioz turns around and audaciously cites him as a transgressor—a move calculated, at the very least, to attract attention. Nor is the citation of Handel's *Israel in Egypt* a surprise. But note that Berlioz cites it from hearsay, and inaccurately. Handel's oratorios, continually in active repertory in England and lately revived in Germany, were still terra incognita in France.

> It might seem as if the "Storm" in the Pastoral Symphony were a magnificent exception to our first rule which allows imitation only as a means and not as an end. For this symphonic movement is wholly given over to the reproduction of the divers noises heard during a violent storm which breaks suddenly over some village festivities. First a few drops of rain, then the rising wind, the thunder grumbling dully in the distance, the birds seeking shelter; finally the approaching gale, the boughs that split, men and animals scattering with cries of dismay, the shattering bolts of lightning, the floodgates of heaven opening, the elements let loose— chaos.
>
> And yet this sublime depiction, which outstrips anything that had ever been attempted in the genre, actually falls within the category of *contrasts* and *dramatic effects*, which are required by the scope of the work. For it is preceded and followed by gentle and smiling scenes to which it acts as a foil. That this is so may be tested by imagining this storm transplanted into another composition in which its presence would not be motivated: it would unquestionably lose a great deal of its effectiveness. Hence this piece of imitation is strictly speaking a means of achieving contrast, devised and managed with the incalculable power of genius.

ex. 6-10 Ludwig van Beethoven, *Fidelio*, Act II, no. 12 ("Es ist nicht leicht!" "Nur etwas noch!"), mm. 1-4

In *Fidelio*, on the other hand, a work by the same composer, we find another piece of musical imitation of very different purport from the one just reviewed. It occurs in the famous duet at the grave: the jailer and Fidelio dig the place where Florestan is to be buried. Halfway through their toil the pair unearth a large rock and roll it with difficulty to one side. At that point the double basses of the orchestra play a strange and very brief figure—not to be confused with the ostinato phrase of the basses which runs through the whole piece—by which it is said Beethoven wished to imitate *the dull sound of the rolling stone* [Ex. 6-10].

Now this imitation, being in no way necessary either to the drama or to the effectiveness of the music, is really an end in itself for the composer: he imitates in order to imitate—and at once he falls into error, for there is in such imitation no poetry, no drama, no truth. It is a sad piece of childishness, which one is equally grieved and surprised to have to complain of in a great master. The same could be said of Handel, if it be true—as is commonly said—that in his oratorio *Israel in Egypt* he tried to reproduce the flight of locusts, and this to the point of shaping accordingly the rhythmic figure of the vocal parts. Surely that is a regrettable imitation of a subject even more regrettable—unworthy of music in general and of the noble and elevated style of the oratorio.[29]

There is no need for us to render a judgment of the end of the fourth movement of the *Symphonie fantastique* according to these criteria. (Our judgments should, and inevitably will, reflect our criteria, not Berlioz's.) What is most pertinent is Berlioz's insistence that what is at stake are the proper limits of musical representation—ultimately the proper limits of artistic representation in general, and even more broadly, the limits of properly artistic subject matter. That is indeed a perpetually contested boundary, and will remain one as long as anyone feels a personal stake in art.

Notes:

(27) Berlioz, "De l'imitation musicale," in *Fantastic Symphony*, ed. Edward T. Cone, p. 41.

(28) *Ibid*., p. 38.

(29) *Ibid*., pp. 38–39.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Berlioz: Musical style

Dies irae

VARIETIES OF REPRESENTATION

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Critics
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Returning now to the *Symphonie fantastique*, the fifth and last movement, in which the artist imagines his own bizarre funeral, was at first notorious for all the deliberately ugly music it contains. One can hardly hear the opening bars, with their interminably sustained diminished-seventh chords, without thinking of Weber's "Wolf's Glen," a work Berlioz revered and, both as critic and as composer, did his best to propagate. (His interpolated recitatives, composed on commission, allowed *Der Freischütz* to be performed at the Académie Royale, the bona fide "Paris Opera," rather than at the Opéra Comique.) But Berlioz's music, unlike Weber's, had to do the work of the whole "production." It is surely with *Der Freischütz* in mind that D. Kern Holoman praises "the ghostly beginning of the last movement, with the eight-part *divisi* strings articulating a dramatic sonority, the whole concept as splendid as the curtain rising on an eerie stage lit in green and purple."[30] With such a task to perform, it is no wonder either that the first part of the "Dream of the Witches' Sabbath" is the part of the *Symphonie fantastique* with the most detailed program, or that every event it details is unmistakably represented in the music. The program, and the "unmistakability" of the representation, were alone what justified the outrageous musical effects.

The whole slow introduction (Larghetto) can be related, as Holoman suggests, to the "unearthly sounds, groans, shrieks of laughter" listed in the program, but the "unearthly cries, to which others seem to respond" have a more specific referent in the woodwind semaphores in Ex. 6-11, answered by the muted valve horn (a very recent invention, introduced in concert only two years before, and specified here for the first time). The "unearthliness" was due not only to the literally unheard-of timbre, but to the octave glissandos, which (as Berlioz knew full well) have to be "faked."

ex. 6-11 Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, V, mm. 7-11

ex. 6-12 Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, V, mm. 40-54

The character-transformation of the idée fixe into "an ignoble dance tune, trivial and grotesque," previewed at m. 21 and played in full at m. 41 (Ex. 6-12), was another device borrowed straight from the opera, but one destined for a long career in orchestral music (as we have already begun to see), largely thanks to Liszt, who attended the premiere performance of the *Symphonie fantastique* and immediately introduced himself to Berlioz, with whom he maintained a cordial friendship until the latter's death. (Berlioz conducted the premiere performance, in Weimar, of Liszt's E♭-major Concerto, where the device of thematic transformation received a workout; Schumann, too, not

only knew but had even reviewed the *Symphonie fantastique* by the time he wrote the *Fantaisie* in A minor for piano and orchestra that eventually became the first movement of his Concerto.) Once again timbre plays a hitherto unprecedented role in characterization: to depict his beloved in a fright wig Berlioz used yet another instrument new to the symphony orchestra, the small, shrill-sounding E♭ clarinet, employed previously only in military bands.

Between the preview and the full statement comes the most radically disruptive and "incoherent" musical event in the score: the sudden tutti on E♭ that interrupts the C-major statement of the tune after its seventh bar. This moment is again carefully given its precise "objective" referent in the program—"a howl of joy greets her arrival" —without which the music would have been simply incomprehensible.

But now comes a profound change in the relationship between the music and the scenario, which from this moment is nothing more than a list of musical events such as might be found in any concert program. For this most fantastic episode of the Fantastic Symphony verbal justification was no longer necessary because a different (and older) kind of musical symbolism had kicked in, one that drew its referents not from within the work but from a wider range of reference on which the composer could rely because he shared it with his audience.

That shared asset was the musical treasury of the Church, the most traditional symbolic repository of all. Berlioz's appropriation of the stern medieval Dies Irae melody and his burlesque treatment of it were a little risqué at a time when representations of religious services on the opera stage were subject to censorship, but it was essential to his "objective" or naturalistic purposes to employ an artifact from "reality," even if it served to illustrate a figment of fantasy.

Yet even here the device seems to have had its source not in real life but in literature. The Dies Irae, sung offstage in the original Latin, was employed as a stage effect in the cathedral scene from Goethe's *Faust*, a play Berlioz placed almost on a level with Shakespeare. Associations with *Faust*, a play all about diabolical havoc, would seem to have furnished the pretext for Berlioz's strange use of the chant to symbolize not divine redemption (as in the liturgy) but devilish fun and games. Such was the force of Berlioz's example that it irrevocably changed the chant's significance for composers to come, who inevitably associated it neither with Goethe nor with God, but with the unholy jigs in the *Symphonie fantastique.*

Not only the Dies Irae device but the midnight chimes that accompanied it (Ex. 6-13) were theatrical borrowings, making use of an instrument that had to be carted to the concert hall directly from the opera house. The most striking musical effect in the Dies Irae travesty is the irregularity with which the eight-measure peal of the chimes (spaced now four, now five bars apart) impinges on the rhythmically regular Dies Irae variations. That seemingly uncoordinated (but of course meticulously calculated) relationship was another "naturalistic" touch: the singers and the bell ringers, working independently, seemingly come together only from the chance perspective of the onlooker (that is, the audience).

ex. 6-13 Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, V, mm. 121-146

The chant variations proceed in a curiously academic, even pedantic manner, by strict diminution. But that is only the first of Berlioz's ironic borrowings from conservatory routine. The *Ronde du sabbat* ("Witches' round dance") itself is introduced through an ungainly but altogether "correct" fugal exposition, and the climactic section, in which the round dance and the Dies Irae are combined, is a cantus firmus exercise such as every counterpoint pupil is still forced to write. (It remained a favorite device with Berlioz: compare the climax of the overture to his opera *Benvenuto Cellini*, in which all the themes are his own, including the cantus firmus.)

All of these devices work together to make the latter part of the symphony's finale a piece of mock church music in the academic manner—just the sort of thing a well-trained musician might imagine under the influence of opium. The effect of the incongruity between the "learned," somewhat archaic compositional devices and the garish program (to say nothing of the orchestration, which reaches a peak of wildness with the *col legno* at Fig. , where the violinists and violists are asked, for the first time in an orchestral score, to "strike the string with the wood of the bow"), is a source of humor to those in the know, and by the end one is *almost* convinced that the sophisticated composer's tongue is in his cheek.

Whether or not it was intended, Berlioz's fellow composers appreciated the joke, and appropriated it. Burlesque Dies

Iraes—in which the Church's most terrifying musical artifact, describing the Last Judgment in appalling detail, was defaced, distorted, covered with composerly graffiti of every kind—became something of a rage or a blasphemous sport in the wake of the *Symphonie fantastique*. Most directly inspired by it was Liszt's *Totentanz* ("Dance of death"), a one-movement piano concerto subtitled "Paraphrase über 'Dies Irae' in der Form einer Variation" (1838, revised and published 1859). Funniest of all was the *Danse macabre*, an orchestral showpiece by Camille Saint-Saëns (1874), that thoroughly defanged the chant, doing to it what Berlioz had done to his idée fixe (Ex. 6-14).

ex. 6-14 Camille Saint-Saëns, Dies Irae in *Danse macabre*

The last major contribution to this odd little tradition was the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini* (1934) by the Russian pianist-composer Sergey Rachmaninoff, a One-movement concerto consisting for the most part of variations on the theme of Paganini's twenty-fourth Caprice, with the Dies Irae thrown in as a reminder of Paganini's "diabolical" persona. By now the tradition (or traditions, for Paganini's Caprice had spawned another) has become entirely jocular, but its improbable longevity perhaps testifies to the ambivalence with which audiences reacted to Berlioz's original appropriation of the tune, and a wish to settle the uneasy questions it raised.

Notes:

(30) Holoman, *Berlioz*, pp. 102–3.

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Schumann: The music critic

Absolute music

DISCRIMINATING ROMANTICISMS

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Critics
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Now what would Schumann have made of all this? We don't have to guess, because Schumann devoted the lengthiest critical article of his career to the *Symphonie fantastique*, issued in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in six installments between 3 July and 14 August 1835. Its length was due in part to its being not just a review but a defense against the captious reviews of others, notably François-Joseph Fétis, whose review Schumann printed in translation over two issues of the journal preceding his own. It was so detailed and diligent that Schumann later submitted it, successfully, for a doctor's degree.

The first installment was a shout of poetic enthusiasm, signed Florestan. The rest was a sober, highly technical descriptive commentary, signed "R. Schumann." The use of his real name was treatment accorded only a few works that Schumann took especially seriously. It already tells us as much as the actual words of the review about Schumann's attitude toward his French contemporary and counterpart, and the fact that it was based on Liszt's piano transcription rather than on the full score (unpublished until 1845) or on an actual hearing (which Schumann could not experience until 1843 when Berlioz visited Leipzig) makes it all the more a triumph of empathy. But Schumann's was nevertheless one of the most peculiar reviews that the *Symphonie fantastique* ever received, and that is why it is so revealing to us of the contrasting attitudes we may otherwise be inclined to lump together under the general rubric of romanticism. There was in fact no such "general rubric" at the time, as the review itself makes clear.

Only after spending five installments lauding the symphony and minutely describing it for his readers both as sound and as expression, providing in the process no fewer than twelve notated examples to refute Fétis's charge that Berlioz was technically incompetent, does Schumann even mention the program. He gives it, grudgingly and with many omissions, as an afterthought, and brings the whole six-part series of ardent notices to a close with this amazing sermon:

> Thus the program. All Germany is happy to let him keep it: such signposts always have something unworthy and charlatan-like about them! In any event the five titles would have been enough; word of mouth would have served to hand down the more circumstantial account, which would certainly arouse interest because of the personality of the composer who lived through the events of the symphony himself. In a word, the German, with his delicacy of feeling and his aversion to personal revelation, dislikes having his thoughts so rudely directed; he was already offended that Beethoven should not trust him to divine the sense of the *Pastoral* Symphony without assistance. Men experience a certain timidity before the genius's workshop: they prefer to know nothing about the origins, tools, and secrets of creation, just as Nature herself reveals a certain sensitivity when she covers over her roots with earth. So let the artist lock himself up with his woes; we should experience too many horrors if we could witness the birth of every work of art!

> But Berlioz was writing primarily for his French compatriots, who are not greatly impressed by refinements of modesty. I can imagine them, leaflet in hand, reading and applauding their countryman who has depicted it all so well; the music by itself does not interest them.

> Whether a listener unfamiliar with the composer's intent would find that the music suggested pictures similar to those he wished to draw, I cannot tell, since I read the program before hearing the music. Once the eye has been led to a given point, the ear no longer judges independently. But if you ask whether music can really do what Berlioz demands of it in his symphony [as Fétis had tried emphatically to deny], then try to associate with it different or contrasting images.

> At first the program spoiled my own enjoyment, my freedom of imagination. But as it receded more and more into the background and my own fancy began to work, I found not only that it was all indeed there, but what is more, that it was almost always embodied in warm, living sound.[31]

The persiflage about national stereotypes, while certainly revealing of contemporary attitudes (attitudes still with us, alas, and still dire), seems a bit beside the point. At issue, ultimately, is freedom of imagination, as Schumann finally gets around to saying in the last paragraph. Music, he insists, that leaves too little to the listener's "own fancy," that excludes the listener from the co-creative process, finally leaves the listener (out in the) cold. The alternative, for Schumann, is certainly not music without expressive (or even descriptive) content, but rather a music that by leaving such content undefined to a degree—by asking "Warum?"—allows and even forces the listener to participate in its creation. It is the music that requires this involvement on the part of the listener that affords the experience of what would later be called "absolute" music—a music absolutely, rather than merely particularly, expressive.

Did Berlioz disagree? Maybe not: after Fétis derided his efforts, he tried to clarify them, saying now that the program did not provide a scenario for the music but rather functioned the way spoken dialogue functioned in a comic opera with respect to the arias. It set them up, prepared the listener to receive their expressive content in its fullness, but did not compete with them or duplicate their meaning. (On another occasion he compared the program to the Greek chorus in ancient tragedies.) This was taken at the time as a retreat rather than a clarification.

It may have been so. It may have been the reason why he never wrote another program to accompany his later instrumental compositions, even though all of them had literary associations. It may even have been one of the reasons why Berlioz declared himself in later life, exasperated at the obstacles he still encountered in getting his works produced in his own country, to be "three-quarters German" as a musician.[32] Minus the animus that motivated it, this was an avowal of faith in instrumental music and its capacity to communicate its expressive content without the help of words. That is the crux on which the discrimination of musical romanticisms depends.

Notes:

(31) Robert Schumann, "A Symphony by Berlioz," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 14 August 1835; trans. Edward T. Cone in Berlioz, *Fantastic Symphony* (Norton Critical Scores), pp. 246–47.

(32) David Cairns, *Berlioz*, Vol. II: *Servitude and Greatness* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1999), p. 296.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 7 Self and Other

Chopin and Gottschalk as Exotics; Orientalism

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Self and Other
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

GENIUS AND STRANGER

> *All these poets write as if they were ill, and as though the whole world were a hospital.*

> —Goethe to his amanuensis Eckermann, 20 september (1827)

Hats off, gentlemen, a genius!" exclaimed Eusebius on Wednesday morning, 7 December 1831, in the dignified pages of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*.[1] With these words the twenty-one-year-old Schumann, making his critical debut three years before founding his own journal, welcomed the twenty-one-year-old piano virtuoso Frédéric Chopin into the ranks of published composers and introduced him to German music lovers, for whom previously he had hardly been a name. Also appearing for the first time in print were Schumann's *Davidsbündler*: the article would have been historic even were it not for the clairvoyance with which one genius had recognized another. But the opening has become a catchphrase; the composer it heralded soon proved to be the very embodiment of everything that the word genius implied in the early nineteenth century, and only Schumann spotted him—or even *could* have spotted him, one easily believes—so *early*.

Even more than a genius, Chopin was music's supreme *poète maudit*. An intruder from an alien terrain, he captivated and mystified with a strange fascination. (Even in 1831 Schumann described himself as being transfixed in Chopin's presence by "strange basilisk eyes," naming a mythical creature that killed with a glance.) And then he wasted mysteriously away, dying of "consumption" (tuberculosis), the most romantic of diseases, before his fortieth birthday.

fig. 7-1 *Chopin Evoking Memories of Poland*, **by Jan Styka.**
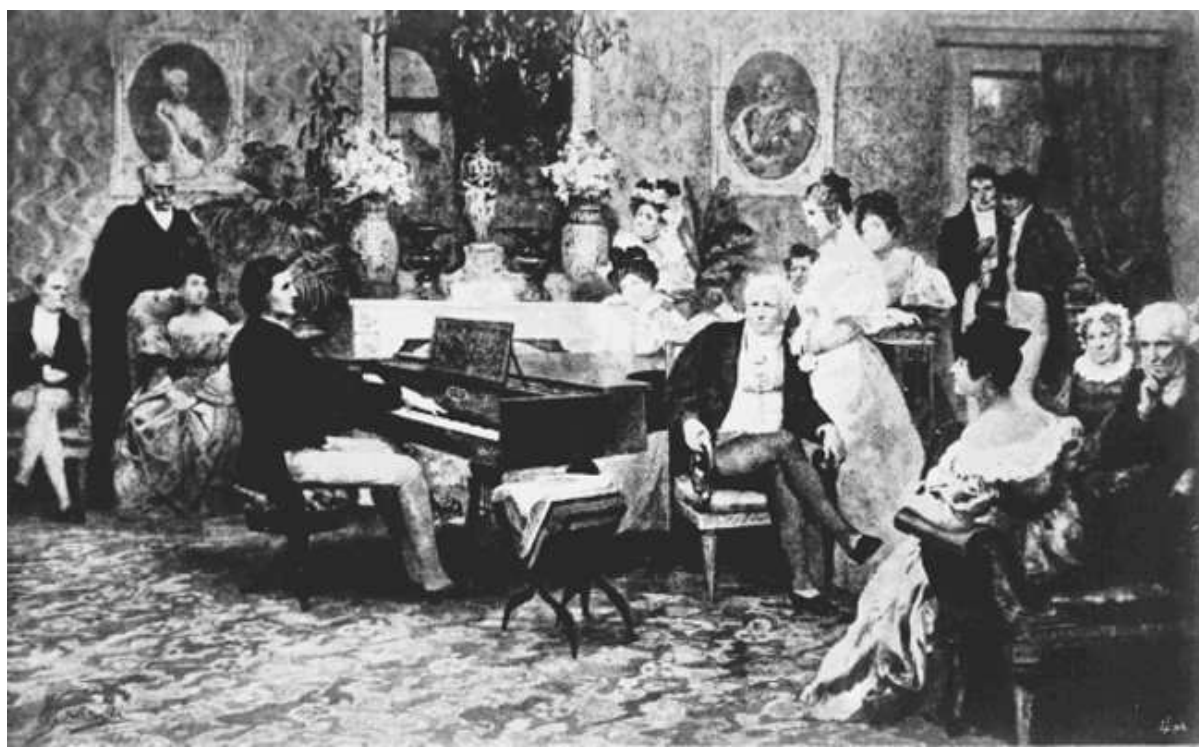

fig. 7-2 Chopin at the Radziwill salon (Hendrik Siemirdzki, 1887).

One of the most romantic things about Chopin was his place of origin. Despite his French surname, he was a Pole, baptized with the name Fryderyk Franciszek Chopin in Zelazowa Wola, a settlement near Warsaw, where he was born in 1810 to the family of a French expatriate, Nicolas Chopin, who had come there in 1787 for reasons unknown and stayed on there to avoid conscription in the French revolutionary army. The future composer's father married a cultured Polish woman and raised his children as Polish patriots.

But although Polish patriotism burned brightly at the time, and would greatly increase, there was no such thing as Poland. In 1795 the country had been swallowed up by Russia, Prussia, and Austria, its powerful perfidious neighbors, in what was called the Third Partition. Its king was forced to abdicate, and it disappeared from the map of Europe until 1918, when it was restored after all three of its devourers had been defeated in the First World War. Like the Jews, those who identified as Poles now constituted a diaspora, a "scattering" among other nations.

The part of Poland in which Chopin was born had been incorporated into Russia, and he was legally a subject of the Russian tsar. But a Russian was the very last thing Chopin would have called himself. In the context of post-Revolutionary romantic politics, as we have seen, nation was no longer synonymous with state. Indeed Schumann, in a later review, noted wryly that "if the mighty autocrat of the North"—that is, Tsar Nikolai I, who had put down a major Polish rebellion in 1831—"knew what a dangerous enemy threatened him in Chopin's works," simple and pretty as many of them were, "he would forbid this music. Chopin's works are guns buried in flowers."[2] Chopin thus became the first major European composer to be actively touted abroad as a nationalist. "And because this nationalism is in deep mourning," Schumann wrote, alluding to Poland's tragic fate, "it attracts us all the more firmly to this thoughtful artist."

Indeed, it was only because the exiled Chopin's nationalism was an oppressed and offended nationalism that Schumann noticed it as nationalism at all. Although the romanticism to which he so ardently subscribed was, as we have seen, very much the product of German nationalism, Schumann did not think of himself as a nationalist. He was already used to thinking of the values of his nation, at least those to which he personally subscribed, as the general values of humanity, thus professing an unwitting double standard—we now call it ethnocentrism—that perpetuated the oppression with which he consciously sympathized on Chopin's behalf.

There was of course a residual social component to Schumann's double standard as well. In the early nineteenth century most Slavic languages were regarded as peasant vernaculars (and their speakers, implicitly, as peasants), especially within large multinational imperial states like Austria and even Russia, itself a Slavic state but with a French-speaking court, and an arrogant overlord to many smaller Slavic linguistic groups. Austria encompassed many Slavic-speaking territories: Bohemia and Slovakia, Western Poland (Galicia), and Croatia, to name only the largest. A speaker of Czech, Polish, or Serbo-Croatian, however, could achieve no social advancement within the empire unless he or she spoke German, the language of civil administration, and preferably French as well, the diplomatic and high-society lingua franca.

The linguistic hierarchy translated directly into a cultural and social hierarchy based on political power, inspiring rebellion. Herder's utopian brotherhood of nations, one of the bedrocks of romanticism, had been predicated on the God-given uniqueness and equality of all languages—something utterly contradicted by social and political realities. Herder had come to his idealistic vision by studying the local Lettish (or Latvian) folklore in the environs of Riga, a German-speaking enclave within the Russian empire. Herder-inspired attempts to turn Slavic vernaculars into literary languages, as precondition for national liberation, were just beginning in Chopin's time. His countryman Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) composed epics, dramas, sonnets, and ballads in the Polish language. Modern Czech literature began with the national historian František Palacký (1798–1876). The first Ukrainian writer to win an international reputation for writing in his mother tongue was the poet Taras Shevchenko (1814–61).

Significantly enough, in view of Schumann's comment about Chopin's "guns amid flowers," all three of these writers faced political persecution from imperial authorities who recognized in their work a threat to Germanic or Russian hegemony. Mickiewicz and Palacký took active part in national insurrections (in 1830 and 1848 respectively) and spent a good part of their lives, like Chopin, abroad. But whereas Chopin lived abroad by choice, in pursuit of his fortune, the writers were true political exiles whose romantic luster, perhaps somewhat undeservedly, rubbed off on the composer, too. In the real world languages and their speakers were far from equal, but in the world of art oppression carried (and still carries) a cachet.

Notes:

(1) Robert Schumann, "An Opus 2," *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, Vol. I (Leipzig, 1854), p. 3.

(2) Robert Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*, trans. Paul Rosenfeld, ed. Konrad Wolff (New York: Pantheon, 1946), p. 132.

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Nationalism

Poland: Art Music, 1750–1900

NATIONAL OR UNIVERSAL?

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Self and Other
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Schumann had bought enthusiastically into Herder's brotherly vision of human diversity, and expressed it in one of his own household maxims: "Listen closely to folk songs; they are an inexhaustible mine of the most beautiful melodies and will give you a glimpse into the character of different nations."[3] But in another maxim, and with no apparent sense of contradiction, Schumann also wrote that "Music speaks the most universal of languages, one by which the soul is freely, yet *indefinably* moved; only then is it at home." To move the soul freely and indefinably, and so to realize its highest aim, music had to be "unmarked" by any defining (thus delimiting) national character. To Schumann, though probably not (at first) to Chopin, German music was unmarked. That is how one naturally tends to hear the music that surrounds one, until one is made aware of the existence of other musics. Thereafter one's own music can be heard as unmarked not by default but only by ideology.

This patronizing ambivalence toward nationalism—as something only "others" possessed or professed, and as something attractive but limiting—on the part of a member of a dominant culture shows very clearly through Schumann's critique of Chopin's composerly "nature" (a word that almost always needs quotation marks when applied to artists and art works):

> In his origin, in the fate of his country, we find the explanation of his great qualities and of his defects. When speaking of grace, enthusiasm, presence of mind, nobility, and warmth of feeling, who does not say Chopin? But also, when it is a question of oddity, morbid eccentricity, even wildness and hate. All of Chopin's earlier creations bear this impress of intense nationalism.

> But Art requires more. The minor interests of the soil on which he was born had to sacrifice themselves to the universal ones. Chopin's later works begin to lose something of their all too Sarmatian physiognomy, and their expression tends little by little to approach the general ideal first created by the divine Greeks; so that by a different road we finally rejoin Mozart.

> I say "little by little"; for he never can, nor should he completely disown his origin. But the further he departs from it, the greater will his significance in the world of art become.[4]

Chopin shared Schumann's ambivalence. He felt his Polish patriotism deeply and sincerely, and also traded on his exotic origins (his "Sarmatian physiognomy" as Schumann put it, affecting Latin) when it came to promoting himself and his works in European society. But he also very consciously modeled his art, and particularly his craft, on the most "universal" examples. Schumann called him "the pupil of the first masters—Beethoven, Schubert, Field,"[5] and went on enthusiastically to proclaim that "the first molded his mind in boldness, the second his heart in tenderness, and the third his hand in flexibility." It was probably Schumann's own repressed nationalism that caused him to overrate Beethoven's formative influence on Chopin (though it was not an insignificant factor) and prevented him from noticing how much Chopin's florid melodic style had borrowed from Italian bel canto opera, of which Chopin had become an enthusiastic connoisseur even in Warsaw.

More recently, Charles Rosen[6] has rightly emphasized Chopin's devotion to Bach, whom he regarded (the way Schumann regarded Beethoven) as the great founder. While (unlike Mendelssohn) he rarely imitated Bach directly, and as a Catholic probably dismissed Bach's vocal music from consideration (if he even knew of it), Chopin's early study of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* deeply influenced the contrapuntal precision of his style, turning him into perhaps the most fastidious and polished craftsman of his day. In at least two of his publications—a cycle of

twenty-four preludes for piano in all the major and minor keys (1839) and a set of studies (Études) published in 1833—he paid Bach's didactic works conspicuous tribute; and when the painter Eugène Delacroix asked him to define musical logic, Chopin responded by playing a Bach fugue, noting that "to know the fugue deeply is to be acquainted with the element of all reason and all consistency in music."7

Not that Chopin ever wrote a fugue (or even a fugato) for public performance or print. Bach's actual style, let alone the genres in which he worked, was regarded (except by professional Germans like Mendelssohn) as irrevocably obsolete. But Chopin's compositions in "abstract" genres strove for logic and stylistic consistency, and proclaimed the composer's universal aspirations, just as his pieces based on Polish national dances declared his national origins and proclaimed aspirations of a different sort. The two strains, however, were not in stylistic conflict, and the progression Schumann claimed to note in Chopin from the national to the universal was a figment of the critic's imagination. Chopin's most Bach-like composition (Étude in C major, op. 10, no. 1, imitative of the opening prelude in the *Well-Tempered Clavier*) was written in 1830, and his very last composition, written only weeks before his death in 1849, was a Polish dance (Mazurka in F minor, op. 68, no. 4).

Notes:

(3) Schumann, "House-Rules and Maxims for Young Musicians," in *On Music and Musicians*, p. 35.

(4) Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*, p. 132.

(5) *Ibid*., p. 131.

(6) See Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, p. 344ff.

(7) *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, trans. Walter Pach; quoted in Karol Berger, "Chopin's *Ballade, op. 23* and the Revolution of the Intellectuals," in *Chopin Studies 2*, eds. John Rink and Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

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Chopin: New frontiers: 1830–34

Exoticism

OR EXOTIC?

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Self and Other
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Chopin's prodigious gifts manifested themselves very early, and inevitably took him away from his homeland, which then offered a musician little scope for a career. He published his first polonaise in 1817 at the near-Mozartian age of seven and made his public debut with orchestra the next year, playing a concerto by Adalbert Gyrowetz (or Jírovec), a very old-fashioned Bohemian composer whose Haydnesque works upheld the unmarked "universal" style. Ironically enough, his first recognition from on high came from Tsar Alexander I, elder brother of the "northern autocrat" Chopin would later so come to hate, who heard him in Warsaw in 1825 and rewarded him with a diamond ring.

Only after finishing high school in 1826 did Chopin enter the local conservatory for full-time music instruction. As a pianist he was already fully formed. His main interest now lay in composition. The first composition that gained him wide notice, a brilliant set of variations for piano and orchestra on "Là ci darem la mano," the duet from *Don Giovanni* on which Liszt would later base his mighty "Don Juan Fantasy" (Ex. 5-6), was composed in 1827, while at the conservatory. (This was the composition that Schumann so prophetically reviewed in 1831, in Chopin's arrangement for piano without orchestra, published as op. 2.) Chopin's foreign debut with orchestra took place in Vienna in 1829. And here he made a fateful discovery, when he noticed that the audience reacted with greatest interest not to his variations on the work by Vienna's favorite son, with which he sought to flatter them, but to his *Krakowiak*, a concert rondo based on a catchy syncopated Polish dance. As in the case of many another Eastern European composer, Chopin's style became more national as his career became more international. Exoticism sells, especially when presented as nationalism (nationalism with "tourist appeal," as the musicologist James Parakilas adroitly termed it in a recent study of Chopin). It provides opportunities, but (as we know from Schumann's ambivalent appreciation) it also fetters. This is a dilemma that all "peripheral" artists have had to face since the establishment of Germanic centrality in "classical music."

His success in Vienna gave Chopin hopes of a stellar career like Paganini's. He returned to Warsaw where (like Paganini before him) he composed a pair of concertos (in E minor and F minor respectively), plus a *Fantasia on Polish Airs* with orchestra, for use on the road. The concertos combined sparkling pianism with tourist appeal: both their finales are in the style of folk dances (a duple-time *ozwodny* in no. 1, which was actually completed later; a triple-time mazurka in no. 2), and in the first concerto the opening theme has the characteristically stilted gait of a polonaise. Second themes in both concertos employ the texture and florid ornamentation of Field's dreamy nocturnes, which Chopin would later develop into a major genre of his own. A little later, back in Vienna at the start of his first big tour, Chopin wrote a *Grande polonaise* for piano and orchestra in the *Eroica* key of E-flat major. It marked his most determined effort to win popular success on a Paganinian (or, later, Lisztian) scale.

He never won it. Disappointed by his reception in Vienna on second exposure, he cancelled a scheduled Italian tour and made for London, Field's territory, "by way of Paris," as he put it in a letter home. After a few concerts en route in southern Germany (where he was much distressed to receive the news of the sack of Warsaw by Tsar Nikolai's army and resolved not to return to Poland until it was free) he arrived in the French capital in September 1831. And there he stayed.

fig. 7-3 Chopin, drawing by E. Radziwill at the Chopin Society, Warsaw.

fig. 7-4 George Sand's property at Nohant, *La Mare au Diable: Bois de Chanteloup*, **drawing by her son, Maurice Dudevant.**

Paris, then in the first flush of Louis Philippe's July Monarchy, appealed to Chopin not (as sometimes assumed) for any reason pertaining to his father's origins, but rather by virtue of its lively intellectual life as the cosmopolitan capital of the nineteenth century, and its high bourgeois salon culture. After his brilliant debut (26 February 1832), at which he played his F minor concerto and his Mozart variations, Chopin found himself a social lion. Patronage came his way from the Rothschilds, the most prominent family of European bankers; the most prestigious hostesses showered him with invitations to grace their salons; and his appearances there made him the most sought-after piano teacher in the city, servicing a high-paying clientele of society belles, some of them very talented and gratifying to teach. Henceforth Chopin was able to renounce the concert hall. From 1838 until 1848, when forced back onstage by material need, he gave no public performances at all.

With the larger public he now communicated solely through publication. He became friendly with Liszt, Berlioz, Meyerbeer, and Bellini, with literary figures such as Balzac and Heine, and with painters like Delacroix, who produced a famous portrait of him in 1838 that now hangs in the Louvre (Fig. 7-5). Their deference surrounded his name with an aura. So did his ten-year liaison with the writer George Sand (Aurore Dudevant), who made veiled references to him in her novels beginning in 1836, and with whom he wintered rather scandalously at Majorca, the Spanish island resort, in 1839. Beginning that year, Chopin spent his summers, and did most of his composing, at George Sand's baronial estate at Nohant, about 150miles southwest of Paris. In the city, he lived in luxurious seclusion.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

THE PINNACLE OF SALON MUSIC

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Self and Other
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

fig. 7-5 Portrait of Chopin by Eugène Delacroix.

Moving as he did in rarefied social echelons to which no other musician had entrée (making him look, not altogether wrongly, like a snob and a social climber to Mickiewicz and other members of the exiled Polish intelligentsia), Chopin cultivated an extremely refined manner that was reflected directly in the style of his performances and compositions. The line between the two was fairly blurry; for as many witnesses report, most of Chopin's compositions began at the keyboard, where they were worked up on the basis of improvisations that he later struggled hard to write down. Although his notation is meticulous, his music continued to evolve in performance as

long as he continued to play it (or to teach it), and his manuscripts abound in variants that make them an adventurous player's paradise but an editor's and bibliographer's nightmare.

Having withdrawn from public performance, Chopin had no further need of the orchestra or indeed of any playing partners. After 1831 nearly all his works would be piano solos; the only exceptions were a handful of songs to Polish texts and a cello sonata, one of his last compositions, composed out of friendship with the cellist Auguste Franchomme (1808–84). He took great satisfaction in the fact that the public, who rarely saw him, regarded him primarily as a creative artist rather than a virtuoso. Most impressive of all was the awed respect shown him by other pianists, many of whom made a point of featuring his works alongside (or even in preference to) their own. The ability to play Chopin idiomatically is still probably the paramount qualifying yardstick for a concert pianist today.

Although he wrote three sonatas (highly unconventional except the first, a student work), Chopin's piano works consist overwhelmingly of character pieces: twenty-one nocturnes, twenty-seven études (literally technical studies, but actually virtuoso concert works), twenty-six preludes, four ballades, four rondos, four scherzos, four impromptus (including a "Fantaisie-impromptu"), and several one-of-a-kind items composed late in his career: a *Fantaisie* (1841), a *Berceuse* or lullaby (1844), and a *Barcarolle* (1846). The lion's share of his output, however, and in some ways the most significant, were the sublimated ballroom dances: sixteen polonaises, twenty waltzes, above all the sixty-one mazurkas, aphoristic miniatures of which most (forty-two) were written after settling in Paris. The études and preludes are often programmed in sets (two sets of ten études, opp. 10 and 25; twenty-four preludes, op. 28), and seem to have been put in an effective performance order by the composer. The rest are freestanding salon pieces, to be chosen and presented at the performer's discretion.

We too have to exercise discretion in choosing and presenting for examination a tiny sample from such a rich assortment. No such sample can hope to be representative. The only solution seems to be to concentrate on the extremes, hoping that that will serve to suggest the amazing scope of Chopin's seemingly one-sided and restricted output, and show how and why this mysterious stranger became such an emblematic (and emblematically contradictory) figure: of "genius," of romantic suffering, of artistic perfection, of sickliness and effeminacy, of nationalism, of exoticism, of universality.

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Chopin: Piano writing

Prelude

Exoticism

Chopin: Genres

THE CHOPINESQUE MINIATURE

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Self and Other
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

On the miniature extreme, no composer ever exceeded Chopin's mastery of the romantic fragment, the most suggestively romantic statement of all. No one ever thematized the idea as vividly as did Chopin when he invented a new genre, the freestanding prelude, to embody it. A prelude, after all, is by definition incomplete. The *New Harvard Dictionary of Music* defines it as "a composition establishing the pitch or key of a following piece."[8] So far we have encountered the prelude only as the first item in a keyboard suite, or as paired with a fugue. Before Chopin, several pianist composers had provided books of preludes for practical concert use, mere modulatory transitions between recital items for pianists who were incapable of improvising their own. Collections of this kind had been published by the Italian-born London-based Muzio Clementi, not only a virtuoso but a piano manufacturer (1787); by the Slovakian-born Johann Nepomuk Hummel (*24 Präludien*, op. 67, 1814); and by Ignaz Moscheles (1794–1870), a Bohemian-born pianist based in London, whose celebrated book of didactic models for improvisations, *50 Präludien*, op. 73 (1827), Chopin probably knew and took (along with the *Well-Tempered Clavier*) for a model.

But Chopin's preludes were not didactic. They were vividly if enigmatically expressive performance pieces, albeit in an "improvisatory" style; and their novelty, instantly perceived, proved influential. The evocative genre Chopin thus created, a prelude to everything and nothing (or, if one insists on being tiresomely literalistic, to the next prelude), was widely imitated by later romantics and post-romantics such as the Russians Alexander Scriabin, Sergey Rachmaninoff, and Dmitriy Shostakovich; the Frenchmen Claude Debussy and Olivier Messiaen; the American George Gershwin, and the Argentine Alberto Ginastera, the date of whose "American Preludes" of 1944 illustrates the impressive chronological reach of Chopin's hold on the imaginations of later pianist composers.

ex. 7-1 Frédéric Chopin, Prelude, Op. 28, no. 1

Like the preludes and fugues of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* or the didactic sets by Clementi et al., Chopin's covered all the major and minor keys, which is why the set contained precisely twenty-four. His ordering was different from his predecessors, who put the keys through a rising sequence of semitones, with each major key followed by its parallel minor. Chopin's ordering already suggests that his set was not a mere compendium but a performance entity, for the sequence of keys is much closer to the sequences of actual harmonic practice: a circle of fifths, with each major key followed by its relative minor (C major, A minor, G major, E minor, etc.).

The first, in C major (Ex. 7-1), perfectly exemplifies the paradoxical, imagination-captivating nature of the genre, being at once fragmentary and whole, complete and yet not complete, sufficient yet insufficient. (Compare Oscar Wilde on the "perfect pleasure" of a cigarette: "it is exquisite, yet it leaves one unsatisfied.")9 The opening, with its suggestion of a parallel period (compare mm. 1–8 with 9–12) is a feint. The second phrase, which promises to balance the first, instead soars aloft into a chromatic ascent that thrillingly overshoots its goal in m. 21 by means of an appoggiatura and only subsides harmonically in m. 25, having grown to exactly twice its expected length. Melodic satisfaction does not come until m. 29, with the sounding of the soprano C so calculatedly withheld at m. 25, where instead the harmonically equivalent m. 1 had been reprised.

But when melodic satisfaction is granted, harmonic stability is withdrawn by suspending the subdominant in the right hand over the root-fifth pedal in the left (a quintessentially Chopinesque touch!). Full subsidence is not achieved until the final arpeggio in m. 33, so that the forthright initial eight-bar phrase has been answered by an elusively asymmetrical twenty-five-bar continuation. The skillful prolongation of the melodic-harmonic resolution makes for a very satisfying conclusion on one level; and yet the piece has not been rounded off. It is a paradoxically single ("aphoristic") statement of the sort of idea that usually demands contrast and repetition: complete yet incomplete, fully formed yet inchoate. It is at once a highly unconventional, sui generis shape and a fastidiously, consummately planned one. The music sounds at once spontaneous and very finely wrought (especially in texture).

ex. 7-2 Frédéric Chopin, Prelude, Op. 28, no. 2

The cryptic second prelude (Ex. 7-2) is one of the most written-about pieces in the whole much-written-about romantic repertoire. It is an out-and-out grotesque (from *grottesca*, originally referring to wall decorations in ancient excavated cave dwellings or grottos): a deliberately, fancifully ugly or absurd utterance. Fancifully ugly is the dissonant left-hand accompaniment, with its chromatic middle-voice neighbors that so frequently interfere with and distort the effect of the harmony-tones, as for example in mm. 5 and 10, with their crabby diminished octaves formed by the friction of chromatic neighbors against diatonic suspensions.

Fancifully absurd is the harmonic vagary. The piece begins, straightforwardly enough, as if in E minor, but the first melodic phrase effects a detour to G, the ostensible relative major. The movement to B minor at m. 9 sets up the false expectation that the whole maneuver will be symmetrically repeated in the dominant; but when the moment of truth comes, in m. 11, the anticipated D is distorted to D♯, obfuscating the tonal orientation and making for some more willful clashes in the part writing. The next phrase is famous for the functional undecideability of the harmony. Where it's leading is anyone's guess. When cadence is finally made on A minor, it seems arbitrarily tacked on—almost mockingly so, given the incongruous little chorale (marked *sostenuto*) that introduces it. If we take the three cadential points G, D (anticipated if never actually realized), and A as marking the prelude's trajectory, we have an instance of willful harmonic movement swimming directly against the current of the circle of fifths.

Thus (to quote the musical deconstructionist Rose Rosengard Subotnik) the A-minor cadence, "rather than constituting the only conceivable and thus logically necessary end to the piece" as longstanding harmonic practice would require, merely intrudes upon it as "a forcible and contingent end, more rhetorical than harmonically logical in its persuasiveness."[10] Subotnik links this radical arbitrariness to the general rejection of "Enlightened" premises in post-Napoleonic Europe, and the potentially sinister romantic exaltation of "personal" over universal truth.

In any case, this is no end-accented progression like the one in the opening movement of Schumann's *Phantasie* (Ex. 6-4). There is no thwarted inevitability about the harmonic trajectory, although (and this should be taken as a caution) analysis can always be employed in hindsight to suggest the opposite. As Subotnik points out, "every pitch in this piece has harmonic aspects that can, in retrospect, be related in some fashion to the tonal identity of the final cadence," and is thus "susceptible to an ex post facto, empirical explanation of what actually (or historically) happened."[11] But such an analysis will not provide what tonal analysis, when truly pertinent, ought to provide —namely, an account of "the necessary realization of a logical premise." (Justification of willful behavior ex post facto, which analysis is designed to accomplish in the name of genius, is just what thinkers like Edmund Burke viewed as the potentially sinister or corrupting side effect of romanticism on reason.)

Yet while Chopin's prelude is "on purpose," a put-on thing from beginning to end, the part writing, however arbitrary the effect, is contrapuntally pristine, rendering the piece at once academically impeccable and poetically fractious. Those primarily committed to academic respectability must respect it, even as they wonder at the grotesquerie (and possibly try to explain it away). Those primarily committed to poetic fractiousness will wonder at the cool "aristocratic" control of the *facture* (the "making," the technical handling or management of materials) which with Chopin was such an indispensable point of honor. There is, in short, something in this piece to bewilder everyone, and something for everyone to admire. It was when both of these elements were present and impossible to disengage from one another that romantics were most apt to speak, as Schumann did, of genius.

Such genius was often linked with the demonic, as we have seen, or with madness or physical illness (and there were many in the nineteenth century who deduced from this the false converse that madness or physical infirmity were signs of genius). Thus Chopin's lifelong sickliness and his death from consumption became in the minds of many the virtual content and message of his art, turning his compositions into what the contemporary French poet Charles Baudelaire called *Fleurs du mal* ("flowers of illness," or "poisoned flowers") and greatly increasing the fascination they wielded over suggestible imaginations.

George Sand made specific allusion to the A-minor prelude in two different memoirs of her life with Chopin. In one, she depicted him composing it while actually coughing blood, becoming an object of "horror and fright to the population"[12] and leading to the couple's eviction from their Majorcan retreat. In the other, she attempts through biography to account for the prelude's strange effect on listeners. It came to him, she writes,

> through an evening of dismal rain—it casts the soul into a terrible dejection. [My son] Maurice and I had left him in good health one morning to go shopping in Palma for things we needed at our "encampment." The rain came in overflowing torrents. We made three leagues in six hours, only to return in the middle of a flood. We got back in absolute dark, shoeless, having been abandoned by our driver to cross unheard of perils. We hurried, knowing how our sick one would worry. Indeed he had, but now was as though congealed in a kind of quiet desperation, and, weeping, he was playing his wonderful Prelude. Seeing us come in, he got up with a cry, then said with a bewildered air and a strange tone, "Ah, I was sure that you were dead."[13]

On the basis of these biographical embroideries, it became fashionable to maintain that Chopin's music, in the words of the mid-century French critic Hippolyte Barbedette (and the Preludes particularly by virtue of their great "artistic value"), exerted a dangerous influence on ordinary mortals. "Chopin," he opined,

> was a sick man who enjoyed suffering, and did not want to be cured. He poured out his pain in adorable accents—his sweet melancholy language which he invented to express his sadness. One feels it irresistibly and is suddenly willess before its charm; since music is above all a vague and inexplicit language, he who plays Chopin's music, for the little he is under the spell of such melancholy thought, will inevitably end by imagining that it is his own thought he expresses. He will really believe in suffering, along with him who knew so well how to weep. Conclusion: Chopin's music is essentially unhealthy. That is its allure and also its danger.[14]

This one-sided but culturally significant view of Chopin is of course contradicted by many of his best-known pieces, including the very next prelude, a light, outdoorsy, altogether unproblematic vivace in G major. The pianistically undemanding E-minor largo that follows it (Ex. 7-3) has become hackneyed over the years by naively emotive, amateurish performances (like the one given—in a satirized attempt at seduction—by the Jack Nicholson character in the movie *Five Easy Pieces*). What can make such performances seem naive is the fact that for all its *espressivo* melancholy and harmonic subtlety this is actually one of the more mannerly preludes. It is a formally

straightforward binary design in which two parallel periods of equal duration proceed without feint or detour first (mm. 1–12) to a dominant half-close, and then (mm. 13–25), more emphatically, to a full stop on the tonic.

ex. 7-3 Frédéric Chopin, Prelude, Op. 28, no. 4

It is the highly chromatic (or "chromatized") harmony that has made this prelude popular. But its chromaticism, far from enigmatic or confusing like that of the second prelude, consists rather of a lucid, regular, and very intelligible application of chromatic passing tones to all three voices in a contrapuntally pristine though rhythmically wayward series of 7–6 suspensions. (In the first period, for example, the sevenths are sounded at m. 2, m. 4, the middle of m. 6, m. 9, and m. 10; their respective resolutions come at the middle of m. 3, the third quarter of m. 4, the middle of m. 8, and the second quarter of m. 9.) Harmony based on a suspension chain rather than a root progression by fifths was the very opposite of a novel device. Its origins lay in the ground-basses of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it was already a deliberate archaicism when Mozart briefly revived it, for example in his C-minor Fantasy, K. 475. Its very old-fashionedness made it esoteric and exotic, and therefore striking, when Chopin used it. It testifies nevertheless to his unusually thorough and conservative grounding in counterpoint, partly the result of his having been trained in a remote and "backward" corner of Eastern Europe rather than in one of the musical capitals of the continent. In its paradoxical way it was a token of his Polishness.

Notes:

(8) Don M. Randel, ed., *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 653.

(9) Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Chap. 6.

(10) Rose R. Subotnik, "Romantic Music as Post-Kantian Critique," in *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 134.

(11) *Ibid.*, p. 130, 134.

(12) George Sand, *Un hiver à Majorque* (rpt., Palma, 1968), p. 60; trans. Thomas Higgins in Chopin, *Preludes, Op. 28* (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 5.

(13) George Sand, *Histoire de ma vie*, Vol. IV (Paris, 1902–04), p. 439; trans. Higgins, *Ibid.*, p. 94.

(14) Hippolyte Barbedette, *Chopin: Essai de critique musicale* (Paris, 1861), p. 65; trans. Higgins, *Ibid.*, p. 92.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Mazurka

NATIONALISM AS A MEDIUM

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Self and Other
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The more obvious tokens of Chopin's Polishness are to be found, naturally enough, in his Polish dances, the polonaises and especially the mazurkas, which were of all his works the ones most prized by his contemporaries as characteristically or authentically "Chopinesque." The man, in other words, was equated with (reduced to?) the group from which he hailed, as is usually the case with "others." Yet here, as everywhere, Chopin was eclectic, or rather syncretic, forging a personal and very distinctive style out of heterogeneous, in some ways even incongruous, ingredients. The authentically national—meaning, in France, the authentically exotic—was only one of those ingredients.

The "mazurka," as it was known abroad (largely thanks to Chopin) was the national dance of the Mazurs, the settlers of the Mazowsze plains surrounding Warsaw. Danced by couples either in circles or in country dance sets, it came in various types—the moderate *kujawiak*, the faster *mazurek*, the very rapid *oberek*, all represented among Chopin's mazurkas. What all types had in common was a strongly accented triple meter, with the strongest accents (usually on the second or third beat) marked by a tap of the heel. Thus even the fastest mazurkas are distinctly felt "in three," unlike the waltz which, except for the slowest specimens, is normally counted "in one," with never an accent except on the downbeat.

So characteristically Polish did Polish patriots consider this dance that a traditional mazurka melody, "Dombrowski's mazurka" (*MazurekDabrowskiego*)—so called because it was played in 1806 as an anthem to greet the briefly victorious Polish legion under General Jan Dombrowski (also spelled Dabrowski) that fought the hated Prussians, Austrians, and Russians on the side of Napoleon—became the national anthem of the resurrected Polish republic after World War I (Ex. 7-4). The melody illustrates the most characteristic mazurka pattern: a dotted rhythm on the first beat, followed by an accent.

Jesz - cze Pol - ska nie zgi - nę - ła,___ kie - dy my ży - je-my

(Poland still is ours for ever, long as Poles remain)

ex. 7-4 *Mazurek Dabrowskiego*

The first set of mazurkas Chopin composed as an exile from Poland, and therefore as nostalgia or exotica rather than in a spirit of insular nationalism, was the set of four published in 1834 as op. 17. All of them feature the characteristic heel-tapping rhythm exemplified in Ex. 7-4. All four are cast, like the vast majority of Chopin's mazurkas, in the ternary da capo form of the *kujawiak* rather than the more common successive strains (AABB, AABBCC, etc.) of the *mazurek*. Although it can be justified in "national" terms, this was already an accommodation to the common practice of the "art" tradition, with its minuets (or scherzos) and trios. Another touch that is especially characteristic of the mazurkas is the use of tonic (and occasionally tonic-fifth) pedals. All four mazurkas in op. 17 show it. The midsections of nos. 1 and 4 maintain it throughout; it is more intermittent, yet quite unmistakable, in the remaining pieces. It is, of course, a trace of folklore, the mazurka being primevally accompanied in its natural habitat by the *duda* or Polish bagpipe, which could produce either a tonic or tonic-fifth drone. Leaping melodic grace notes, though often thought of as especially Chopinesque, may be another bagpipe effect, since briefly stopping another pitch on

the "chanter" or melody pipe is the only way one can articulate repeated notes given the bagpipe's unremitting air stream, which the player cannot "tongue" or interrupt in any way.

But all such life traces are filtered, in Chopin's French-period mazurkas, through a gauze of nostalgic memory conjured up by stinging or slithery chromatic harmony. In op. 17, no. 1, the effect is achieved by the use of modal mixtures and auxiliary dissonances to add a pungency that registers as poignancy to melodic reprises. The last phrase of op. 17, no. 2 (Ex. 7-5), with its play of passing chromatics (including the Lydian raised fourth degree) and appoggiaturas, epitomizes the slithery style, as does the second half of the midsection, all played over a tonic pedal.

ex. 7-5 Frédéric Chopin, Mazurka, Op. 17, no. 2

By contrast, the surprising delayed harmonization of the opening note in op. 17, no. 3 (Ex. 7-6), turning what is by rights a consonant diatonic note into a dissonant chromatic suspension, is especially stinging. The major-minor instability of the third degree will persist throughout the piece, as will the instability of the fourth degree, ever tottering between the folklike Lydian tritone and the perfect common-practice interval over various local tonics.

ex. 7-6 Frédéric Chopin, Mazurka, Op. 17, No. 3, mm. 1–4

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Chopin: Piano writing

Mazurka

Stephen Heller

HARMONIC DISSOLUTION

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Self and Other
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

All such effects pale, however, before the extraordinary maneuvers of op. 17, no. 4, one of Chopin's most haunting fragments, in which denatured and strangely tinctured reminiscences of the mazurka seem to hover in a kind of harmonic ether. The characteristic accompaniment pattern of the "authentic" mazurka, the steady oompah-pah against which the shifting melodic accents rebound, prominent in the first two mazurkas and only slightly attenuated in the third, is now almost altogether gone, replaced by a mid-register pulsation marked *sotto voce* ("in an undertone"—see Ex. 7-7a).

ex. 7-7a Frédéric Chopin, Mazurka, Op. 17, no. 4, mm. 1–20

ex. 7-7b Frédéric Chopin, Mazurka, Op. 17, no. 4, end

The repeated harmonic progression in Ex.7-7a is a variant of the Chopinesque suspension chain we encountered in Ex. 7-3, even closer this time to the ancient *passus duriusculus* ground bass, cadencing alternately on V and on I. The grafting of this basso ostinato to a melody voice full of mazurka rhythms is already a fantastic amalgam, made stranger still by the admixture of Italianate *fioritura* (most closely associated, at the keyboard, with the nocturne) on melodic repetitions (as in m. 15).

But for the romantic sense of evocative incompletion at fullest strength, nothing can compare with the ending of this mazurka (Ex. 7-7b). The idea is simplicity itself: a closing repetition of the mazurka's first four bars, which in their harmonic open-endedness had made an effective preface (or "prelude") to the dance. In a postlude, the same open-endedness is uncanny. Ending on an F major (or, perhaps more to the point, a tonic triad with an appoggiatura to its fifth left unresolved) gives a sense that the piece has not ended but merely passed out of earshot (as the notation *perdendosi*, "getting lost," corroborates). Nothing can follow such an ending without spoiling its special mood of enchantment. To do it justice, silence must palpably hang in the air—a silence that seems to throb with unheard music. Not for nothing, then, did Chopin choose to end the set with this mazurka, even if the four pieces were not necessarily meant to form a concert sequence.

There is a huge difference between the fragmentary quality of Schumann's *Phantasie*, which begins in medias res but comes to a definite close, and the far more disquieting sense of incompletion Chopin achieves in the A-minor mazurka. The closest Schumann came to it was in "Child Falling Asleep" (*Kind im Einschlummern*), the next-to-last of his *Kinderscenen* ("Scenes of childhood"), op. 15, a programmatic piece in which the implied narrative—the child nodding off before the end is reached—explains and justifies the effect. Even so, Schumann continued a circle of fifths from the end of "Child Falling Asleep" into the beginning of the last piece in the set, "The Poet Speaks" (*Der Dichter spricht*), so that the harmony at the end of the first piece does find resolution of sorts in the other, albeit in a different key (Ex. 7-8).

ex. 7-8 Robert Schumann, *Kinderscenen*, end of no. 12 and beginning of no. 13

More direct echo or emulation of Chopin's uncompleted fragment can be found in composers of the next generation. Stephen Heller (1813–88), a Hungarian-born pianist composer who made his home, like Chopin, in Paris, was only three years Chopin's junior, but he had barely achieved notice by the time of the Polish composer's death, and then only as a composer of technical studies. His more important works mainly belong to later decades. First among them was a set of character pieces with the emblematically romantic title *Spaziergänge eines Einsamen* ("Solitary rambles"), published in 1851. The last item, a harried vivace, ends the cycle with an unresolved diminished-seventh chord, the equivalent of ending a letter or a story or—most typically—a lyric poem with an ellipsis ("…"). Except for the startling effect at the end (startling that is, in retrospect, when one realizes that it *was* the end), the piece is fairly innocuous, and so were the many popular stories and poems that abused the device of ellipsis, turning it eventually into a cliché (Ex. 7-9).

ex. 7-9 Stephen Heller, *Spaziergänge eines Einsamen*, Op. 78, end of no. 6

Liszt was among the abusers. He wrote a whole series of *Valses oubliées* (Forgotten waltzes) that popularized the effect of "dissolved" tonality as a representation of hazy memory ("balls of youth recalled in old age…"), and even an experimental "Bagatelle in No Key" (*Bagatelle ohne Tonart*), composed in 1885, the last full year of Liszt's life, but unpublished until 1956 (Ex. 7-10). The touted suspension of tonality is the result of a series of unusual deceptive cadences whereby dominant-seventh chords are converted into diminished sevenths, one of which is allowed, as in Heller's piece, to finish the piece, if not conclude it.

ex. 7-10 Franz Liszt, *Bagatelle ohne Tonart*, mm. 169–end

The interesting question such pieces raise—one that was on many minds in 1956 when Liszt's bagatelle was published amid considerable publicity—is whether such devices, which may be said to have originated with Chopin, necessarily weaken the structural role of tonality. The answer, pretty clearly, is that they do not, any more than the rhetorical use of ellipsis, or of incorrect or nonstandard grammar in literature, weakens the everyday efficacy of grammar. To end a piece with an unresolved appoggiatura, or more radically with a diminished-seventh chord, honors the requirement of tonal closure in the breach rather the observance, but honor is in any case paid. If anything, frustration heightens the sense of expectation.

There is not the slightest doubt as to the expected conclusion in Chopin's mazurka or Heller's "Ramble." Not even in Liszt's bagatelle can there be any real debate as to the identity of the harmonic goal that has been rhetorically left unreached; the last functional chord being a clear dominant of A minor, that is clearly the key avoided. There is no ambiguity, and surely no tonal incoherence. The startling effect of arbitrary rupture is entirely a matter of rhetoric rather than structure. The object of the rhetoric is the affirmation precisely of the right to be arbitrary, to please oneself: in a word, the time-honored romantic right to subjectivity.

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Romanticism

Piano playing: Romantic period

PLAYING "ROMANTICALLY"

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Self and Other
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The other area in which the rights of the romantic subject are paramount in Chopin is in the realm of performance practice, particularly the crucial matter of *tempo rubato*. Chopin's playing was so unusually marked by it that there were those among his contemporaries who actually thought that he had invented the technique of arbitrarily "stealing" time from some notes so as to lengthen others for expressive effect, an arbitrary act being referable to no standard save the actor's subjective desire for it. Chopin was indeed one of the first to use the actual word *rubato* as an explicit if fuzzy performance direction, rather than relying only on traditional directions for tempo modification like *accelerando* (or *stretto*), *ritenuto*, etc., or else (like several eighteenth-century composers, including C. P. E. Bach and Mozart) indicating its effect with melodic ties and syncopations.

The first such usage came in the first mazurka Chopin published after leaving Poland: the one in F♯ minor, published in 1832 as op. 6, no. 1 (Fig. 7-6). The word is used alongside *ritenuto* and *rallentando*, and probably means a subtler broadening than the more traditional terms imply, here intended to point up the repetition of the opening period and distinguish it (as more expressive or emphatic) from the first playing. If Chopin's own description of tempo rubato is applied, it would appear to mean a slight delay of the melody with respect to the bass, probably not to be righted until the next downbeat.

fig. 7-6 Original edition of Chopin's Mazurka in F-Sharp Minor, op. 6, no. 1 (Leipzig: Kistner, 1832).

Chopin always maintained, like Mozart in a famous letter with which Chopin must have been familiar, that for him, *rubato* did not mean a general alteration of tempo but only a dilation of melody over a steadily pulsing accompaniment. Wilhelm von Lenz, a Russian government official who took lessons from both Liszt and Chopin in Paris, reported Chopin as saying that "the left hand is the conductor; it must not waver, or lose ground; do with the right hand what you will and can."[15] Whether Chopin always practiced what Lenz here had him preaching may be questionable. Earwitness reports of his playing are very inconsistent. Mendelssohn accused him in 1834 of playing in the "Parisian spasmodic and impassioned style, too often losing sight of time and sobriety,"[16] and the French music publisher Aristide Farrenc, who had known him throughout his Paris years, chided Chopin in 1861 for the "tempo rubato, of which one makes today a usage so ridiculous and tiring."[17] Hackneyed or exaggerated post-Chopinesque rubato eventually produced a backlash in the early twentieth century, when an "objective" style of playing, characterized by uniform metronomic tempos, became fashionable. Stravinsky, whom we have already identified as a ringleader of the anti-Beethovenian reaction, was at the forefront of this movement, too, receiving "special thanks" from his friend, the Italian composer Vittorio Rieti (1898–1994), "for not asking us to swallow crescendo porridge, pedal sauce, and rubato marmalade."[18]

Needless to say, this "objective" attitude was just as significant a cultural indicator in the early twentieth century as Chopin's style of performance had been in the mid-nineteenth. And what should also go without saying is that Chopin performances in the early twentieth century had to conform to the new attitude if they were to be considered "authentic." Even "Chopin specialists" like the Polish pianist Arthur Rubinstein (1887–1982), who made a special point of presenting themselves as the composer's heirs, performed his works in a much "straighter" fashion than the Chopinists of the preceding generation, the first to leave recorded evidence behind.

The assumption, or claim, was that those earlier pianists, such as Vladimir de Pachmann (1848–1933), had exaggerated and vulgarized the "true" Chopinesque rubato, which Rubinstein's generation had restored to its original dignity. It seems just as likely, however, that Chopin's own playing would have been considered vulgar (full of "porridge, sauce, and marmalade") in Rubinstein's time, and that Rubinstein and his contemporaries had not restored Chopin at all but rather altered him (perhaps unwittingly) to conform to a new set of expectations.

The mazurkas, where Chopin was most apt to include the word *rubato* in his notation, were a special case, and a wonderfully instructive one. A reviewer of Chopin's last public concerts, which took place in London in 1848, wrote that the mazurkas "lose half their characteristic wildness if played without a certain freak and license, impossible to imitate,"[19] and to which the composer alone possessed the key. Most suggestive of all is a memoir by the German (later English) pianist and conductor Charles Hallé (1819–95), who lived in Paris during most of Chopin's residence there and came to know him well. "A remarkable feature of his playing," Hallé recalled,

> was the entire freedom with which he treated the rhythm, but which appeared so natural that for years it had never struck me. It must have been in 1845 or 1846 that I once ventured to observe to him that most of his mazurkas (those dainty jewels), when played by himself, appeared to be written, not in 3/4, but in 4/4 time, the result of his dwelling so much longer on the first note in the bar. He denied it strenuously, until I made him play one of them and counted audibly four in the bar, which fitted perfectly. Then he laughed and explained that it was the national character of the dance which created the oddity. The more remarkable fact was that you received the impression of a 3/4 rhythm whilst listening to common time. Of course this was not the case with every mazurka, but with many.[20]

Of course one wants to know which ones, exactly, but Hallé did not say. The most plausible suggestion is that the distension applies mainly to the basic mazurka rhythm noted in Ex. 7-4, beginning with a dotted figure that might easily be extended beyond a beat's duration in the interests of enhancing its noble effect. But note that this time Chopin explained the practice not by referring to the expressive dimension of the music, let alone his feelings, but instead referred to its "national character," an impersonal criterion.

The question thus legitimately arises as to whether the application of tempo rubato, even the kind that affects not just the melody but the general tempo, is really as arbitrary and romantic as it may seem, or whether it may be governed by rules of rhetoric that have their origin not in an individual's subjective expressive impulse, but in the intersubjective expressive conventions of the musical community. And from this arises the further thought, disturbing to some, that what we subjectively perceive as our own personal expressive impulses may in fact be grounded to a greater extent than we realize in the historically contingent values of the communities to which we belong.

But none of this should really be surprising, let alone disturbing. Artists like Chopin, who in their composing and performing created a highly prized impression of extreme subjective spontaneity and unique original inspiration, but whose work was nevertheless intelligible to the nonprofessional audience that it addressed, were obviously working within the boundaries of the normal (which is to say, the conventional), even as their more adventurous conceptions, like the A-minor Mazurka, served to extend those boundaries (or "push the envelope," as the saying lately goes). When the boundaries have been thus extended, what was once considered radical behavior will seem normal, and may eventually (as in the work of Stephen Heller, or the reputed abusers of rubato) become hackneyed.

Notes:

(15) Wilhelm von Lenz, *Die grossen Pianoforte-Virtuosen* (1872); quoted in Richard Hudson, *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 191.

(16) Felix Mendelssohn, *Briefe aus den Jahren 1830 bis 1847*, Vol. II, ed. Paul Mendelssohn Bartholdy (Leipzig: Hermann Mendelssohn, 1864), p. 41; quoted in Hudson, *Stolen Time*, p. 176.

(17) Aristide Farrenc, *Le trésor des pianists*, Vol. I (Paris, 1861), p. 3; quoted in Hudson, *Stolen Time*, pp. 176–77.

(18) Vittorio Rieti, "The Composer's Debt," in *Stravinsky in the Theatre*, ed. Minna Lederman (New York: Da Capo, 1975), p. 134.

(19) *The Athenaeum*, no. 1079 (1 July 1848), quoted in Hudson, *Stolen Time*, p. 185.

(20) *The Autobiography of Charles Hallé*, ed. Michael Kennedy (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1973), p. 54.

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Chopin: Musical style

THE CHOPINESQUE SUBLIME

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Self and Other
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Strangely enough, the pieces in which Chopin strayed furthest beyond the boundaries of what his contemporaries thought normal and intelligible were his two mature sonatas (in B♭ minor, op. 35, published in 1840, and in B minor, op. 58, published in 1845), works belonging to the most traditional and classical genre to which Chopin applied himself. It was precisely his failure or unwillingness to reckon with the obligations of genre, the expectations to which title words give rise, that made his sonatas hard to understand. To recall Schumann's point, quoted in the previous chapter, "we are accustomed to judge a thing from the name it bears," and, more pointedly, "we make certain demands upon a fantasy, others upon a sonata." Later, confronted with Chopin's B♭ minor sonata, the same Schumann expressed his bemusement in one of his funniest paragraphs:

> The idea of calling it a sonata is a caprice, if not a jest, for he has simply bound together four of his wildest children, to smuggle them under this name into a place to which they could not else have penetrated. Let us imagine some good country cantor visiting a musical city for the purpose of making artistic purchases. All the newest compositions are laid before him, but he does not care to know them; finally, some rogue hands him a sonata: "Ah, yes, that is something for me, a composition of the good old days," says he delighted, and buys it at once. At home he takes up the piece, and I am much mistaken if he does not vow, by every musical divinity, that this is no sonata style but rank blasphemy, even before he has painfully ground out the first page at the keyboard. But Chopin has achieved his goal: he has penetrated into the cantor's residence; and who knows whether, in years to come, in the same dwelling there may not be born some romantic grandson who some day will dust off the sonata, play it, and think to himself, "This man was no fool!"[21]

Schumann was exaggerating. The sonata is not as weird as all that. It has a first movement that is recognizably in sonata form, even if the recapitulation of the first theme (and with it, the dramatic double return) has been elided out. It has a scherzo replete with trio. The famous (to Schumann, repellent) slow movement is cast, just like the one in Beethoven's *Eroica*, as a *Marche funèbre*, a funeral march.

ex. 7-11 Frédéric Chopin, Sonata in B-flat minor, IV

The finale, a presto to be played sotto voce throughout, still gives pause, however (Ex. 7-11). It is indeed a wild child, unique and well-nigh indescribable: a moto perpetuo, but for the last chord all in octaves (that is, without harmony), all spun out of a six-note motive but without literal repetitions except for an ironically formal recapitulation as if to take the place of the one missing from the first movement. Bach might have called it a prelude (no wonder it comes at the end!). It elicited from Schumann a virtual accusation of sadism:

> That which in the last movement is given to us under the name "finale" resembles mockery more than any kind of music. Yet we must confess that even from this joyless, unmelodious movement an original and terrifying spirit breathes on us which holds down with mailed fist everything that seeks to resist, so that we listen fascinated and uncomplaining to the end—though not to praise; for this is not music.[22]

On the contrary, Chopin must have taken this as the very highest praise (and so, of course, Schumann must have intended, master of irony that he was). But what should seem by now both striking and characteristic is the way in which the music paradoxically achieves its extreme modernity by way of archaism. Except for the chromatic and dissonant implied harmony, the piece that so astounded and even offended nineteenth-century musicians would have struck their early eighteenth-century counterparts (who encountered unaccompanied preludes every day) as downright conventional, at least in appearance.

Notes:

(21) Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*, p. 140.

(22) *Ibid*., p. 142.

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Chopin: Piano writing

Ballade

Sonata form: The 19th century

SONATA LATER ON

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Self and Other
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

And now for Chopin's heroic side, exemplified chiefly by the regal or military polonaises, the chillingly macabre or ironic scherzos, a few of the nocturnes (composed as if expressly to counter the genre's association with the feminine)—but above all by the ballades, like the preludes a genre that Chopin invented (or reinvented at the keyboard), and that later spread far and wide. The ballade was the repository for Chopin's most serious expressions of Polish nationalism. It was universally understood in that vein by his contemporaries; and in its widespread influence it helped establish what James Parakilas has aptly called "a uniform, international nationalism"[23] as a primary constituent of European (and, incipiently, Euro-American) art music in the nineteenth century.

Up to now the romantic ballad has been in our experience a vocal genre, based on poems (like Goethe's *Erlkönig*) that emulated narrative folk songs. Taking Goethe's poem, known to us (from chapter 3) in settings by Reichardt, Schubert, and Loewe, as our archetype of the genre, we could further stipulate that a ballad typically concerns a horrific situation of some kind, and that it proceeds through a combination of straight narration and dramatic dialogue to a climactic denouement ("…in his arms, the child lay dead!"). It was, so to speak, an end-accented genre.

The British Isles and Scandinavia were the home of the authentic folk prototypes, circulated by Herder and other collectors of the late eighteenth century, on which professional poets in other countries fashioned their literary ballads, often with the pretense that they were drawing on local oral tradition. That was the case with Goethe, and that was certainly the case with Mickiewicz, the Polish national poet and cultural hero of the Polish diaspora, who brought the ballad to Poland in his first book, *Ballady i romanse* (1822). In the introduction, Mickiewicz called the ballad "a tale based on the events of common life or on the annals of chivalry."[24] It was in order to give Poland its own chivalric poetry, testifying imaginatively to a Polish knightly past, that Mickiewicz invented Polish balladry. All over Eastern Europe poetry was being used in this way to remodel the past as a basis for present aspirations and in hopes of a better future.

Like Chopin, Mickiewicz lived in Paris after the failed rebellion of 1831. He was at the center of an émigré community to which the composer was far more peripherally attached. But Chopin was very much aware of his work and even told Schumann, on a visit to Leipzig in 1841, that his ballads (of which he had by then written two, the second dedicated to Schumann) were modeled on "certain poems of Mickiewicz."[25] This avowal, plus the fact that the early German editions called the pieces *Balladen ohne Worte* ("Ballads without words"), has led many Chopinists off on wild goose chases to find the actual poems by Mickiewicz whose contents were embodied in Chopin's music (or even secretly set to it). But Chopin probably never meant to imply such a thing. Like Mendelssohn in his *Lieder ohne Worte*, he probably intended what we would nowadays call a structural analogy (more precisely, a homology) between the sung and instrumental media, in which the very absence of words served to liberate the poetic utterance and make it at once more intense and more universal in its appeal.

That, at any rate, seems to be what George Sand sought to convey in a passage from her memoirs that purported to summarize Chopin's views on the meaning of music, thoughts she managed to extract from him despite his inclination to "talk little and pour out his heart only at his piano." Here, according to the woman who knew him best, is Chopin's esthetic credo:

> Where the instruments alone take charge of translating it, the musical drama flies on its own wings and does
> not claim to be translated by the listener. It expresses itself by a state of mind it induces in you by force or

gently. When Beethoven unchains the storm [in the *Pastoral* Symphony], he does not strive to paint the pallid glimmer of lightning and to make us hear the crash of thunder. He renders the shiver, the feeling of wonder, the terror of nature of which man is aware and which he shares in experiencing it…. The beauty of musical language consists in taking hold of the heart or imagination, without being condemned to pedestrian reasoning. It maintains itself in an ideal sphere where the listener who is not musically educated still delights in the vagueness, while the musician savors this great logic that presides over the masters' magnificent issue of thought.[26]

These points, whether expressed in Chopin's words or Sand's, apply with particular force to the Ballades, which are by definition story pieces, but without any specified subject matter. Chopin in effect has announced an intention to do something similar to what Berlioz did in his *Symphonie fantastique*, but has foresworn as futile and even trivializing the use of a programmatic guide to interpretation. Rather, by the use of instrumental music, he now sought to duplicate (and even to surpass) not the content but rather the *effect* of Mickiewicz's nationalistic narrative poetry. Anticipating by half a century the favorite maxim of the French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, Chopin sought to *peindre, non la chose, l'effet qu'elle produit*: "paint not the thing but the effect it produces."[27]

The means were all ready to hand, but had never been coordinated in precisely the way that Chopin now proposed to deploy them. The means in question were those of the traditional sonata, as dramatized by Beethoven and lyricized by Schubert. The unprecedented deployment reflected the characteristic structure and rhetoric of the poetic ballad. It was one of the most sophisticated and successful mutual adaptations of music and literature ever achieved in a century that was practically dedicated to that achievement. No wonder it was influential.

To represent narrative content by means of techniques borrowed from sonata form was an inevitable solution. By its very nature the process of thematic development—in which musical events seem to be not merely juxtaposed but causally connected, so that the past conditions the present and the present (both thematically and tonally) forecasts the future—has a compelling narrative aspect. And by its very nature the newly radicalized contrast in thematic content—in which a lyrically expansive "second subject" (in an increasingly "remote" alternate key) had lately begun to assert equal rights and claim equal time—implied an equally compelling dramatic potential. There was even the latent possibility of a traditional narrative "frame" if one deployed the traditional slow introduction and coda in tandem.

Let us turn now to Chopin's Ballade in G minor, op. 23, now known as the First, completed in 1835 (having possibly been sketched as early as 1831, in the immediate aftermath of the Polish revolt) and published in 1836. The relationship of its spectacularly end-accented overall shape to the narrative shape of, say, *Erlkönig* is obvious. From a briefly loud and "weighty" (*pesante*) opening largo the piece has quieted down to piano by m. 4 and settled into a ruminative moderato by m. 9 (Ex. 7-12a). There is no challenge to either the soft dynamic or the deliberate tempo until the fortieth measure (Ex. 7-12b), where a sudden forte, accompanied by the marking *agitato* (soon succeeded by *sempre più mosso*), begins foretelling the general trajectory the piece will follow (albeit not without incidental detours) until *il più forte possibile* ("the greatest possible loudness") is reached in m. 206, preparing the way for a final explosion of fireworks, *presto con fuoco*, two bars later, to be played at the greatest possible speed (Ex. 7-12c). The whole Ballade is in effect a single magnificently sustained, ten-minute, 264-bar dramatic crescendo that continually gathers momentum from portentous introduction to cabaletta-like coda. Nothing could be further removed from the small aphoristic or sectional forms with which we have up to now associated Chopin's name. The piece shows him to have been capable of formal planning on a colossal scale few had attempted since Beethoven, however novel or sui generis the relationship of the constituent parts.

ex. 7-12a Frédéric Chopin, Ballade no. 1 in G minor, mm. 1–17

ex. 7-12b Frédéric Chopin, Ballade no. 1 in G minor, mm. 40–44

ex. 7-12c Frédéric Chopin, Ballade no. 1 in G minor, mm. 206–212

To compare the coda to a cabaletta is to add an operatic ingredient to the Ballade's eclectic recipe alongside the elements drawn from the practice of sonata form and the rhetoric of narrative poetry. That impression is corroborated at the other end of the piece, to return to Ex. 7-12a, in the bare-octaves introduction (Largo), which, though exceeding the range of any actual singer, is unmistakably vocal in style, comprising three phrases of evident recitative, each one shorter, hence more urgent, than the last. The first phrase arpeggiates a harmony that is retrospectively identified by the following cadence as a Neapolitan sixth. The last phrase is left hanging (m. 7) on a remarkably evocative chord containing three dissonances—two appoggiaturas and one suspension—over a dominant root. This chord was so striking to nineteenth-century musicians that Frederick Niecks, author of an early biography of Chopin, called it "the emotional key-note of the whole poem."[28]

The way in which the first theme of the Moderato begins (m. 8)—with an arpeggio that resolves the keynote chord's charged dissonances one by one (E♭ to D, G to F♯ by octave displacement, B♭ to A by direct melodic succession)—is evidence of the composer's narrative skill: the bard's exordium ends on a note of suspense, leading the listener with urgent expectations into the unfolding drama. What is of greatest relevance right now, however, is the fact that the two main harmonic events of the narrator's Introduction, the Neapolitan sixth and the keynote chord, both return in the coda (cabaletta), after having gone unheard throughout the main body of the Ballade. The Neapolitan sixth is taken up at the height of the *presto con fuoco* (m. 216) and the cadence it initiates is then repeated obsessively three more times (Ex. 7-12d). The keynote chord, meanwhile (or rather its constituent notes in the form of an arpeggio), returns at m. 257 (Ex. 7-12e) in the form of a recitative phrase in octaves that keenly recalls the rhetoric of the "bard's exordium." It serves to introduce the horrifically dissonant final outburst before the end, just as a brief phrase of recitative ("in his arms …"—on the Neapolitan!) had preceded the catastrophic denouement in Schubert's setting of *Erlkönig*.

ex. 7-12d Frédéric Chopin, Ballade no. 1 in G minor, mm. 216–22

ex. 7-12e Frédéric Chopin, Ballade no. 1 in G minor, mm. 257–end

Both Schubert and Chopin used the recitative and the Neapolitan harmony in response to the narrative framing device in the poems their music served to transmit. In Schubert's case it was an actual poem, Goethe's ballad about the Elf King. In Chopin's case it was the imaginary or conceptual ballad of which his music was the embodiment. In both cases, however, the narrator speaks in his own voice exactly twice: in the first stanza (Introduction) and in the last (cabaletta). In between comes the main action, carried not by the narrator but by the "principals"—in Chopin's case the two main themes, plus a couple of nonrecurring episodes.

Very much unlike the narrator's choppy phrases of recitative, which we interpret as a conventional representation of speaking, both of the Ballade's main themes are cast in full lyrical periods, suggesting singers' voices. The first, in a manner quite unlike standard sonata procedure, comes to a full close before the first episode begins. There is no cadential elision at this point, as we normally expect to find in a sonata. But the situation remains sufficiently sonatalike so that we recognize what follows as an episode, not a theme; we not only expect a modulation, but we specifically expect one to the major. And so we are prepared to know the second theme when we hear it (Ex. 7-12f), even though it comes not in the "classical" relative major but in the Schubertian submediant.

ex. 7-12f Frédéric Chopin, Ballade no. 1 in G minor, mm. 68–82

This second theme, unlike the first, ends with a dissolve on every appearance—another departure from what we might take to be the sonata-ish straight-and-narrow. Its first dissolution is accompanied by a restive return of the first theme over the dominant pedal, acting as a bridge to set up the climactic statement of the second theme in A major, at a tritone's remove from its first statement, thus most dramatically—even melodramatically—providing the tonal far-out point (FOP). This climax is set up by means of a typically operatic stall (Ex. 7-12g), the kind of thing that prepares the soprano's high note in Bellini and Donizetti, composers from whom Chopin learned an enormous amount, not only about bel canto lyricism, but about dramatic pacing as well.

ex. 7-12g Frédéric Chopin, Ballade no. 1 in G minor, mm. 98–109

The episode that follows next is sometimes called the "waltz episode" owing to the character of the accompaniment. Unlike typical sonata episodes it does not modulate, but rather prepares the return of E♭ for the final statement of the second theme. This is followed by the final statement of the first theme, again in the agitated dominant-pedal mode replete with stalling tactics, but in *its* original key, thus completing a tonal palindrome: g–E♭–A–E♭–g (upper case denoting major, lower case minor). The superimposition of this closed tonal progression, with its suggestion of "ternary form," over the steadily gathering momentum of the Ballade's narrative unfolding is further proof of the eclectic complexity of design that undergirds its thrillingly immediate and emotional impress.

Now this description of the Ballade's sequence of events has gone out of its way to call attention to those aspects of its unfolding that do not conform to the normal sonata-form template. Chiefly these departures have to do with the order in which things happen. The second theme is recapitulated before the first. The FOP occurs not at the climax of development but at the moment of greatest lyrical expanse. Development as such is deployed in brief setups to offset lyrical high points rather than as a modulatory agent. The coda has an entirely unconventional relationship to the introduction, as we have already observed.

Because of these apparent deviations from standard operating procedure, some have been reluctant to compare Chopin's Ballade with the sonatas of earlier composers or to locate the source of its rhetoric in sonata procedures, even if we are less likely now to assume, as did the otherwise admiring Niecks, that such deviations merely demonstrate Chopin's incapacity for handling large classical forms. And yet the shapes and gestures that give form to the Ballade—the bithematic exposition, the motivic reconfigurations of the first theme, the recapitulation (never mind in what order), the elaborate coda (never mind its contents)—all had their origins and sole precedents in symphonies and sonatas, and derived their meaning (as narrative, as drama) from the listener's recognition of that fact.

Chopin had so internalized the morphology of the sonata, one might say, that he could deploy its elements in idiosyncratic ways that actually resemble the oral techniques of a folk balladeer, who (as Goethe remarked) has his pregnant subject—his figures, their actions and emotions—so deep in his mind that he does not know how he will bring it to light. He can begin lyrically, epically, dramatically and proceed, changing the form at will, either to hurry

to the end or to delay it considerably.

So Chopin changed the form of the sonata to suit his narrative purposes. Perhaps, then, it would be best to say, not that Chopin's Ballades are in a modified sonata form (which fails to consider, or even obscures, the reasons for modification), but that they represent the sonata later on, the way French or Spanish is Latin later on. Recognizable elements of an older vocabulary and syntax have been newly configured and positioned to serve new rhetorical and expressive aims; and it would make no greater sense to interpret the new configurations as decline or deterioration in the handling of form than it would to regard French (as many once surely did) as a deteriorated Latin.

The extra recurrences of the main themes, seemingly at odds with sonata procedures, are crucial to our perception of the Ballade as a ballad, which, besides being a narrative, is also a strophic song, unfolding in recurrent stanzas. By synthesizing strophic and sonata principles, Chopin brilliantly solved the problem of capturing the relationship in a ballad between the recurrent tune and the ever-evolving narrative content. Every time the first theme recurs, to pick the most obvious example, its continuation is different: the first time it gives way to the first episode, the second time to the lyrical climax, and the third time to the coda-cabaletta. Thus it is invested each time with a new narrative function, just as each repeated melodic stanza is invested in a poetic ballad with new words.

But if the Ballade is a narrative, what kind of a story is it telling? George Sand's explanation, that the instrumental medium substitutes feeling content for object content, is not quite sufficient, whether or not it carries the composer's authority. Feelings can as easily be evoked by pictures (like Beethoven's storm picture in the *Pastoral* Symphony, to cite Sand's or Chopin's own example) as by stories. Why a story—and a folk story at that?

Notes:

(23) Parakilas, *Ballads Without Words*, p. 24.

(24) Quoted in Parakilas, *Ballads Without Words*, p. 34.

(25) Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*, p. 143.

(26) George Sand, *Impressions et Souvenirs* (1873), quoted in Berger, "Chopin's *Ballade, op. 23*," p. 78.

(27) Quoted in Robert Goldwater, *Symbolism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 75.

(28) Frederick Niecks, *Frederick Chopin as a Man and Musician* (London, 1988), quoted in Parakilas, *Ballads Without Words*, p. 57.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Nationalism

Chopin: Reception

NATIONALISM AS A MESSAGE

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Self and Other
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The Polish-American musicologist Karol Berger has argued that Chopin invented the instrumental Ballade as a vehicle to tell the story of Poland as he and his fellow émigrés conceived it—not the story of Poland's lamentable past (although that past is surely referred to) but the story of its future. "Personal and collective identities always have narrative structure," Berger writes. "We identify ourselves by means of the stories we tell about ourselves, stories about where we have come from, and where we are going."[29] The story Chopin told in the Ballade was a modified and (by means of his music) universalized version of the story Mickiewicz and other exiled Polish intellectuals were telling about Poland—that is, about themselves. It was a story of impending revolution.

In the words of the Polish-born Oxford historian Sir Lewis Namier, from his famous essay "1848: The Revolution of the Intellectuals," exiled Polish patriots felt in the aftermath of their crushed revolt of 1830–1831 that

> Poland's resurrection could only come through a war between the Partitioning Powers, or the defeat of all three (as happened in 1918); that this presupposed a general upheaval, a world war or a world revolution; that the July Monarchy [newly installed in France, where they lived] offered no base against the Powers of the Holy Alliance [namely Prussia, Russia, and Austria, Poland's occupiers]; and that a new revolution was needed to mobilize popular forces in France and give the signal to Europe. They waited for 1848.[30]

The 1848 revolutions also failed, but we have Chopin's response to them in the form of a letter to a compatriot then living in New York. War and revolution were a heavy price to pay, he wrote. They "will not happen without horrors, but at the end of it all there is Poland, magnificent, great; in a word, Poland."[31] The G-minor Ballade, composed some twelve to fifteen years earlier, was a prophecy. Berger relates its narrative to that of the biblical exodus, with its "structure of past enslavement, present exile and future rebirth preserved but modulated to stress the dimension of the future."[32] That emphasis is what conditioned the Ballade's thrilling trajectory from a subdued beginning to a blaze of fiery, even tragic glory.

This interpretation carries conviction on the basis of evidence both internal and external. Beyond the general gathering of momentum over the course of the whole movement, Berger specifically emphasizes the contrast between the drooping contour of the main theme (particularly if its beginning is heard as a continuation of the "emotional key-note" in mm. 6–7) and the stunning upward surges, practically covering the length of the keyboard, that set off the narrator's valedictory recitatives in the Ballade's final measures, one of which actually replays, fortissimo, the keynote phrase. In the context of a folk or national genre like the ballad/Ballade (even one with spurious literary origins), these surges and keynotes carry the force of a political harangue.

And that is where the external evidence fits in. It is remarkable that Chopin's Ballade was almost universally interpreted as the composer's most seriously nationalistic endeavor despite the fact that, unlike the polonaises and mazurkas, its musical style is not at all marked as specifically Polish. Indeed, the only national reference made in the course of the foregoing stylistic and formal analysis was to the Italian opera, then regarded, along with German symphonism, as an international or universal genre. And there are Germanic resonances in the piece as well, beginning with its very opening, where the octave-unison writing and the Neapolitan harmony have recalled to many listeners the opening bars of Beethoven's Piano Sonata no. 23 in F minor, op. 57 (the "Appassionata").

Chopin, in other words, pulled off the extraordinary feat of telling a national story using only universal ingredients. That, in its way, is the Ballade's most compelling association with the political and cultural discourses that

surrounded and conditioned the revolution of 1848, which (as Namier insisted) "was universally expected" by the intellectual classes all over Europe, and at the same time "was super-national as none before or after."33 Glossing this characterization, Berger defines that universal expectation as the hope that "the future revolution should complete the unfinished business of 1789 and universally replace the principle of dynastic property with that of national sovereignty."34 Poland, a murdered country whose national sovereignty had been forcibly eradicated to add to the property of three European dynasties, was the great emblem of 1848, and Chopin, in his Ballade, displayed that emblem to all of Europe in a language all could understand, and respond to, as theirs.

So the national question, while originally posed in terms of folklore (or *Volkstümlichkeit*, "folklikeness"), nevertheless quickly transcended folklore. The reception of Chopin's Ballade, like that of many other national monuments in tones, proved that nationalism in music is not defined by style alone, or even necessarily, but by a much more complex interaction between creative intentions and critical perceptions.

Given the import of his work, and the aspirations it embodied, the final chapter of Chopin's life was a tragicomical anticlimax. His affair with George Sand ended in 1847 as a result of envious intrigues by her children, leaving him depressed and disinclined to work. The immediate effect of the outbreak of the long-awaited 1848 revolution, when it hit Paris, was the interruption of Chopin's income from teaching, forcing him to take up residence in England where he again became the darling of fashionable society. He stayed there for eight months, returning to Paris in November, having earned (or been given) enough money to maintain a residence. His longstanding tuberculosis claimed him less than a year later. He died surrounded by fellow Poles including his sister, who had come to his bedside from Warsaw; but he was buried in Paris like a grand seigneur after a funeral attended by three thousand mourners, at which Mozart's Requiem was performed.

Notes:

(29) Berger, "Chopin's *Ballade, op. 23*," p. 76.

(30) Sir Lewis Namier, *1848: The Revolution of the Intellectuals* (London, 1944), quoted in Berger, "Chopin's *Ballade, op. 23*," p. 74.

(31) Chopin to Julian Fontana, 4 April 1848, quoted in Berger, "Chopin's *Ballade, op. 23*," p. 76.

(32) Berger, "Chopin's *Ballade, op. 23*," pp. 76–77.

(33) Namier, *1848*, quoted in Berger, "Chopin's *Ballade, op. 23*," p. 73.

(34) Berger, "Chopin's *Ballade, op. 23*," p. 73.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Louis Moreau Gottschalk

Folk music

Stephen Foster

AMERICA JOINS IN

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Self and Other
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

A composer whose career began very much like Chopin's, but later diverged owing to his failure to attain a comparable level of social prestige, was Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829–69), a native of New Orleans who was the first American-born composer to make his mark within the European tradition of fine-art music. His father, London-born and Leipzig-educated, was a prosperous merchant from a highly assimilated (possibly converted) German-Jewish family like Mendelssohn's; his mother, a skilled amateur pianist and operatic singer, was the daughter of a celebrated French Creole baker who had fled to Louisiana as a refugee from the Haitian slave revolts of the 1790s. His socially ambitious parents identified wholeheartedly with European high culture and brought up their children in an atmosphere effectively shielded from the local popular culture by a well-developed salon and opera-house network. As soon as their gifted son had received his basic training from the local cathedral organist, he was packed off to Paris, aged thirteen, for finishing.

Gottschalk was an extraordinarily precocious talent. Before he turned sixteen he gave a recital at which he played Chopin's E-minor Concerto before an audience that included Chopin himself, who paid enthusiastic respects backstage and (according to Gottschalk) declared him the future "king of pianists."[35] Yet like the young Chopin before him, Gottschalk found he could not break through to real recognition from the European public except as an exotic—which is what turned him, very much against the current of his upbringing, into an American (or, more precisely, a Louisiana Creole) nationalist.

In quick succession he published three sets of bravura variations—*Bamboula, danse des nègres*, op. 2; *La savane, ballade créole*, op. 3; *Le bananier* ("The banana tree"), *chanson nègre*, op. 4—that have been aptly dubbed a "Louisiana trilogy" by Gilbert Chase,[36] a leading musical Americanist. They established for him a reputation, at age nineteen, of being (in the words of an enraptured Paris reviewer) a rude prodigy who composed "wild, languishing, indescribable" things that bore "no resemblance to any other European music."[37]
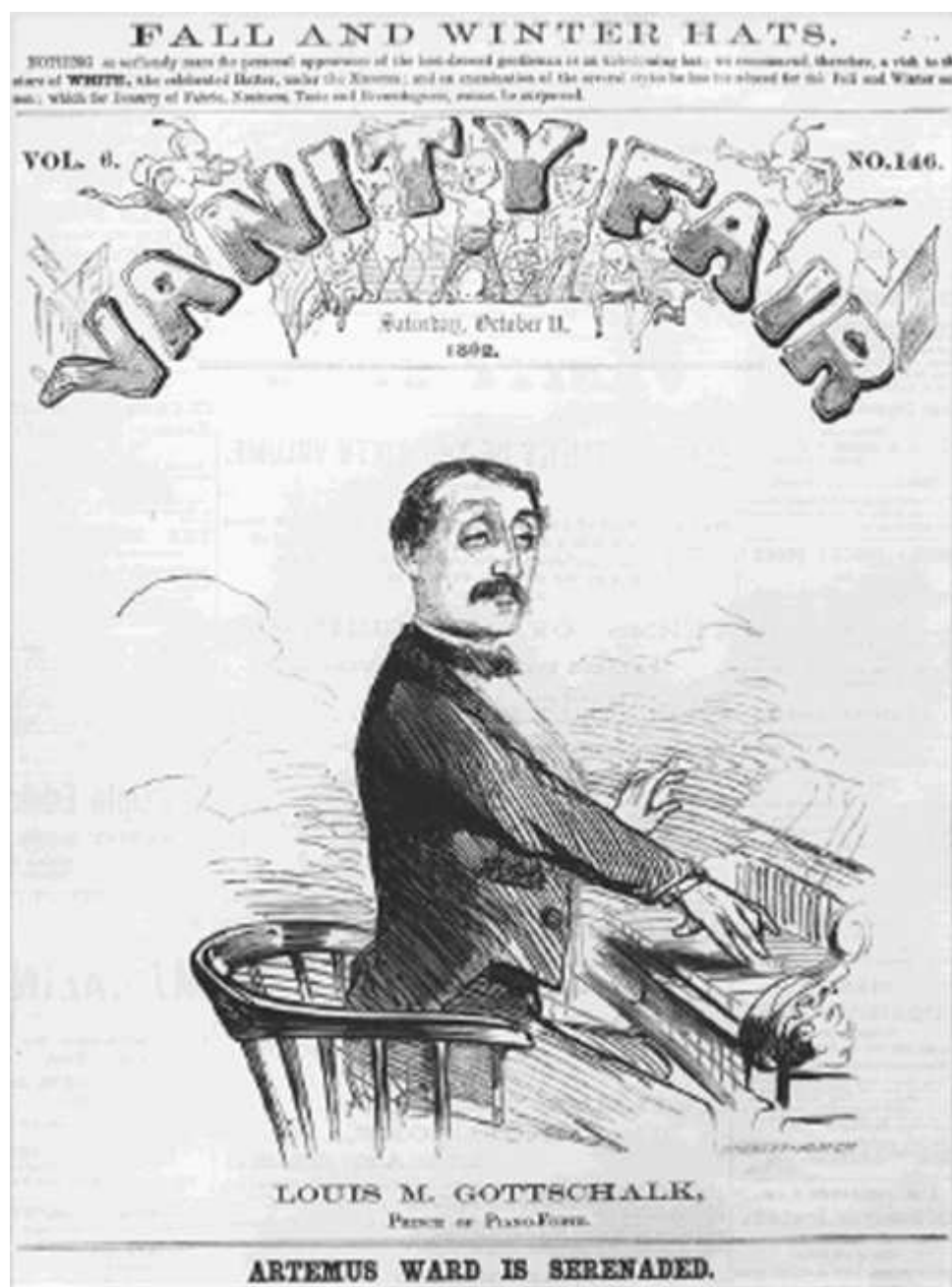
fig. 7-7 Louis Moreau Gottschalk, wood engraving after a drawing by Henry Louis Stephens, published in *Vanity Fair*, 11 October 1862.

Although French was his first language, Gottschalk was not really a Creole, since he descended only on his mother's side from French settlers. Nor, despite his own testimony (accepted by his early biographers), is there any reason to assume that his "Louisiana trilogy" was based on exotic memories from his childhood. *La savane* ("The savannah"), for example, which bears the Chopinesque designation ballade, was supposedly inspired by a legend that the live oaks in the swamps surrounding New Orleans had grown up out of the skeletons of runaway slaves. According to his program note, the boy Gottschalk heard this legend from his governess, a mulatto slave girl named Sally, who punctuated her narrative with snatches of the mournful slave song on which the bravura variations are based. French audiences were not likely to notice that this so-called slave song was a minor-mode variant of "Skip to My Lou, My Darling," an old English dance tune that is still an American nursery staple.

But even if Gottschalk's "Creole" music was no more authentic than this, the piano style in which he couched it did give his music a convincingly personal imprint (hence authentic in another, perhaps more important sense), and one that proved unexpectedly fertile in America. The startlingly original *Bamboula*, apparently composed in 1844–45 when Gottschalk, aged just fifteen, was recovering from an attack of typhoid fever, was issued by the Paris publisher Escudier in 1849. The title is supposedly the name, in New Orleans black patois, of an African-style drum made of

bamboo, and the piece is purportedly an evocation of Saturday night social dancing at the Place Congo (Congo Square), a hall frequented by *les gens de couleur*, New Orleans' free mulatto or mixed-blood population, who were largely of Caribbean descent.

None of this can be confirmed. The tunes are not recognizably West Indian, nor was the very sheltered Gottschalk likely to have been taken as a lad to witness such goings-on at first hand. But in evoking the bamboula drum, whether real or imaginary, Gottschalk devised an angular, dryly percussive style of piano playing (Ex. 7-13), full of hocketing exchanges between the hands and reinforced in the notation by many polyglot reminders to the player to keep it up (*"très rhythmé," "sostenuto il canto, staccato l'accompagnement," "pesante il basso,"* etc.). The touch, and consequently the texture, is exceptionally differentiated, the two hands (and sometimes two lines within a single hand) being radically contrasted. There is even a spot where the right hand is required to play legato and rubato while the left hand carries the warning *"la basse toujours rhythmée,"* and (even more unusually) there are whole sections in which the damper pedal is held in abeyance.

This special piano touch, "wild and indescribable" to listeners used to Chopin and Liszt, later became the foundation of ragtime, especially when Gottschalk added syncopated Latin American rhythms to the mix (as in his "Souvenir de Porto Rico, Marche des Gibaros") during a strange Caribbean interlude that lasted from 1857 to 1862 (Ex. 7-14). The hocketing hands-exchange technique reached its peak in *The Banjo* (1854), composed while Gottschalk was living in Spain and briefly enjoying court patronage. At the end (Ex. 7-15a) there is a lengthy bravura coda or cadenza based on the melody of his compatriot Stephen Foster's then brand-new *Camptown Races* (1850), in which the accompaniment was already fashioned to resemble banjo-picking (Ex. 7-15b).

ex. 7-13 Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Bamboula*, mm. 1–24

While Foster (1826–64) wrote music for consumption in homely domestic venues or minstrel shows, Gottschalk's

bravura exercises in Americana, it is important to remember, were composed for European audiences. He returned to America early in 1853 for what he expected to be a whirlwind tour, but his father's death later that year turned him willy-nilly into the family breadwinner. From then on he made his career entirely on the terms of the burgeoning American music trade, not on those of the European salon culture to which he had expected to return. He would not be Chopin's successor as society lap dog after all. His destiny lay in the uniquely American business of popularizing high culture.

He stepped up the frequency of his concert tours to unprecedented levels, causing him chronic exhaustion and periods of burnout, and considerably shortening his life in consequence. Thanks to the boom in American railway construction that coincided exactly with his peak concertizing period, Gottschalk covered more miles in less time than any other virtuoso of the day, playing not only big cities but small mill and mining towns from coast to coast and bringing European fine-art music to audiences of a kind that would never have heard it in Europe. Toward the end of his concert career he calculated that between 1853 and 1865 he had given 1,100 recitals and logged more than 95,000 miles by rail.

And he did all this not in twelve years, actually, but in only seven, since (as already mentioned) he spent the years 1857 to 1862, following a nervous breakdown, leading a vagabond existence in the Caribbean, playing little but composing much. His works from this period included a one-act opera (*Escenas campestres* [Rural Scenes]), a symphony (*La nuit des tropiques* [The Tropical Night]), and a new crop of "Latin" piano works like the one in Ex. 7-14, which he could later purvey to American audiences as the kind of exotic fare with which he had formerly regaled Paris.

But he also composed quantities of precisely the kind of sentimental commercial music his European experience had taught him to despise—sentimental parlor-piano compositions with titles like *The Last Hope* (1854), *The Maiden's Blush* (1863), *The Dying Poet* (1864), and *Morte!* (1868). It practically goes without saying that these compositions, intended for home consumption, were not in the least nationalistic. Quite the contrary: just as to aristocratic European audiences Gottschalk had represented untamed America, so to the "vulgar" American public, both those who came to hear him play and those who purchased the sheet music afterward to play at home, he represented European "class."

fig. 7-8 Stephen Foster, portrait by Thomas Hicks.

ex. 7-14 Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Souvenir de Porto Rico, Marche des Gibaros*

A vivid case in point is the single piece of Americana he composed in America: a rousing pastiche of patriotic songs called *Union*, with which he would end his concerts during the Civil War. After a stormy martial introduction and an ornate arrangement of "The Star-Spangled Banner," during which audiences presumably stood at attention, there came a contrapuntal juxtaposition of "Yankee Doodle" and "Hail Columbia," a far more learned, even academic sort of exercise than he would have dreamed of playing before European audiences who heard conservatory-trained musicians every day.

ex. 7-15a Louis Moreau Gottschalk, the Foster-quoting section of *The Banjo*

ex. 7-15b The corresponding snatch of Fosters "Camptown Races"

The first statement of "Hail Columbia" is European in another way as well: as an exercise in the most recondite, most sophisticated sort of slithery "continental" harmonization, indebted above all to Chopin (Ex. 7-16a). If

Bamboula and *Souvenir de Porto Rico* gave a foretaste of ragtime, this passage is a prophecy of the vogue for sentimental barbershop quartet singing that flourished as a sort of American *Männerchor* movement for forty years or so beginning in the 1890s (see Ex. 7-16b).

Gottschalk was forced to leave the United States in 1865 to avoid prosecution on a charge (later declared unfounded) of statutory rape. He spent the last four years of his life, as his biographer and performing champion Jeanne Behrend put it, "skirting much of the outer rim of South America—six months in Peru, one year in Chile, two years in Argentina and Uruguay, seven and a half months in Brazil."[38] During this final period Gottschalk became a sort of P. T. Barnum of music, or perhaps an American Berlioz, taking popularization to new heights in monster concerts that he organized wherever he went at the expense of the Chickering piano manufacturing firm of Boston, the inventor of the cast-iron frame (hence the perfecter of the modern grand piano), which had made Gottschalk an official trade representative. In South America this musical son of New Orleans now represented Yankee enterprise.

The pinnacle was reached in Rio de Janeiro on 24 November 1869 with the cooperation of the Brazilian Emperor Pedro II, who placed the massed bands of the National Guard, the Imperial Army and Navy, and three municipal orchestras at Gottschalk's disposal. "Just think of 800 performers and 80 drums to lead,"[39] he exulted, exaggerating only slightly, in a letter to a friend. The concert went "crescendo," starting with Gottschalk alone on stage playing a Lisztian potpourri on themes from Charles Gounod's popular operatic version of Goethe's *Faust*, followed by a new *Tarantella* for piano and orchestra. Then the curtain went up on the great mass of performers, 650 in all. After the Brazilian national anthem played (according to the *Anglo Brazilian Times*) by "forty young ladies on twenty-five pianos" (Chickerings, of course), came the Grand March from Meyerbeer's *Le prophète*, a movement from Gottschalk's own "Tropical Night" Symphony, and as grand finale a new work of Gottschalk's, composed for the occasion and dedicated to the Emperor: *Marcha solemne brasileira*, replete with backstage cannon fire. A repetition of the entire program was scheduled for the day after next, with a solo performance by Gottschalk on the evening in between.

ex. 7-16a Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Union*, mm. 11–24

No novelist would dare invent what happened next for fear of losing credibility. Gottschalk collapsed during that intervening performance right in the midst of *Morte!* (She's Dead), one of his popular potboilers, and had to be carried from the stage back to his hotel room. The second *concerto monstro* had to be postponed, then canceled. Gottschalk never played again. He died on 18 December from the consequences of a ruptured abdominal abscess.

Notes:

(35) Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott, 1881), p. 33.

(36) Gilbert Chase, *America's Music* (2nd ed., New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 315.

(37) Quoted in Richard Jackson, "Gottschalk of Louisiana," introduction to *Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Dover, 1973), p. v.

(38) Jeanne Behrend, editorial interpolation within Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist* (New York: Knopf, 1964), p. 320.

(39) Quoted in Jeanne Behrend, "Postlude," in L. M. Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist* (New York: Knopf, 1964), p. 403.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Nationalism

ART AND DEMOCRACY

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Self and Other
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

ex. 7-16b Chorus from "Home on the Range," arranged for barbershop quartet by Ozzie Westley, mm. 17–end

As an emissary from America to Europe, then from Europe to America, and finally between Americas; as a mediator between low culture and high society, and then between high culture and "low" society; as a shuttler between culture and commerce; and as a perpetual peripatetic whose selfhood was always defined by some sort of otherness, Gottschalk led an emblematically liminal existence—an existence on the borders—that defined a particularly

"American" moment in the history of European music. It was a moment of confrontation that presaged the hardening of categories and the closing of borders.

The United States, the exemplary creation of Enlightened universalist politics, posed a perpetual threat to the European status quo. What it threatened was the security of traditional hierarchy. The American experience, which began with a revolution, was viewed in Europe as an experiment in social leveling, hardly less ominous than the revolutionary movements that were gathering force seemingly everywhere on the European continent between 1830 and 1848. Backlash against Americanism—defined in terms of commercialism, mechanical technology, and indifference if not sheer hostility to quality or excellence in matters of culture and conduct—was already well advanced by the time the young Gottschalk sailed for Europe in 1842. Pierre Zimmermann, the head of the piano department at the Paris Consevatoire, would not even allow an American boy to audition (even one who spoke perfect French and had been trained at home by Frenchmen), because "America produces steam engines, not musicians."[40] Instead Gottschalk studied in Paris with the German-born Charles Hallé, Chopin's friend.

The democratic, nonhierarchical spirit of nineteenth-century America, however partial or limited (in view of the simultaneous existence, until 1865, of Negro slavery, to pick only the most obvious contradiction), has been looked upon by some American cultural historians as having fostered a kind of populist golden age of art. Gottschalk's successful if overly strenuous career as an American public entertainer between 1853 and 1865, and his later activity as a grandiose musical impresario in Latin America, might seem to support the historian Lawrence Levine's contention that "in the nineteenth century, especially in the first half, Americans, in addition to whatever specific cultures they were part of, shared a public culture less hierarchically organized, less fragmented into relatively rigid adjectival boxes [i.e., "high" vs. "low"] than their descendants [i.e., we] were to experience a century later,"[41] and that the loss of this sense of a shared heterogeneous popular culture, including the portion later defined and fenced off as "high," was a grievous one for the subsequent development of art in America, and even throughout the world.

There is truth in this view, and we will explore it. It is most immediately demonstrated in the opposition Gottschalk faced from fastidious critics in America such as John Sullivan Dwight (1813–93), inevitably a Bostonian, who was an early advocate of what Levine calls "fragmentation,"[42] and who deplored Gottschalk's popularizing and Americanizing efforts. But it is a one-sided view. Gottschalk, and other American artists, had their social troubles in America, too, owing not to their being Americans, but to their being artists. The place of charismatic individuals in a society that puts a social and political premium on ordinariness or conformity can be precarious, as Gottschalk's eventual fate bore out.

The morals charge and the attendant scandal that led to his exile from America reflected the social stigma and suspicion that attached to artists in American society. Indeed, the stigma and suspicion have lasted into our own time, as witness the perpetual difficulties encountered in establishing and administering government art patronage in America. Recall, for example, the persistent efforts in the 1980s and 1990s to dismantle the federal government's National Endowment for the Arts, and the moral vilification some American artists have personally suffered in consequence of those efforts at the hands of politicians who saw an electoral advantage in persecuting them.

Here European attitudes can be shown to differ considerably, in the direction of tolerance. Both Liszt and Chopin, as we already know, lived openly with women to whom they were not married (and who were married, or had been married, to others), and suffered little or no social stigma in consequence. In the case of Liszt, his reputation as a womanizer was in fact a distinct career advantage. Chopin and George Sand were once notoriously refused accommodations in Majorca, it is true. The reason, however, was not their depraved liaison, but rather Chopin's manifestly poor health.

Notes:

(40) Gottschalk to his mother, undated fragment, ca. 1850; quoted in S. Frederick Starr, *Bamboula: The Life and Times of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 50.

(41) Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 9.

(42) Levine, *Highrow/Lowbrow*, p. 8.

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See also from Grove Music Online

Orientalism

Félicien David

Exoticism in Opera

Samson et Dalila

STEREOTYPING THE OTHER: "ORIENTALISM"

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Self and Other
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

So far in this chapter we have observed the tensions between the universal and the particular, and between the nationalistic and the exotic, from the perspective of expatriated composers highly conscious of themselves as outsiders, presenting a sense of self that is to a large extent constructed out of a sense of difference. It is unlikely that Chopin would have written so many mazurkas, or Gottschalk his "Louisiana trilogy," had they stayed at home all their lives. There are, of course, other perspectives. There is the domestic or patriotic national consciousness that we have observed by now in many romantic artists, in which the assertion of national identity serves a different social purpose, emphasizing community rather than peculiarity, sameness rather than difference, social cohesion rather than social division.

And there is yet another perspective, in which members of one community represent an alien or exotic community for their own purposes and their own consumption. This kind of exoticism could be looked upon as a sort of inverse nationalism, since very often the purpose of representing (and, almost invariably, of stereotyping) the other is the bolstering of one's own sense of community by contrast. It is an act not of ecumenism or world fellowship in the spirit of Herder, but one of invidious distinction, of "marking off," ultimately of exclusion.

The most widespread and time-honored guise that this kind of exoticism has worn in the European musical tradition is that of "orientalism," the musical representation of non-European (generally Asian) peoples. We have encountered it in Beethoven (*Die Ruinen von Athen*), in Rossini (*L'Italiana in Algeri*), and in Weber (*Turandot*; also *Abu Hassan*, an 1811 singspiel based on the *Arabian Nights*). Even by Mozart's time it had a long history. "Turkish" operas —operas making fun of Turks or other Muslims—were a Vienna specialty (in still-conscious reaction to the Ottoman siege of 1683) when Mozart wrote his singspiel *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* ("Abduction from the Seraglio") in 1782. Lully's incidental music to Molière's play *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* had lampooned the Turks (Europe's most formidable antagonists since the time of the Crusades) even earlier, in 1670; and there are isolated examples going back to the sixteenth century.

European musical representation of the Orient enjoyed an enormous renewed vogue during the nineteenth century, thanks in particular to a historical and economic turnabout whereby the Europeans, rather than the Asians, became the expansionist aggressors. One can almost exactly coordinate manifestations of musical (as well as artistic, literary, and scholarly) orientalism with the movements of colonial and imperialist armies, beginning with Napoleon's Egyptian campaigns of 1798–99—a scholarly bonanza above all owing to the discovery of the Rosetta stone, and the subsequent publication of the twenty-four-volume *Description of Egypt* by Edme François Jomard, a geographer and antiquarian who had traveled with Napoleon's army between 1809 and 1813.

Together with the sumptuously illustrated album *Voyage in Lower and Upper Egypt* by Baron Dominique Denon, another member of Napoleon's entourage who later became the chief curator of the Louvre, Jomard's work touched off a French craze for all things "Near Eastern." The Vicomte de Chateaubriand published a best-selling travel book, the semi-imaginary *Itinerary from Paris to Jerusalem*, in 1811; Victor Hugo's wholly imaginary *Les Orientales*, a book of exotic poems, followed in 1829. Accordingly, the first place to look for signs of a new romantic wave in musical orientalia is France.

The wave reached an early crest in the work of Félicien David (1810–76), a specialist in the Eastern mode, who made

a pilgrimage to Egypt in 1833–35 by way of the Turkish cities of Constantinople (Istanbul) and Smyrna (Izmir). He noted down Arab and Turkish tunes wherever he went, and after first publishing a large series of piano pieces based on them (*Mélodies orientales*, twenty-two pieces in seven books, 1836), summed up his impressions of the East in a monumental "Ode-Symphony" (a symphony with voices in the manner of Beethoven's Ninth) called *Le Désert*, which had its deliriously successful premiere in December 1844 and remained a concert staple for a couple of decades thereafter, although like its author it is virtually forgotten today.

The direct influence of Beethoven's Ninth is apparent from the very outset, which evokes the infinite desert expanse (as Beethoven had evoked the cosmos) with a seemingly endless pedal tone on C against which a welter of motives for future development (some seemingly in C, others in F, still others in A♭) alternate with "melodramas" for a speaking narrator, a device borrowed from *Lélio, or Returning to Life (Lélio, ou le retour à la vie)*, the now-forgotten sequel to the *Symphonie fantastique* by Berlioz, who was quick to proclaim his imitator's work a masterpiece.

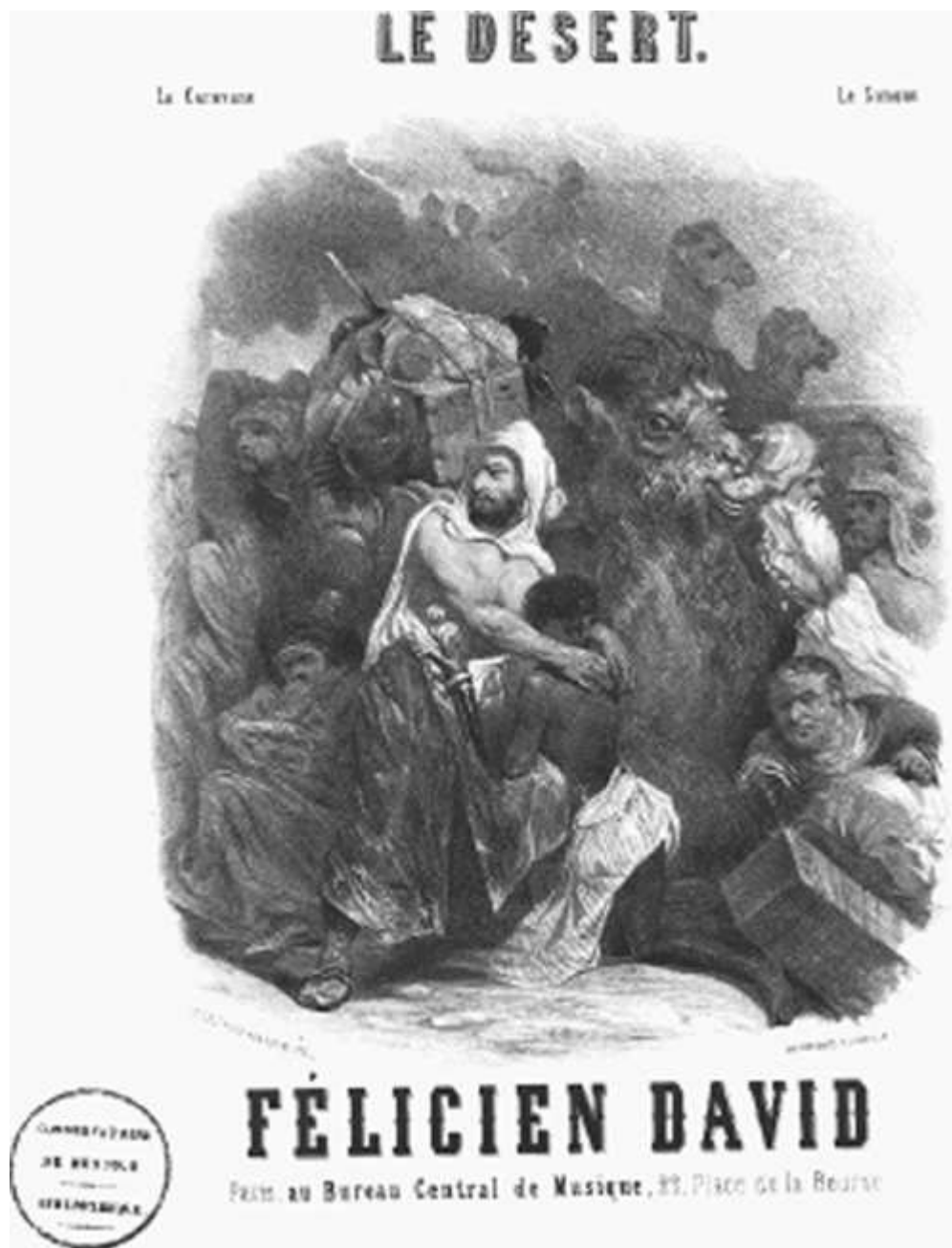**fig. 7-9 Title page of first edition of Felicien David's *Le Désert* (Paris, 1845).**

Thereafter the work proceeds in three long movements, each comprising several unrelated episodes or scenes (although there is a sort of recapitulation of the opening at the very end), the whole representing a caravan slowly crossing the desert, encountering a sandstorm, passing mosques, offering a prayer to Allah, and so forth. The voices

are all male, but the second movement contains a "Danse des almées" (Dance of the "Almahs," Egyptian belly dancers, regarded by Europeans as prostitutes) that supplies what would prove to be the most durable, indeed indispensable, ingredient in European musical orientalism (Ex. 7-17a). The most famous episode in *Le Désert* was the call of the muezzin, the crier who, standing in the balcony of a minaret or mosque turret, at stated hours five times daily, intones the call summoning the faithful to prayer (Ex. 7-17b).

Both the dance and the muezzin's cry were based on authentic source material, personally observed by the composer on location; indeed, in the final melisma of the muezzin's call, he seems to have tried to give an impression of microtones. In any case, David received the compliment of recognition from an Arab delegation in native dress, attending the premiere as the guests of the French government, much to the audience's delight.

ex. 7-17a Félicien David, *Le Désert, Danse des almées*

ex. 7-17b Félicien David, *Le Désert*, Muezzins call

The vogue for *Le Désert* came quickly to an end, however; by 1857, Berlioz, who as press critic had acclaimed it, was calling it in private correspondence "a curious specimen of silly music."[43] The reason for its fall from favor may have had to do, at least in part, with its excessive "verisimilitude," with its being, paradoxically enough, too faithful (and uncritical) a portrait of the East, and too little a story. The main thrust of French musical orientalism quickly turned toward opera rather than song or symphony, where a certain repertoire of archetypal tales emerged to lend moral, social, and political significance to the exercise.

The list of orientalist operas that ensued would include works by almost every French composer of any reputation at all from the middle to the end of the century. By David himself there was *Lalla-Roukh* (1862), after a story about the love life of an Indian princess by the Irish poet Thomas Moore. By Meyerbeer there was *L'Africaine* (1865), which (its title notwithstanding) also concerns the love of an Indian princess, in this case for Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese explorer. By Léo Delibes (1836–91) there was *Lakmé* (1883), yet another tale about the love of an Indian princess (and priest's daughter), this time for an English officer. By Jules Massenet (1842–1912) there was *Le roi de Lahore* ("The King of Lahore," 1877), in which the title character dies, spends an act in Hindu heaven, and returns to life in the guise of a beggar to claim a virgin priestess for his bride.

By Georges Bizet (1838–75) there were *Les pêcheurs de perles* ("The pearl fishers," 1863), a love triangle—yes, she is a virgin priestess—set in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and *Djamileh* (1872), about a slave girl who wins the heart of an Egyptian caliph. By Ambroise Thomas (1811–96) there was *Le Caïd* ("The Khayyid," 1849), about the amorous misadventures of a North African chieftain. Finally, by Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921) there was *Samson et Dalila* (1877), on the famous biblical story, which of all these operas retains the securest place in repertory today.

Whether comic or tragic, all of these operas are love stories given an unusually frank and sensual treatment that, set in the "occident," would have been considered offensive within the mores of the time. The idea of the Orient as sexual playground gave license for the enjoyment of libidinous fantasies, their immorality diminished by the non-Christian (hence morally irredeemable) setting. The exotic sexpot or sex toy was only one of the stereotypes for which the orientalist manner made allowance: others included acts of despotic violence, depraved luxury, picturesque or orgiastic rites and sacrifices, and so on. Under cover of moral censure an otherwise inadmissible voyeurism could be indulged.

What is more, a repertory of recognizably "oriental" musical devices could be deployed semiotically, as signs or tropes to conjure up the qualities associated with orientalist plots and characters: thus a certain kind of oriental music could signify or conjure up sex(iness), another violence, a third barbarous ritual, even without an explicitly oriental setting. For this technique to work, verisimilitude had to be sacrificed to stereotype, the latter often lacking any authentic counterpart in "oriental" reality.

But that is precisely the point. "Orientalism," as the Arab-American literary critic Edward Said (a leading theorist of the process) has pointed out, "overrode the Orient."[44] Indeed, the very expression "the Orient" is already an example of such overriding, since the East is "the East" only to "the West." The very act of naming it is already constitutive: the name is what brings the thing into being. And that thing is a thing of metaphor, of imaginary geography and historical fiction: a reduced and "totalized" (omnisciently known) other against which we construct our no less reduced and totalized sense of ourselves.

There is no way of fully disengaging this constructed East from "the real one," least of all in artistic representations (which are always conventional). Thus an attempt, like David's *Le Désert*, merely to transcribe the reality of the thing, will quickly pall—will seem artless or naive—next to the really sophisticated fruits of orientalism.

The famous *Bacchanale*, the ballet sequence from act III of *Samson et Dalila*, can serve as an example (Ex. 7-18). The Philistines, an ancient people who have left no musical traces to posterity, are seen carousing before the idol of their god, Dagon, right before Samson brings the temple down to end the opera. Without any authentic source to guide him, thus untempted by the possibility of "real verisimilitude," Saint-Säens opts for a fancifully exotic mode containing not one (as do some Arabian modes) but two "oriental" augmented seconds (B–A♭, F♯–E♭), intervals that in various contexts can evoke Arabs or Jews or Gypsies *ad libitum*, or symbolize their attributes (here, orgiastic excess). At the same time the drumbeat accompaniment below is dividing the eighth-notes in every pair of measures into groups following the asymmetrical pattern 3 + 3 + 2, a rhythmic cycle found in many kinds of non-European music including Arabian, but also black Caribbean ("Afro-Cuban") or Latin American.

ex. 7-18 Camille Saint-Saëns, *Samson et Dalila*, Act III, *Bacchanale*

The net result is an imaginary or all-purpose orientalist music that nevertheless communicates a very specific image to properly attuned European listeners. (What it would communicate to the modern-day descendants of the Philistines is anybody's guess.) In an orientalist sense it is realer than anything real could be; and if that seems a paradox, an observation by the Russian critic Hermann Laroche may help clarify it. Pondering the "biblical orientalism" in several Russian operas based on Old Testament or Apocryphal subjects, he asked and answered a rhetorical question:

> In what does Alexander Serov's masterly characterization of the extinct Assyrians in his opera *Judith* [1863] consist, or Anton Rubinstein's of the ancient Semites in his "sacred opera" *The Tower of Babel* [1870]? Obviously in one thing only: the composers have successfully reproduced *our* subjective idea of the Assyrians and the Semites.[45]

Which is to say, they successfully catered, by the use of stereotypes, to contemporary prejudice, as memorably encapsulated in Chateaubriand's *Itinerary* when he wrote of the Turks that they spend their time "ravaging the world or else sleeping on carpets, amidst women and perfumes."[46] Orientalist tropes (figures, turns of phrase) would henceforth pervade the representation of masculine barbarity and feminine voluptuousness alike, and thereby broaden their significance through a process known as metonymy, the representation of a thing by one of its attributes, or vice versa. An orientalist trope could now connote or specify barbarity or voluptuousness in any context.

Notes:

(43) Berlioz to his sister Adèle, 11 March 1858; quoted in Dorothy Veinus Hagan, *Félicien David 1810–1876: A*

Composer and a Cause (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985), p. 147.

(44) Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), p. 196.

(45) Hermann Laroche (German Larosh), "'Der Thurm zu Babel' Rubinshteyna," in Larosh, *Muzïkal'no-kriticheskiye stat'I* (St. Petersburg: Bessel, 1894), p. 117.

(46) François-René, Vicomte de Chateaubriand, *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem, et de Jérusalem à Paris* (Paris: Le Normant, 1812).

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Orientalism

Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka

The Mighty Five

Alexander Borodin

SEX à LA RUSSE

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Self and Other
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

This process can be traced very vividly in the music of Russian composers, who were if anything even more obsessed with the development of orientalist tropes than were the French. The reason for their obsession was twofold. In the first place, Russia was engaged throughout the nineteenth century in imperialistic expansion into Islamic territories, first in the Caucasus (where the indigenous populations were in fact Christian as well as Muslim), later in what the Russians called "Central Asia," the vast plain or steppe south of Siberia and north of Iran, Afghanistan, and China.

The Caucasian campaigns reached their peak in the immediate post-Napoleonic period and lasted into the 1830s. The Central Asian campaigns were waged from the 1860s to the early 1880s, by which time the entire territory of what would later become the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the world's last surviving multinational empire, was controlled by Russia. In this later phase of its expansion into Islamic Asia, Russia was competing with Great Britain in what Rudyard Kipling, the great poet of British imperialism, called the Great Game[47] a protracted war of conquest against a Muslim Holy League led by the khan of Bokhara (now Uzbekistan).

Unlike the British Empire, or any of the other modern Western European empires (French, Spanish, Portuguese), which were formed in the process of colonization (first of the New World, later of Africa and India), the Russian empire, like the Ottoman (Turkish) and the nearly defunct Hapsburg (Austrian) empires, or like the empires of the ancient world, was a contiguous empire, formed by a continual process of aggrandizement into bordering territories. It occupied a single enormous landmass, and its various peoples intermingled (and intermarried) to a much greater degree than in the Western European empires.

This contiguity and (so to speak) intimacy gave impetus to the other reason why Russian composers were such avid orientalists. The orientalist tropes with which they filled their music distinguished them from the composers of Western Europe, and gave them a means of competing with the older, more established traditions of European art music. To accentuate the "oriental" aspect was for Russian composers a way of asserting their individual identity and their claim to respect and attention as independent musical creators at a time when Russia was just joining the European fine art tradition.

Thus when the arts publicist Vladimir Stasov (1824–1906), a wonderfully energetic and effective propagandist for what he called the "New Russian School" of nationalist composers, looked back in 1882 at "Twenty-Five Years of Russian Art" (the title of one of his most famous essays), he listed "the oriental element"[48] as one of the four major characteristics that justified its assertion of equal rights. (The others were its skepticism of European tradition, which made it independent; its striving for a unique national character, which made it authentic; and its "extreme inclination toward program music," which made it progressive.)

But of course this gave orientalist tropes a far more ambiguous place within the Russian stylistic spectrum than within the French. For French composers, orientalism was exclusively a means of marking the other. For Russian composers, depending which way they were facing, orientalism could also be a means of marking the self. Orientalism was thus attended by the same tensions and ironies as nationalism. Where nationalism could mean authenticity at home and exoticism abroad, orientalism could mean exoticism at home and authenticity abroad. For Russian composers, an orientalist trope could be a sort of self-portrait. That greatly multiplied the range of its possible meanings, of course, and its possible ambiguities. It also made the formation and deployment of orientalist

tropes a much more significant and artfully sophisticated phenomenon among Russian composers than among any other European national group.

To witness that formation and deployment we can compare three different settings, made over a period of more than sixty years, of a single poem, an untitled lyric by Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837) dating from 1828. In literal translation, it goes like this:

- Sing not in my presence, O beauty,
- Thy songs of sad Georgia;
- They remind me
- Of another life, a distant shore.

- Alas! they remind me,
- Thy cruel melodies,
- Of steppes, of night—and 'neath the moon
- The features of a poor far-off maid.

- This lovely, fateful vision
- I can forget on seeing thee;
- But you sing—and before me
- I envision it anew.

- Sing not, etc.

ex. 7-19a *Ne poy, krasavitsa* **(Pushkin), Glinka's setting, mm. 1-12**

ex. 7-19b *Ne poy, krasavitsa* **(Pushkin), Miliy Alexeyevich Balakirevs setting, mm. 1–8**

The first setting (Ex. 7-19a) is by Glinka, the composer of *A Life for the Tsar* (see chapter 4), but composed five years before that epoch-making opera made him a nationalist. Subtitled "Georgian Song," it incorporates only the first two stanzas of the poem. According to the composer's memoirs, the song's strophic melody, which he learned from the poet and playwright Alexander Griboyedov (1795–1829), was an authentic Georgian tune, the very one to which Pushkin reputedly composed the poem. From the music alone there is no way of guessing that. Nothing about the song sounds the least bit exotic. The diatonic melody seems perfectly normal to Western ears, Glinka's

harmonization unremarkable, the text setting straightforwardly syllabic. Already we have a warning that musical orientalism is a matter not of authenticity but of conventions—conventions that had not yet been established by 1831.

ex. 7-19c *Ne poy, krasavitsa* **(Pushkin), Sergei Rachmaninoff's setting, mm. 1–12**

ex. 7-19d *Ne poy, krasavitsa* (Pushkin), Sergei Rachmaninoff's setting, mm. 39–42

The next setting (Ex. 7-19b) is by Miliy Alexeyevich Balakirev (1837–1910), the founder of what Stasov called the "New Russian School" of avowedly nationalistic composers. (Some reference sources give Balakirev's birth year as 1836, because on the day he was born, Russian calendars read 21 December 1836. Russia was then using the Julian or old style calendar, and would until 1918; in Western Europe and America, where the Gregorian or new style calendar was already in use, the date read 2 January 1837. In this book, with its international purview, all dates are given according to the new style.) The New Russian School consisted of a group of self-taught composers who had gathered around the charismatic Balakirev like a sort of real-life Davidsbund, opposing academic authority on the one hand and philistinism on the other. With the aid of Stasov's propaganda, and abetted by the journalistic activity of César Cui (a member of the group), they gradually achieved recognition under a whimsical nickname Stasov had invented for them: *moguchaya kuchka*, which means a "mighty little bunch." The five outstanding members of the circle—Balakirev himself, Cui (1835–1918), Alexander Borodin (1833–87), Modest Musorgsky (1839–81), and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908)—are often called the "Mighty Five" in English.

All of them made conspicuous contributions to the orientalist flood tide: Balakirev in an orchestral work called *Tamara* (1882), based on a poem by Mikhail Lermontov; Cui in an opera, *A Prisoner in the Caucasus* (1857; revised 1882), based on a poem by Pushkin; Borodin in an opera, *Prince Igor* (posthumously produced in 1890), and a "musical picture" for orchestra called *In Central Asia* (1880); Musorgsky in an unfinished opera based on the novel *Salammbô* by Gustave Flaubert; and Rimsky-Korsakov in many works including two symphonic suites: *Antar* (1868) and the very popular *Sheherazade* (1888), based on the *Arabian Nights*.

Balakirev's setting of Pushkin's verses in Ex. 7-19b, titled "Georgian Song," was made in 1865, a generation later than Glinka's, and is typical of the orientalism practiced by the Mighty Five. It is as exotic as could be. The melody is full of close little ornaments and melismas like the ones in Félicien David's muezzin's call (see Ex. 7-17b), but also full of telltale augmented seconds like the ones in Saint-Saëns's *Bacchanale* (Ex. 7-8)—even though the singer (that is, the speaker of Pushkin's lines) is not supposed to be an oriental himself but presumably a Russian. Most conspicuously "oriental" of all is the imitation in the accompaniment of Islamic drumming patterns with two pitched drums—the tar (a big frame drum) and the tabla (a higher cylindrical drum played with the individual fingers and capable of

producing rapid tattoos).

All of these stylistic effects have plenty of authentic prototypes—but only in Arabian, Turkish, and Persian music, or in the music of those Caucasian regions (Armenia and Azerbaijan) that absorbed influences from traditional Islamic practices. Georgian folk music uses none of them, and sounds nothing at all like Balakirev's "Georgian Song". Balakirev, who lived for long periods in the Caucasus, knew that perfectly well, but he wanted his listeners to get the point, and that meant sacrificing real verisimilitude to something more legible. Russians call it *khudozhestvennaya pravda*: "artistic truth." It is what Laroche had in mind in his comment on operatic representations of ancient oriental peoples. Orientalism again overrides the Orient.

So far, then, we have had an example (Glinka's) that was authentic but not exotic, and one (Balakirev's) that was exotic but not authentic. It is the latter that counts for orientalists (if not for ethnomusicologists) as verisimilar, hence truly oriental. But now consider a third setting of Pushkin's poem: the most famous one, by Sergey Rachmaninoff (1873–1943), written a generation later than Balakirev's, in 1892, when Rachmaninoff, a piano-playing and composing prodigy of nineteen, had just graduated from the Moscow Conservatory (Ex. 7-19c). It is far less verisimilar than Balakirev's and makes no pretense to authenticity. Yet with hardly an augmented second it speaks the sign language of Russian orientalism in a highly developed form, adding a great deal to our experience of the poem.

Rachmaninoff's setting also has conspicuous melismas: not little decorative authentic-sounding ones like Balakirev's, which sound a little strange in the mouth of the poet-speaker, but great sweeping ones that have a motivic consistency deriving from the opening neighbor note. The neighbor-note motif is usually sounded in pairs or in threes, with ties that connect resolution tones to the next preparation tone. The result is a syncopated undulation that is sounded in conjunction with two other distinctive musical gestures to complete a semiotic cluster (a set of signifiers that work together, deriving their meaning from their association): a drone (or drum) bass such as even Glinka had suggested, and—most important of all—a chromatic accompanying line that in this case steadily descends along with the sequences of undulating melismas.

To anyone familiar with the tradition on which it depends, the song's opening ritornello quite specifically conjures up the beautiful oriental maiden the song is about—not the one singing, but the one remembered. And the ritornello also tells us that she was the poet-singer's erotic partner; for the cluster of signs—undulating melisma, chromatic accompanying line, drone—evokes not just "the East" in general, but specifically its voluptuous allure. The syncopated undulation is iconically erotic; its contour paints a picture of languid limbs, writhing torsos, arching necks. The drum bass and the melismas are an echo of the stereotyped Islamic musical idiom that Balakirev had already evoked, sexuality's necessary ticket of admission (for "Western," Christian necks do not arch and writhe).

It is the descending chromatic line, possibly a vestige of the old *passus duriusculus* as mediated through Chopin, that is particularly interesting as an orientalist trope, because it is neither iconically nor stylistically "verisimilar." That is, it is neither realistic sexual portraiture nor specifically Asiatic in style. But though a purely arbitrary convention, it was a widely accepted one: a badge worn by exotic sexpots all over Europe, including France—or rather Spain (once an Islamic region, after all) seen through French eyes—as its most celebrated manifestation in all of opera reveals (Ex. 7-20).

Love is a wild bird whom nothing can restrain.
One calls upon it in vain, if it is inclined to refuse.

ex. 7-20 Georges Bizet, *Carmen*, Act I, "Habanera," mm. 1–12

The climax of Rachmaninoff's song (Ex. 7-19d)—undeniably a climax despite the soft dynamic—occurs at the setting of the last two lines, when the chromatic line is suddenly transferred from the middle of the texture to the voice part, at the top. Clearly it is the predominating sign of oriental sensuality, or what the Russians call *nega,* the bliss of gratified desire (or, more excitingly, the promise of it). Its origin as a musical trope lay in Glinka—not in his "Georgian Song," but in *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1842), his second opera, based on a mock-epic by Pushkin that is set partly in fictitious oriental lands. The composer who brought it to its peak of development was Alexander Borodin, one of the most gifted members of Balakirev's doughty "Davidsbund." Borodin was quite famous during his lifetime, but not as a musician. Like many of Balakirev's associates, he was a Sunday composer. As a chemist with an international reputation, he was one of Russia's leading scientists, and the founder and chief administrator of his country's first women's medical course. He had little spare time for the hobby that won him immortality, which is one reason why his largest work, the opera *Prince Igor*, was far from finished at the time of his death, although he had been working on it for eighteen years. Based on *The Song of Igor's Campaign*, a genuine epic of the twelfth century and Russia's first literary masterpiece, the opera was a veritable monument to Russian orientalism composed at a time when its plot—a tale of ill-fated hostilities between a Russian prince and Turkic nomads called Polovtsy whose encampments surrounded his domain—was being virtually played out in real life in the Russian empire's wars of aggression in Central Asia.

fig. 7-10 Costume for Borodin's opera *Prince Igor*.

On the way to it, Borodin also composed a number of shorter works with Eastern themes that could be looked upon as sketches toward his fully elaborated orientalist idiom. One of these spin-offs from the opera was a short song for contralto called *Arabskaya melodiya* ("Arabian melody"), composed in 1881. The tune is an authentic Arab melody, taken from a book. Again, however, the mode of the tune coincides with the familiar diatonic scale and does not give away its exotic origin to the Western ear. What marks Borodin's song as oriental is the snaking chromatic accompanying line, so obviously related to the one in Rachmaninoff's "Georgian Song" (Ex. 7-21), for which it served as model.

ex. 7-21 Alexander Borodin, *Arabskaya melodiya*, second strophe, mm. 1–8

Where Rachmaninoff's chromatic line (like Bizet's in *Carmen*) made a straightforward descent, however, Borodin's (like Glinka's in *Ruslan*) is serpentine, adding a new dimension of erotically iconic undulation. The point at which the change of direction takes place is very significant. The line descends to the fifth degree, then passes chromatically up to the sixth, then down again through the same interpolated half step, joined now by a middle voice that proceeds to repeat the same double pass twice, not counting a couple of extra undulations between the fifth degree and its chromatic upper neighbor. When the climax is reached—a climax as much sexual as musical—on the words "But even death is sweet to me, the death born of passion for thee," the rhythm of the undulation is excited into diminution and begins to spread out to neighboring scale degrees, ultimately to complete the chromatic gamut, as in Rachmaninoff.

The reversible chromatic pass between the fifth and sixth degrees is the essential *nega* undulation—the essential symbol or "marker" of sex à la russe—as a little snatch from the Chorus of Polovtsian Maidens at the beginning of *Prince Igor*'s second act will prove (Ex. 7-22a). Brief as it is, this little passage deploys the whole orientalist cluster with terrific economy: the text is about creature comfort and gratified desire (in this case the image of nocturnal dew following a sultry day is acting as *nega* metaphor); the sopranos contribute the melodic undulation, here a sort of pedal; the altos contribute the harmonic undulation, from the fifth degree to the sixth and back through a chromatic passing tone each way; and the orchestral bass instruments supply the drum/drone.

And now we are equipped to get the full message from the most famous music in *Prince Igor* (Ex. 7-22b). The famous "Polovtsian Dance" (immortalized for Americans as *Stranger in Paradise*, a pop standard from the Broadway musical *Kismet*) again displays the whole cluster—melodic undulations tied over the beat, a chromatic pass from the sixth scale degree to the fifth, a throbbing drumbeat in the bass, plus, in its orchestral garb, the sound of the English horn, the closest orchestral counterpart to the "snake-charmer's" pipe and another absolutely indispensable orientalist marker.

All of these features are displayed again in the "oriental" theme that confronts a Russian one directly in the "musical picture" *In Central Asia*, which celebrates the contemporary Russian military victories in the east quite directly (Ex. 7-22c). Its first statement, naturally enough, is an English horn solo. The one shown in Ex. 7-22c is the climactic one, in which the chromatic inner voice grows to encompass a whole scale, as in Rachmaninoff's later modeling of it, and

(also as in Rachmaninoff's song) moves out from an inner voice to a textural extremity, here the bass. It was a telling touch—and again, a typical one—to extend the length of each phrase in the melody to five bars through one extra languorous undulation ("please, just once more …"). What it tells us is why those hedonistic Central Asians were simply no match for the purposefully advancing Russians.

ex. 7-22a Alexander Borodin, *Prince Igor*, Chorus of Polovtsian Maidens

ex. 7-22b Alexander Borodin, *Prince Igor*, Polovtsian Dance

Nega saturation is maximized in *Prince Igor* by the use of a subplot, not present in the twelfth-century original, involving the romance of the title character's son Vladimir and Konchakovna, the daughter of their captor, the Polovtsian chieftain Khan Konchak. The pretext for her invention (by Stasov, as it happens, who provided Borodin with the opera's scenario) was a single line in the original in which two Polovtsian khans, Gzak and Konchak, consider "entoiling the falconet by means of a fair maiden,"⁴⁹ that is, sexually enslaving the young prince.

ex. 7-22c Alexander Borodin, *In Central Asia*, mm. 175–92

The result was something unique in the annals of opera: an ingénue ("innocent maiden in love") role played not by the usual lyric soprano but by the throatiest contralto imaginable. In the act II love duet, Konchakovna's voice coils all around and beneath Vladimir's tenor to startling effect. The falconet is indeed "entoiled by a fair maiden" —fascinated and emasculated. Never had there been such an emphasis on raised fifths, flattened sixths, and chromatic passes in general. They were the means of his enslavement. Passion mounts in two great waves in which the lovers occupy opposite positions; the *meno mosso* in the middle (Ex. 7-23), cast over the palpably chafing harmony of the dominant minor ninth, is where Konchakovna slides beneath. Her part obsessively applies the flattened sixth scale degree (D♭) to the fifth (C) while Vladimir, having gone through a variety of other chromatic passes, finally adopts hers at the fermata. She then turns around (*allegro appassionato*) and makes another pass at him, from raised fifth to sixth, while he yelps in response, his phrases narrowed down to the sign of chromatic passing in minimal, most concentrated form. The orchestral bass meanwhile gives out one of those complete chromatic descents that signal *nega* at full sensual strength.

Konchakovna: My sweet, my joy, my delight!   Vladimir: O repeat thy words of love,
                Yes, I love thee with all the passion,   let me hear them again, my darling!
                all the strength of my young soul.   Love me, my darling, my own,
                                                                       with all thy passion.

ex. 7-23 Alexander Borodin, from *Prince Igor*, Act II, Love Duet

They reach their first climax on a question ("Will you/I soon call me/you your/my wife?"), supported in the orchestra by a prolonged harmony rooted on the flat sixth—a harmony we have associated with altered, often ecstatic, emotional states since the days of Schubert, but never so patently sexual as here. The flat submediant finally makes its affirmative progress through the dominant to the F major tonic. The change from anxious question to rapt reply itself takes the form, for Vladimir, of a chromatic inflection (the sustained A♭ over ♭VI now trumped at the tonic by a sustained high A-natural). And while they both hold their final notes the orchestra harps repeatedly on the hypnotic undulation of fifth degree and flattened sixth. Vladimir is now thoroughly lost, his manhood *nega*ted, rendered impotent with respect to his (and his father's) bellicose mission. Prince Igor leaves him behind to perish, the victim of a sinister oriental charm.

Notes:

(47) See Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1992).

(48) Vladimir Vasilievich Stasov, "Dvadtsat' pyat' let russkogo iskusstvo: Nasha muzïka, *Vestnik YEvropï* (1882–83), in V. V. Stasov, *Izbrannïye sochineniya v tryokh tomakh*, Vol. II (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1952), p. 525.

(49) *The Song of Igor's Campaign*, trans. Vladimir Nabokov (New York: Vintage, 1960), p. 70.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Orientalism

Exoticism in Opera

Pyotr Ilyich Chaikovsky

THE OTHER IN THE SELF

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Self and Other
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The view of oriental "difference" as something sinister, and its transference to "ethnic" characters of all kinds, but especially sexy women, was one of the most significant artistic symptoms of the issues at stake in later nineteenth-century cultural politics. The most familiar bearer of orientalist tropes in the standard operatic repertoire, the title character of Bizet's *Carmen* (1875), is not even an "oriental" by the usual definition. As a Spanish Gypsy, however, she is a member of an ethnic minority (one, be it noted, with origins that can be traced to South Asia). For Prosper Mérimée, the author on whose story the opera was based, Carmen's exotic heritage made her an outsider to "mainstream" society and a threat to its denizens and their values. Bizet made this even clearer by casting every one of Carmen's solo numbers in an explicitly designated Spanish or Latin American dance form (habanera, seguidilla, etc.)—exotic, that is, not so much within the opera's stage world as in the world of its French audience.

The judgment of ethnic difference as alluring peril is embodied not only in the music but also in the plot, in which a good soldier, Don José, is (like Borodin's Vladimir) brought to moral ruin and vocational impotence by contact with the ethnic other and her irresistible charms. The story became a veritable archetype in later nineteenth and early twentieth-century opera, wryly summarized by the music historian Ralph P. Locke, who notes the omnipresence of a "young, tolerant, brave, possibly naive, white-European tenor-hero" (Borodin's Vladimir, Bizet's Don José, Meyerbeer's Vasco da Gama, and many later counterparts) who "intrudes," in pursuit of love or sex, "into mysterious dark-skinned, colonised territory" and is punished for it, usually along with the sex-object that lured him.[50]

Otherness, in this view, and especially female otherness, is likened to an addiction or a disease, against which Europeans need protection or inoculation. In a way we have come round again to Chopin, whose foreignness and whose diseased condition worked in tandem to mark him in the eyes of Parisians and Londoners both as a fascinating genius and as a toxic presence, the two aspects of his allure inextricably linked (and often read as effeminacy).

The progress of the view can be measured by *Carmen*'s dénouement, in which Don José ruins himself with a "crime of passion," killing his exotic temptress in the throes of jealousy. Although he is the criminal and she the victim, it is he, not she, who is marked by the music as the object of the audience's sympathy. Indeed, Susan McClary has gone so far as to suggest that "the urgency of Bizet's music invites us to desire Carmen's death."[51] The urgency to which McClary refers is the ordinary urgency of "tonal" music for thematic and harmonic closure. If her remark rings true, then, it must follow that along with the uplift and rapture that it affords, music can also serve (even simultaneously) as a dehumanizing influence, dehumanizing both the exotic victim and the momentarily depraved witnesses in the theater—yes, us.

But McClary also reminds us that Carmen's stage death does not end her disquieting hold on our imaginations. "We leave the theater humming her infectious tunes [like Ex. 7-20], and the closure that had seemed so indisputable opens up again."[52] The "other" is irrevocably a part of everyone's consciousness in the ethnically commingled world we now inhabit, and operas like *Carmen* were a part of the process through which Europeans (and lately Euro-Americans, too) came to terms with that new reality—the presence of the other within the self.

As suggested earlier, Russians were conscious of this presence sooner than most. A case in point is Pyotr Ilyich Chaikovsky (1840–93), one of the earliest conservatory-trained Russian composers, who held aloof from Balakirev and his Davidsbund, preferring to work within established institutions and media, becoming (as we shall see) one of

the great late nineteenth-century symphonists. He was far less inclined than were the "Mighty Five" to emphasize his "otherness" from Western European culture, less inclined to present himself as an exotic. Apart from a single character in a single opera (*Iolanta*, his last) and a single "Arabian Dance" in a single ballet (*The Nutcracker*, his last and most popular), Chaikovsky never showed the slightest interest in musical portrayals of "the East."

But that does not mean that Chaikovsky did not employ orientalist tropes in his music—far from it. He made extremely telling and effective use of them quite early in his career in a work that seems, on the face of it, quite unrelated in its thematic content to anything oriental: a concert overture (or "Overture-Fantasia," as Chaikovsky called it) on the subject of Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* (1869; revised 1870, 1880), a work that has long been in the standard orchestral repertory.

Like most concert overtures, it roughly follows sonata form in its sequence of events: slow introduction, bithematic exposition, development, recapitulation, coda. And each of these parts seems to be correlated with a character or plot component in the drama: the slow introduction, in ecclesiastical style, with Friar Laurence; the turbulent first thematic group with the feuding families; the lyrical second thematic group with the balcony scene, and so on.

The frank sensual iconicity of the balcony music is often remarked. One conspicuous reason for that impression is a throbbing, panting countermelody in the horn (see the end of Ex. 7-24b) that unmistakably evokes the physical manifestations of passion. But the love themes evoke *nega* just as surely by means of the orientalist trope we have already observed in *Prince Igor*, namely the strongly marked chromatic pass between the fifth and sixth degrees; and the first love theme (generally associated, though on no particular authority, with Romeo) features, on its first appearance, the equally marked English horn timbre (Ex. 7-24a).

Juliet responds to Romeo's advance with a theme of her own, mirroring his descending chromatic pass with an ascending one that is then maintained as an oscillation (or perhaps an osculation—a prolonged kiss), while Romeo's ecstatic reentry is prepared by reversing the pass once more by way of a transporting augmented-sixth progression (Ex. 7-24b). At the climax, delayed until the recapitulation, Chaikovsky enhances carnality by adding one more chromatic pass at the very zenith of intensity to introduce the last full statement from which the love music will then gradually subside (Ex. 7-24c). This music is easily as steamy as the love duet from *Prince Igor*, and the source of the steam in both, despite their differing subjects and settings, is the same.

ex. 7-24a Pyotr Ilyich Chaikovsky, *Romeo and Juliet* ("Overture-Fantasia"), main love theme (Romeo?)

ex. 7-24b Pyotr Ilyich Chaikovsky, *Romeo and Juliet* ("Overture-Fantasia"), subsidiary love theme (Juliet?)

ex. 7-24c Pyotr Ilyich Chaikovsky *Romeo and Juliet* ("Overture-Fantasia"), climax

For this we have corroboration from the best of witnesses. In a marvelously cruel letter to Chaikovsky, Balakirev, the peerless connoisseur of musical orientalism, reacted to the main themes of the work, which Chaikovsky had sent him for comment while composition was still in progress. To understand what he had to say about the big love theme one must know what Balakirev knew: that Chaikovsky was just then getting over an infatuation with the soprano Désirée Artôt, the one woman known to have aroused the otherwise homosexually inclined Chaikovsky's romantic interest, who had disappointed him by marrying the Spanish baritone Mariano Padilla y Ramos. Balakirev wrote to Chaikovsky that the theme given in Ex. 7-24a was

> simply enchanting. I often play it and have a great wish to kiss you for it. It has everything: *nega*, and love's sweetness, and all the rest. It appears to me that you are lying all naked in the bath and that Artôt-Padilla herself is rubbing your tummy with hot scented suds. I have just one thing to say against this theme: there is little in it of inner spiritual love, only the physical, passionate torment (colored just a wee bit Italian). Really now, Romeo and Juliet are not Persian lovers, but European. I'll try to clarify this by example. I'll cite the first theme that comes to mind in which, in my opinion, love is expressed more inwardly: the second, A♭-major, theme in Schumann's overture *The Bride of Messina*.[53]

Indeed, Schumann's long wet noodle of a love theme (Ex. 7-25), which reaches no climax, does seem as if by design to moderate the orientalism of Chaikovsky's, diluting the chromatic passes and replacing the lascivious English horn with a chaste (or, to use the German buzzword as Balakirev did, an "inward") clarinet.

ex. 7-25 Robert Schumann, *The Bride of Messina* Overture, second theme

Balakirev's letter confirms the impression that Chaikovsky used the orientalist trope metonymically, to conjure up not the East as such but rather its exotic sex appeal. The little tease about Artôt is provocative indeed, precisely because it is so plausible. If, as Balakirev seems to suggest, Chaikovsky had cast himself as Romeo to Artôt's Juliet, then the theme becomes a self-portrait. And if so, then it is a remarkable instance of that phenomenon, noticeable first in Russian music, whereby the eastward gaze is simultaneously a look in the mirror.

Notes:

(50) Ralph P. Locke, "Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* III (1991): 263.

(51) Susan McClary, *George Bizet: Carmen* (Cambridge Opera Handbooks; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 110.

(52) *Ibid.*

(53) Miliy Balakirev to Pyotr Chaikovsky (13 December 1869), in *Perepiska M. A. Balakirevas P. I. Chaikovskim*, ed. Sergey Lyapunov (St. Petersburg: Zimmerman, 1912), pp. 49–50.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 8 Midcentury

The New German School; Liszt's Symphonic Poems; Harmonic Explorations

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 Midcentury
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

HISTORICISM

Historians generally, and musicologists in particular, are seldom associated with the avant-garde. Their contemplative lifestyle and their antiquarian scholarly interests lend them an air, in uninitiated eyes, of conservatism. But historians of a certain type—or rather, adherents to a certain theory of history—have conspicuously allied themselves with avant-garde movements, seeing themselves not only as passive recorders of events but as active participants in their making. This type of activist historian, the product of a somewhat improbable union of Enlightened and romantic thought, reached a peak of prestige and authority in mid-nineteenth-century Germany, just as German music was reaching its own peak of prestige and authority, and when it was widely believed (not only by musicians) that "music is the sovereign art of the present."[1] The history of that country and that century, and particularly of that music, cannot be fully understood without some knowledge of the history of history.

As a historical method "historicism" has largely died out, victimized by the extremes of distortion and abuse to which its tenets were subjected in the twentieth century. Therefore, the name of its main musical protagonist will probably be new to most readers of this book: Karl Franz Brendel (1811–68), from whom the impressive quotation in the previous paragraph was taken. He may be forgotten today, but his memory is worth reviving. There was no more important figure in the world of German music at midcentury than this man, a doctor of philosophy with only a casual musical education (mainly piano lessons with Friedrich Wieck, Clara Schumann's father), who neither composed nor performed. His impact derived from the nature of his voluminous writings, and the social and political activism through which he put his precepts into practice.

fig. 8-1 Franz Brendel, music historian, editor of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, and organizer of the *Allgemeiner deutscher Musikverein.*

Brendel's great achievement was to write his century's most widely disseminated "universal" and "scientific" history of music: *Geschichte der Musik in Italien, Deutschland und Frankreich von den ersten christlichen Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart* ("History of Music in Italy, Germany and France from the Earliest Christian Times to the Present"). First published in 1852, by 1906 it had gone through nine editions. The words put in quotes in this paragraph's first sentence constitute the book's inheritance from the Enlightenment. It aspired to say everything that was important, and to say it in a way that put all facts into an overriding system that gave them meaning. The reasons for putting the words in quotes constitute the book's inheritance from romanticism. The limitation, despite the claim of universality, to the richest and most powerful countries of Western Europe is already evidence of the author's commitment to a view of history cast in terms of the progressive realization of an essential European spirit of which those countries were collectively the protagonist. And the science that gave his work system was the one worked out by the romantic (or "idealist") philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). It was known as the "dialectic."

In its broadest terms, the Hegelian dialectic has long been a cliché: human history develops according to a process in which one concept (thesis) inevitably gives rise to its opposite (antithesis), which then interacts with the thesis to

produce a resolution (synthesis) that in turn becomes the thesis for a new "triad." Thus nothing is static or immutable. The hypothetical or axiomatic first triad that sets history in motion—Being reacting with Negation to produce Becoming—stipulates that all of history must be conceived as a constant state of flux.

fig. 8-2 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, lithograph after a lost painting by Julius Ludwig Sebbers.

So far the theory is irrefutable: the first thing one notices in this or any study of history is that things change under the impact of other things. Everything that can be observed can be described either as a cause or as an effect, hence everything is both cause and effect in an endless chain. This much is not a theory of history but simply a description—or rather, a tautological definition—of how things happen. What sets the Hegelian dialectic apart from other interpretations of the great chain, such as Darwin's theory of biological evolution (first set forth in 1859 and immediately reinterpreted or misinterpreted in light of the dialectic), is that it purports to show not merely *that* things change or *how* things change, but *why* things change. The stipulation that change has purpose turns random process into law.

The law of history, as Hegel first postulated it in lectures at the University of Berlin that his pupils reconstructed from their notes and published as *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* in 1837, was this: "The history of the world

is none other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom." That is the first sentence of the book, and the notion from which the entire subsequent argument and demonstration is drawn. According to it, all meaningfully or significantly "historical" change (all change, in other words, that is worthy of representation in the dialectic) has contributed to this progress in the realization of human freedom, which Hegel called the progress of the "world soul." If it has not contributed to this progress, then, change has not been historically significant (or, in Hegelian terms, not "historical").

The doctrine remains a tautology, of course. While more specific than the baldly axiomatic statement of the dialectic, it still harbors a confusion of explanation with definition. And it obviously left a lot of things undefined—beginning with "Freedom," which many who called themselves Hegelians interpreted in ways Hegel never would have countenanced. But it was enormously attractive in its optimism, appearing as it did "between the revolutions." And it enabled its followers to believe, in the words of Karl Popper (one of historicism's most implacable foes), "that by contemplating history we may discover the secret, the essence of human destiny."[2] It offered, in sum, the authority of science and consolations of religion; and it was believed in, and defended, not only as history but as prophecy.

The Hegelian dialectic was infinitely adaptable to other philosophies of process. Its great virtue was its power to lend any such process the aspect of systematic logic in support of a purpose (or anything deemed good, true, or beautiful). It was especially fruitful in conjunction with romantic ideas of "organic" growth toward diversification within a higher unity, and here is where it made its greatest impact on the histories of art and politics, and provided a means for yoking the two together.

As the first self-consciously Hegelian historian of music, Brendel cast his narrative in terms of successive emancipations, both of musicians and of the art itself. Before the sixteenth century all was primitive, mere "prehistory," because in Brendel's ears (and here he did not differ from his contemporaries) such music did not intelligibly express the ideas or feelings of individual creators. All musicians were slaves to the mechanical rules of counterpoint, as people generally were enslaved by the dogmas of the medieval Church.

The first great composer, in Brendel's reckoning, was Palestrina, who, reflecting the romantic interpretation of the Renaissance, broke through to true spiritual expressivity. What he expressed, however, was not yet a personal sensibility but rather the collectively held beliefs of his religious community. His art was "sublime" rather than "beautiful," because it continued to address a higher-than-human plane. But while it still fulfilled prescribed ecclesiastical functions, its euphony and expressive power already showed the way toward artistic autonomy.

The phase of "beauty" was reached when the spiritual, freed from its ecclesiastical bonds, could be expressed in fully human (that is, secular) terms. The rise of opera bore witness to it. And the next stage—the fully-fledged "esthetic"—came with the emancipation of music from words in the instrumental masterpieces of the German classical masters. Their music, now able to realize its own essential spirit, able at last to evolve spontaneously and autonomously (that is, according to its own laws), was effectively a metaphor for the advancement of humanity toward ultimate self-realization. The very autonomy of the new instrumental music (implying freedom from all "extramusical" association or constraint) made it a political symbol—hence re-enmeshing it in extramusical ideas. That is a small example of the dialectic in action.

The value of music could be measured best, in the Hegelian view, in terms of the degree to which it embodied its own epoch's evolutionary synthesis and pointed the way to the next. Composers were valuable (or not) to the degree that their actions advanced the tendencies inherent in the musical materials toward further autonomous evolution. Unsurprisingly, the most advanced, hence most valuable, composers were Germans: Bach and Handel (the latter viewed bizarrely as a church musician), who were the last and most consummate representatives of the sublime epoch, and Gluck, Haydn, and Mozart, who brought to its first full fruition the epoch of the esthetic. Needless to say, Beethoven's popular image as music's emancipator supreme received a resounding confirmation.

But the most provocative chapter of Brendel's *History* was the last, because of the way the author maintained his account of progressive emancipation even beyond Beethoven, into what was then the present. This was at the time a very unconventional and risky move, since it potentially threatened the status of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven as "classics"—that is, as having set a timeless (and therefore unimprovable) standard. For a German historian, nothing short of the nation's honor was at stake in this historical "fact." Denying it was unthinkable. Brendel got around the problem in two ways. First, he posited that every age (or stage) had its perfect representatives. Hence Bach was not invalidated by Mozart, nor Mozart by Beethoven, and so Beethoven would never be invalidated either; his status was secure. Second, he obediently gave the chapter concerning the present the title *Verfall* (decline), in keeping with

what was by then an inescapable art historian's obligation.

And yet the chapter's contents roundly belied its title. The music of the man Brendel singled out as the greatest composer then living carried on the torch, advancing both the progressive consciousness of freedom and the progressive attainment of esthetic (or organic) unity. The ostentatiously Hegelian terms in which the author couched his description of that composer's achievement left no doubt that Brendel saw the latter's work as a new synthesis, a new transcendence begetting a new thesis—a new dawn—for music:

> It is the unity of the poetic and the musical, and the progress to a new consciousness of this unity, that deserves to be called the essential novelty in the artistic creations under discussion. In earlier phases, but especially with Beethoven, the conscious thought—the sovereignty of the poetic Idea—emerges only along with a soaring of ideals and a gravity of contents, as the end result; but here these factors constitute the point of departure, the foundation of the whole creation. Hence, this conscious side now has a commanding significance. Here we see that earlier process concluded: the summit of thinking, toward which everything strives, has been achieved with precision, and thereby the sovereignty of Idea has been elevated to the status of a governing principle.[3]

Let identification and exemplification wait for a moment while we savor the rhetoric. The high premium placed on embodied consciousness and precision of thought might seem to contradict the usual romantic emphasis on feeling. But as Carl Dahlhaus pointed out in his history of musical esthetics, what is really accomplished is the final proof of an even more fundamental romantic intuition: namely the superiority of instrumental music to vocal.[4] Here Brendel purported to correct not only Beethoven, who in the Ninth Symphony seemed to imply that the incorporation of voices was a breakthrough to a higher unity, but also Hegel himself, who in his own treatise on esthetics had endorsed the eighteenth century's preference for vocal music. Brendel could presume to use the dialectic against its own originator because the system was greater than any person.

That is what gave Brendel's work such enduring prestige and such a lasting influence even among musicians who have never heard of him. As the editor of the book's fifth edition (1875) put it in his Preface, "all contemporary criticism, consciously or unconsciously, is under its sway," because "for the first time a synthesis [!] appeared of material that formerly had only the exterior unity of an arbitrary narrative, showing the history of music to be a great, self-evolving whole under the control of law."[5] Ever since the appearance of Brendel's *History*, historicism has been a force not only in the historiography of music but in its actual history as well.

That is, ever since the middle of the nineteenth century, there has been abroad the idea that the history of music (like the history of everything else) has a purpose, and that the primary obligation of musicians is not to their audience but to that purpose—namely, the furthering of the "evolutionary" progress of the art, for the sake of which any sacrifice is justified. Ever since the middle of the nineteenth century, in other words, the idea that one is morally bound to serve the impersonal aims of history has been one of the most powerful motivating forces, and one of the most exigent criteria of value, in the history of music. As recently as 1993, in a widely noticed review, a critic sought to discredit a new symphony that had enjoyed unusual audience acclaim by declaring that it did not "add anything to the universe of musical possibility."[6] Such criticism has become common, so common as to seem commonplace, even commonsensical. In fact, it depends entirely on the historicist assumptions that Franz Brendel was the first to introduce into musical criticism.

Brendel's own way of putting it was to say that "the essence of today's art" can no longer be realized in "the old naturalistic way"—that is, instinctively or intuitively by musicians out to please their patrons or their listeners—but only with "the intervention of theory and criticism," and by "art's presupposing theory and criticism within itself."[7] The age of creative innocence was over; self-conscious theory, based on a high consciousness of purpose and of history, was the only true path to the future. Furthermore, that consciousness of purpose, being the road to self-realization, made the future graspable in the present. The path of destiny was marked out to those in the know. Others did not matter. The self-conscious few, history's self-appointed "advance guard" or *avant garde*, now saw themselves (following the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's famous definition of his own calling) as "the unacknowledged legislators of the world."[8]

Perhaps needless to say, these contentions have been among the most controversial ideas of their time, a time that extends right up to the present and shows little sign of abatement. Their advent marks the beginnings of the modern—or modernist—age of music, which has also been the age of revolutionary politics. Both in art and in

politics, it has been the age in which (to quote Richard Kostelanetz, a contemporary American theorist of the avant-garde) "an innovative minority makes the leaps that will be adopted by the many"—or that, according to the theory, ought by rights to be adopted. The invidious comparison implicit in this idea—or rather the elitism, to give it its contemporary *nom de guerre*—has understandably given rise to angry backlashes and counterrevolutions. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the world of classical music has been a world riven with political factions and contentious publicity.

Of these, too, there is no end in sight, for we still live in the age of historical and theoretical self-consciousness whose birth we are now witnessing, and of which this very book is a product. That self-consciousness—together with the obligations it has been seen to impose on its proponents and the fierce conflicts to which it has given rise—will be something to reckon with on virtually every remaining page of this book. From here on we are truly investigating the history of the present.

Notes:

(1) Franz Brendel, *Geschichte der Musik in Italien, und Deutschland Frankreich von den ersten christlichen Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart* (5th ed., Leipzig: Verlag von Heinrich Matthes [F. C. Schilde], 1875), p. 594.

(2) Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 269. It is surely not without significance for readers of this book that, according to his autobiography, Popper's insights into the poverty of historicism originated in the context of the "progressivist" theory of music history traced in this very chapter: see Karl Popper, *Unended Quest: An Intellectual Autobiography* (LaSalle and London: Open Court, 1982), p. 68ff.

(3) Brendel, *Geschichte der Musik* (4th ed., Leipzig, 1867), p. 623; quoted in Carl Dahl-haus, *Esthetics of Music*, trans. William Austin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 57.

(4) Dahlhaus, *Esthetics of Music*, p. 58.

(5) F. Stade, "Vorwort zur fünften Auflage," in F. Brendel, *Geschichte der Musik* (5th ed., Leipzig: Verlag von Heinrich Matthes [F. C. Schilde], 1875), xx–xxi.

(6) Paul Griffiths, "Zwilich in F-Sharp," *The New Yorker*, 15 March 1993, p. 116.

(7) Brendel, *Geschichte der Musik* (4th ed.), p. 624; quoted in Dahlhaus, *Esthetics of Music*, p. 63.

(8) Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry* (1821).

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Karl Franz Brendel

Robert Schumann

Franz Liszt

New German School

THE NEW GERMAN SCHOOL

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 Midcentury
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The first self-conscious proponent of the musical avant-garde was Brendel himself, in his role as activist—a role his historical vision (by his own typically Hegelian avowal) had thrust upon him unbidden. During his youthful piano studies with Friedrich Wieck in Leipzig, Brendel naturally came to know a fellow pupil named Robert Schumann. After receiving his doctorate he returned to Leipzig in 1844 and lectured on music history as preparation for his magnum opus. That plan was temporarily put on hold when Schumann asked him to take over the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. Brendel formally became its editor with the issue of 1 January 1845 and remained in that position for almost a quarter of a century, until his death. Already the established voice of the German musical left, the journal was an effective forum and power base.

To Schumann's eventual consternation, Brendel turned the journal in a frankly political direction when he began agitating in its pages, under the guise of music criticism, for German unification. It should have been no surprise; on the contrary, it was the inevitable nationalistic outcome of commitment to Hegel's teachings, with their emphasis on the realization of the spirit through unity. The political faction that pressed hardest for unification was the group that called themselves the Young Hegelians. For them, the goal of unification was eventual German hegemony over Europe. This new (or neo-) Hegelianism became the philosophical underpinning, in the second half of the century, for a new, aggressive brand of German nationalism, to which Marxism, another radical offshoot of Hegelian thinking, became the antithesis.

The Young Hegelian character of Brendel's activity as spokesman for the German musical left became especially evident in 1859 when in celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* the indefatigable editor organized at Weimar, Goethe's town, and in Leipzig, the journal's birthplace, a great convocation of musicians from all parts of Germany, out of which emerged an organization called the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein, the All-German Musical Society, for the purpose of agitation and propaganda on behalf of the musical tendency to which Brendel had devoted the culminating chapter of his *History* seven years before. In his widely publicized keynote address, Brendel christened that faction the New (or neo-) German School. The guest of honor at the convocation, the honorary president of the society, and the figurehead of the New German School was the same man whose music Brendel had held aloft (in the passage from his *History* quoted earlier) as a beacon of "progress to a new consciousness" of music's historical obligation. That man was Franz Liszt.

Liszt? That virtuoso? That eclectic? He wasn't even German! But since we left him in chapter 5 his life had undergone a remarkable change. In 1848, possibly under the influence of Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein, a brilliantly intellectual, immensely wealthy Polish noblewoman (née Iwanowska) whom he had met the year before at his recital in Kiev (and who would be to the end of his life not only his mistress but his muse and ghostwriter), Liszt unexpectedly retired from the concert stage and took up full-time residence in Weimar, the capital of a small, secluded, and (by mid nineteenth-century standards) sleepy East German duchy where Bach had once played the organ, and where Liszt had rather perfunctorily been given an honorary court appointment several years earlier. Nobody expected him, an international star, really to fill such a post. As the English novelist George Eliot put it, visiting Weimar on her honeymoon, "One's first feeling is: how could Goethe live here, in this dull, lifeless village?"[9] How much less could the likes of Liszt?

fig. 8-3 Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein with her daughter Marie, lithograph by C. Fischer after a painting by Casanova (1844).

But with the fantastic energy he had formerly devoted to his pianistic career, Liszt now became the court kapellmeister to end all kapellmeisters. The musical establishment of which he assumed the reins was measly: an orchestra of thirty-seven, a chorus of twenty-three and a corps de ballet of four. Liszt had little conducting experience. But by dint of his personality, his high ambitions, his prestige, and the enthusiastic generosity of his patron, the Grand Duchess Maria Pawlowna of Saxe-Weimar (sister of the Russian tsar Nikolai I), he soon turned the backward town into what his biographer Humphrey Searle called "the Mecca of the avant-garde movement in Germany."[10]

In the first place, Liszt greatly expanded and modernized his equipment, so that the Weimar court orchestra came to represent the midcentury state of the art. Those who composed for it (meaning, in the first instance, Liszt himself and his hired orchestrators) were encouraged to exploit its resources to the hilt. In furtherance of his aim to create the ideal music machine, Liszt summoned from Leipzig the already famous nineteen-year-old prodigy Joseph Joachim (1831–1907), a former protégé of Mendelssohn and Schumann, to preside over the orchestra as Konzertmeister (leader of the first violins) beginning in 1850. After several years of service, however, Joachim's loyalty to his former masters and their attitudes toward the Viennese classics won out over his contractual

commitments to the avant-garde and he resigned the post, later becoming (along with his best friend and contemporary Johannes Brahms, another Schumann protégé) one of the New German School's most tireless public detractors.

But Liszt's presence brought many sincere disciples to Weimar, the most important being the composers Joachim Raff (1822–82) and Peter Cornelius (1824–74), and the pianist Hans von Bülow (1830–94), who married Liszt's daughter Cosima and under his tutelage became the great conductor of the age. These younger men, together with Liszt, formed the early nucleus of the New German School. Taking advantage of his protected position as a court musician, Liszt placed himself as conductor at the service of the most advanced, formidable, and politically risky composers of the time, particularly Richard Wagner (then a political exile from Germany). Liszt gave the widely publicized and acclaimed first performance of Wagner's romantic opera *Lohengrin* (on a German knightly legend) in 1850, as well as notable productions of operas by Schumann (*Genoveva*) and Berlioz (*Benvenuto Cellini*).

fig. 8-4a Joachim Raff. He and Peter Cornelius, shown in Fig. 8-4b, were two mainstays of the "new German school."

Finally, and most important, Liszt used his abundant remaining time at Weimar to produce a remarkable series of avant-garde compositions of his own, many of which he had roughly conceived at the keyboard during his whirlwind

touring years, but had never had the time to work out on paper. Temporarily abandoning the piano, he turned to the orchestra he now led as his medium of choice. At first, since he had no training and little experience as an orchestrator, he farmed out the task to assistants: at first a minor composer of comic operas named August Conradi (1821–73), but later Raff, whom Liszt summoned to Weimar and personally supported for this purpose. Later, having performed the music and had the experience of hearing and revising the scoring of his works in long and painstaking rehearsals (a process Joachim found particularly unendurable), Liszt became a master of ostentatious orchestration in his own right.

fig. 8-4b Peter Cornelius.

The works he produced in this fashion were the ones Brendel extolled in the final chapter of his *History* as "the summit of thinking," the culmination of the whole historical process toward which everything up to that time had striven. Liszt eventually called them *symphonische Dichtungen*, symphonic poems, echoing the Hegelian ideal of "unity of the poetic and the musical." They are single-movement orchestra works, sometimes as long the average symphony, sometimes only as long as a good-size first movement, that are outfitted with titles and (sometimes) brief prefaces to specify the "poetic" content the music will expound.

In their various aspects Liszt's symphonic poems had plenty of precedents. Specific "poetic" content can be found not

only in programmatic symphonies like Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* or David's *Désert*, but also in the type of theater or opera overture (like Beethoven's *Coriolanus* or *Egmont*, or Weber's *Der Freischütz*) that seek to summarize or otherwise evoke the drama to which they are appended. The closest precedents, perhaps, were Mendelssohn's concert overtures, self-sufficient works to which no drama was appended (although the first of them, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, still took its cue from one). Liszt actually referred to his early symphonic poems as overtures, or sometimes (more vaguely, but also more tellingly) as "free-form compositions," before arriving at the definitive name in 1854, before any of them had been published.

As for compressed single-movement form, Liszt's own piano concertos and Schumann's *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra provided models that, while lacking any specified poetic or programmatic content, were certainly not lacking in drama. These works (not to mention Berlioz's symphony with its idée fixe) also employed the technique of thematic transformation, or perpetual variation, on which Liszt would rely to give shape (if not conventional form) to his symphonic poems. Why then, in view of so many apparent forerunners, did the symphonic poems seem to so many contemporaries to be not merely a new genre, but a breakthrough to a new artistic plane?

The reason had to do, first of all, with the nature of the poetic content, which in most cases was neither narrative nor pictorial, but philosophical, staking out a loftier expressive sphere than any composer save Beethoven had previously addressed, and doing so, moreover, with an explicitness that seemed to exceed—or at least claimed plausibly to exceed—Beethoven's powers. Liszt himself implied such a claim, which, he maintained, was a contemporary musician's privilege and duty, and the only way of paying Beethoven proper tribute. "Although Dresden and a hundred other cities may 'stop at Beethoven' (to whom, while he lived, they much preferred Haydn and Mozart), that is no reason for Weimar to do so," Liszt wrote to a dubious court official in 1855. "There is no doubt nothing better than to respect, admire and study the illustrious dead," he continued,

> but why not also live with the living? The significance of the musical movement of which Weimar is the real centre lies precisely in this initiative, about which the public understands little, but which is nevertheless important for the continued development of contemporary art.[11]

To many others, of course, in Dresden and a hundred other cities (including Berlin, where during the 1850s Liszt's orchestral music was regularly hissed and jeered), avant-garde posing of this sort, with its haughty implication that the interests of art and its audience had irreconcilably diverged, seemed the most intolerable hubris. And there was more. Liszt and his spokesmen made the patently Hegelian claim that with the symphonic poem he had at last ushered in the age of music's full equality among the arts as a bearer of meaning, a necessary precondition to its "sovereignty."

As usual, the spokesmen made the claim more sweepingly and arrogantly than the master. Liszt's own version (probably drafted by the Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein) took the form of a rather modestly worded *avant-propos* (foreword) meant for distribution at performances of any of his symphonic poems, to silence doubts or disagreements as to his intent. Addressing first the problem of music's suitability to extramusical tasks, he conceded that "the poorest of apprentice landscape painters could give with a few chalk strokes a much more faithful nature picture than a musician operating with all the resources of the best orchestras." But of course there was a *but*. "If these same things are laid open to subjective contemplation, to dreaming, to emotional uplift, have they not a kinship with music, and should not music be able to translate them into its mysterious language?"[12]

This is not so far from what George Sand, speaking for Chopin, said about the content of the latter's music in the previous chapter: one paints not the thing but the emotion to which it gives rise. But Liszt wanted more. He wanted to specify "the thing" rather than leaving it to the listener's imagination. And that justified the use—inherited from Berlioz but very much against the traditional German romantic biases that Schumann had passionately defended in his review (in the "old" *Neue Zeitschrift*) of the *Symphonie fantastique*—of verbal notes and explanations, in short, of programs. As Liszt put it in the *avant-propos*:

> Since the musician's language is more arbitrary and more uncertain than any other, and lends itself to the most varied interpretations, it is not without value (and most of all not ridiculous, as it is often thought) for the composer to give in a few lines the spiritual sketch of his work and, without falling into petty and detailed explanations, convey the idea which served as the basis for his composition. This will prevent faulty elucidations, hazardous interpretations, idle quarrels with intentions the composer never had, and endless commentaries which rest on nothing.

Brendel went much further, in a handbook *Franz Liszt als Symphoniker* ("Franz Liszt as a symphonist") published in 1859, the year of the great Leipzig Lisztfest. There he made the brazen claim that beginning with Liszt, and only with him, "content creates its own form."[13] If the implied dichotomy between form and content is accepted as real (and this itself was, and remains, a major battle) then Liszt's achievement, as described by Brendel, counts as a double emancipation. On the one hand, content itself is liberated from an earlier state of contingency, and music is thus freed to express it more directly than before. And on the other, composers are freed from their dependency on the traditional *Formenlehre*, the standard repertory of forms in which all previous music, even Beethoven's, had perforce been cast.

In a review of *Harold in Italy*, Berlioz's symphony with viola obbligato, which appeared in the "new" *Neue Zeitschrift* in 1855, Liszt himself (or his ghostwriter) had come out aggressively in favor of programmatic music as "one of the various steps forward which the art has still to take" toward "the poetic solution of instrumental music." He took the offensive against what he called "the purely musical composer," who "only values and emphasizes the formal working-out of his material," and who therefore forfeits "the capacity to derive new formulations from it or to breathe new life into it."[14] Given the Hegelian premises on which Liszt based the argument, "purely musical composers" had good reason to think that they were being declared useless and obsolete.

The last straw was the slogan *la musique de l'avenir*: "the music of the future," or *Zukunftsmusik* (as it became widely known in Germany), along with its derivatives like *Zukunftsmusiker* (musician of the future) for composers of the New German School and *Zukunftskonzerte* (concerts of the future) for performances of their works. The term was apparently coined by the Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein after the premiere of *Lohengrin*, when Brendel suggested that the work was beyond the capacities of present-day audiences. "Very well," came the smug rejoinder, "we are creating the music of the future."[15]

The phrase immediately began resounding in the pages of the *Neue Zeitschrift* and in Liszt's correspondence. Needless to say, it quickly turned counterproductive, a great source of fun for the group's antagonists. Finally, in his 1859 keynote address, Brendel called for its abandonment in favor of "New German School." But by then it was too late. It was pointed out that New German School was a misnomer in any case, since two of its elder statesmen, Liszt and Berlioz, were not German. To this Brendel retorted that it was "common knowledge" that these two had taken "Beethoven as their point of departure and so are German as to their origins."

Warming to the subject, he continued:

> The birthplace cannot be considered decisive in matters of the spirit. The two artists would never have become what they are today had they not from the first drawn nourishment from the German spirit and grown strong with it. Therefore, too, Germany must of necessity be the true homeland of their works, and it is in this sense that I suggested the denomination New German School for the entire post-Beethoven development.[16]

While the occasion that elicited it might be written off as a tempest in a teapot, this was a remarkable pronouncement. It testified to a new conception of nationhood and nationalism that had arisen in the wake of Hegel, or rather in the wake of the political activism that Hegel had inspired among the Young Hegelians. Germanness was henceforth no longer to be sought in folklore. One showed oneself a German not ethnically but spiritually, by putting oneself in humanity's vanguard.

The new nationalism appeared to sacrifice the distinctive national coloring that Herder had prized. In a sequel to his *History* called "The Music of the Present and the Holistic Art of the Future" (*Die Musik der Gegenwart, und die Gesammtkunst der Zukunft*, 1854), Brendel had dismissed such coloring as mere surface decoration (*Schmuck*). But the new concept made a far greater claim for the nation than the old. Germany was now viewed as the world-historical (*welthistorisch*) nation in Hegel's sense of the word, the nation that held the key to history and served as the executor of history's grand design, the nation whose actions led the world to its inevitable destiny. And so it came about (according to Arnold Schoenberg a twentieth-century advocate of the concept) "that German music came to decide the way things developed, as it has for 200 years."[17]

Notes:

(9) Quoted in Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years 1848–61* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), p.

250.

(10) Humphrey Searle, "Liszt," in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. XI (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 31.

(11) Franz Liszt to Freiherr Beaulieu-Marconnay, Intendant of the Court Theater at Weimar, 21 May 1855; *Letters of Franz Liszt*, Vol. I, ed. La Mara (New York: Haskell House, 1968), pp. 241–42.

(12) Franz Liszt, General Preface to the symphonic poems; F. Liszt, *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. I (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1901); quoted in Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years*, p. 358.

(13) The claim had previously been made in a more general context in Franz Brendel, *Die Aesthetik der Tonkunst, Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Vol. XLVI (1857), p. 186; trans. Martin Cooper in Bojan Bujic, ed., *Music in European Thought 1851–1912* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 130.

(14) Liszt, "Berlioz and His 'Harold' Symphony," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Vol. XLIII (1855); in Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History* (New York: Norton, 1950), pp. 859, 863.

(15) Lina Ramann, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch*, Vol. III (Leipzig, 1894), p. 69; quoted in Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years*, p. 336; Ramann's evidence was an 1875 letter from Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein herself.

(16) *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Vol. L (1859), p. 272, trans. Piero Weiss in P. Weiss and R. Taruskin, *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, 2nd ed., p. 328.

(17) Arnold Schoenberg, "National Music" (1931), trans. Leo Black, in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 170.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Symphonic poem

Liszt: Symphonic poems

THE SYMPHONY LATER ON

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 Midcentury
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Except for the chauvinistic bombast, to be taken on faith or not at all, we can put all this heady rhetoric and theorizing to the test at last by examining one of Liszt's symphonic poems. *Les préludes*, eventually published in 1856 as Symphonic Poem No. 3 with a dedication to Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein, was not the first of the set to be performed. It was the first to have been conceived and sketched, however, possibly as early as 1841; and it is the only one of the thirteen to have survived in standard repertory. It is also one of the shortest and (partly in consequence) one of the most radical, and is for all of these reasons perhaps the most revealing of Liszt's innovative project.

fig. 8-5 Alphonse de Lamartine, by Henri Decaisne.

The title is that of a famous poem, from *Nouvelles méditations poétiques* (New Poetic Meditations, 1823) by Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869), one of the loftiest, most philosophical romantic poets. On its first publication, the work was actually titled *Les préludes* (*d'après Lamartine*) ("The preludes, after Lamartine"), and carried a prefatory note that looked, and was evidently designed to look, like a précis of the poem:

What else is our life but a series of preludes to that unknown Hymn, the first and solemn note of which is intoned by Death?

Love is the glowing dawn of all existence; but in whose fate are the first delights of happiness not interrupted by some storm, the mortal blast of which dissipates its fine illusions; the fatal lightning of which consumes its altar; and where is the cruelly wounded soul which, on issuing from one of these tempests, does not endeavor to rest his recollection in the calm serenity of life in the countryside? Nevertheless man hardly gives himself up for long to the enjoyment of the beneficent stillness which at first he has shared in Nature's bosom, and when "the trumpet sounds the alarm," he hastens to the dangerous post, whatever the war may be, which calls him to its ranks, in order at last to recover in combat the full consciousness of himself and the entire possession of his energy.

The program has been tailored for music, of course; following the sonorous invocation of the Question (mm. 1–46) it comprises four episodes—Love (mm. 47–108), Storm (mm. 109–181), Bucolic Calm (mm. 182–344), Battle-and-Victory (mm. 345–end, with a recapitulation of the Question at m. 405)—corresponding to the movements of a conventional symphony if not in the most conventional order (yet ending *very* conventionally with *Kampf und Sieg*!). It has been thoroughly Germanized as well, the main trophy of battle being full consciousness of Self, just what Dr. Hegel would have prescribed.

ex. 8-1 Table of themes derived from the main motive in Liszt's *Les préludes* (Symphonic Poem no. 3)

The music, while heavily indebted in concept to Berlioz, self-consciously advertises its descent from Beethoven even as it flaunts its freedom from the formal constraints to which Beethoven had submitted. This, of course, is no mere contradiction; rather it is an "antithesis" that leads to the achievement of the next—higher—liberating synthesis. After a mysterious pair of pizzicato Cs that seemingly invoke the lyre of the muse whom Lamartine summons to his side at the outset of his poem, the Question is broached in the form of a three-note *échappée* figure, plus a continuation (see Ex. 8-1).

The most obvious reason for separating the first three notes from the continuation is that Liszt himself so separates and repeats them in mm. 6–9, thus marking them as an independent motive. A more esoteric reason, yet probably known to a large part of the audience to whom the work was originally addressed, is that Beethoven had already propounded a very similar *échappée* motive (albeit jestingly) as a great philosophical enigma in a note preceding the last movement of his last quartet (F major, op. 135). Under the heading "The Difficult Resolution," the motive and its inversion are set out over the words "Muss es sein?" (Must it be?) and "Es muss sein!" (It must be!) (Ex. 8-2).

ex. 8-2 Ludwig van Beethoven, *Der schwer gefasste Entschluss*, Op. 135

Liszt was not jesting. It was a measure, he (or at least Brendel) would have said, of the long way music had come since Beethoven's day that composers could now give serious treatment to philosophical questions that formerly could only be broached vaguely, or else ruefully mocked. And the treatment Liszt gave the question embodied in the three-note motif is the third and most important reason to consider the motif as an independent entity, since every major theme in the ensuing composition—every answer to the Question (or "prelude to that unknown Hymn")—is fashioned out of the question's intervallic substance, set out in Ex. 8-1.

This was by all odds the most thoroughgoing demonstration Liszt ever gave of his technique of thematic transformation. In light of the preface invoking Lamartine, the conceptual source of the technique can be easily traced to Berlioz's operatically derived idée fixe, the device that had unified the *Symphonie fantastique*, the prototype of all later compositions with specific literary programs. And yet there is a genuinely Beethovenian element as well, in the whittling down of the decisive unit of recognition from a full-fledged theme to a tiny motive. This refinement—the weaving of the whole symphonic fabric out of a motivic thread that comes, in turn, directly out of the poem—seemed as if deliberately meant to justify Brendel's claim that Liszt's symphonic poems ushered in a new age of music in which "content creates its own form."

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Programme music

New German School

BUT WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN?

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 Midcentury
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

So it may come as a disquieting (or perhaps an amusing) surprise to learn that the music was mostly conceived in an altogether different poetic context, and thus preexisted the content that supposedly created it. The American Liszt scholar Andrew Bonner has found documentation to confirm the suspicion of earlier writers that what we now know as the symphonic poem *Les préludes* was originally conceived as the overture to *Les quatre élémens* ("The four elements"), a group of four choruses that Liszt wrote in 1844 to words by a minor French poet named Joseph Autran (1813–77), and was largely based on themes drawn from the choruses. It is possible that some retouching—adding a harp part, strengthening a bit of the thematic transformation and making it more obvious—followed the decision to ascribe the content to Lamartine, but the music only follows that content in the most general way, and the program's all-important motivating Question nowhere occurs in Lamartine's poem.

Given the exalted claims that were being made on his behalf, and the contentious critical climate surrounding his work, Liszt was understandably embarrassed, as Bonner notes, "that the program had not in this case determined the music,"[18] and took steps (including the destruction of the overture's original title page) to suppress the composition's early history. These circumstances have magnified the glee with which the record has been set straight, and inspired the claim (by Emil Haraszti, the first to suspect the truth) that the corrected record invalidated the claims of the Zukunftists.

But does it really? The claim was never made, after all, that the music explicitly paraphrased the poetic content, only that it paralleled the content and conveyed its emotional impact to the listener. The means of embodiment and conveyance was and remains symbolic, hence conventional, no matter what the content. The content, therefore, can be viewed as a particular interpretation of the music, just as any symbolic representation has to be interpreted (even one consisting of words, such as an allegory or a parable). The association of the music with the choruses of *Les quatre élémens* was one such interpretation; the ex post facto association with Lamartine was another, just as plausible or appropriate, but no more demonstrably "true." In either case—that is, in both cases equally—the representational tasks that the music had to accomplish conditioned not only its thematic content but its form as well. Take away the symbolic dimension, in either case, and the form loses a significant part of its motivation. This or that program may be attached or discarded; but a program is self-evidently required to account for the sui generis form of the music, its highly characterized and contrasted thematic content (drawing on such recognizable generic types or *topoi* as the stormy, the pastoral, and the military), and its multitude of carefully worked-out motivic relations that subsumes contrast within an overarching narrative unity. The music of *Les préludes* all by itself would likely impress a naive listener (that is, a listener without any preconceptions) the way an obviously allegorical painting might strike a naive viewer. Both might be greatly pleased and moved by the sheer sonorous or visual display; yet both might also be aware that there is a dimension of meaning to which they at the moment lack access.

It comes down, then, to a choice of allegories. Liszt proposed the later one, via Lamartine, as part of a broad agenda to which he and Brendel and the rest of the New German School attached enormous esthetic, historical, and political importance; hence his urgent insistence on only the second associative reading of the music and his deliberate suppression of the first. Yet neither his insistence on the one program, nor Haraszti's insistence on the other as the true meaning of the music, can be supported simply by reading the music. A third program, if advanced authoritatively in the absence of other alternatives, might be just as convincing, hence just as "true." This relativism need trouble us only if we resist the notion that associative meanings of all kinds, however compelling and however necessary, are virtually by definition conventional, hence artificial. And we will be troubled in this way only if we have never given thought to the way in which even the sounds of spoken language acquire their meaning.

These interpretive matters become urgent in proportion to the urgency of the attendant political stakes. In the 1850s and 1860s, the interpretation and evaluation of Liszt's symphonic allegories were tied to the issue of music's continuing need to evolve in the direction that a self-selected vanguard of German composers had pointed out for it, and became furiously contentious. At the same time, as we shall see a couple of chapters hence, Italian operas were being subjected to similar interpretive contests between those who read them as revolutionary allegories and those who preferred to take their plots at face value. In the twentieth century, similar controversies have swirled around the artworks created in the great European totalitarian states, some reading them as allegories of political dissidence, others as allegories of political submission, still others as abstract or transcendent artistic utterances without political association, and their creators maintaining a studied silence.

In all cases these clashing interpretations were (and are often still) advanced in a categorical fashion that can be only supported ideologically (that is, on the basis of belief), never tested empirically (that is, on the basis of observation). But in no case can the necessity for interpretation be seriously questioned. The basic esthetic "fact" that the music embodied and represented a "poetic" content, and did so both in its thematic matter and in its form, is accepted by all of the contending parties, although in all cases some felt that the music was thereby enhanced, others that it was thereby diminished.

These are among the issues first raised by the New German School that have never gone away, and never will. Another cursed question is the matter of who gets to decide which reading is correct, a question that abides whether or not the composer is among the interpreters. It would be an excellent exercise to imagine historical conditions other than the one affecting the interpretation of *Les préludes* (namely the discovery of suppressed documents) under which a composer's own interpretation, if offered at all, might be doubted or impugned or even rejected; and another excellent exercise would be to imagine under just what circumstances the allegorical interpretation of a work of instrumental music becomes desirable and even necessary, so that even without the authority of a program the listener will impose one.

Yet even at their freest and most poetically determined, the symphonic poems of Liszt and his many imitators were still governed by a general approach to coherent form inherited directly from the earlier symphonic (or sonata) literature that the New German School sought, or claimed, to have supplanted. At the global level, the level of overall shape rather than the moment-by-moment unfolding, traces of the standard inherited form—that of the lyricalized or Schubertian sonata—can be most clearly observed.

In *Les préludes*, for example, the standard "there and back" construction that had controlled musical discourse at least since the time of the old dance suite continues to impress its general shape on the sequence of programmatically derived events. The expanded reprise of the introductory climax (*andante maestoso* at m. 35) to form the coda (mm. 405–419) imposes a traditional thematic and tonal symmetry on the whole structure. Furthermore, the relationship between the introductory section (the "invocation of the Question," mm. 1–66) and the first episode (Love, mm. 67–108) is cast very much in the manner of a Schubertian sonata exposition, with a dynamic first theme and a languidly lyrical and dilatory second theme in the key of the mediant.

Then again, it cannot be a mere coincidence that the main Love theme reappears unexpectedly (and, for that matter, without specific programmatic motivation) in the pastoral episode, or that the transition to the martial episode should feature the same theme in C major, the original tonic. That is the effective recapitulation, and it begins, just as Chopin's recapitulations so often did, with the lyrical theme, saving the more commanding main theme for coda-duty. In between, the stormy episode, with its extremes of tonal indeterminacy, bears unmistakable earmarks of the traditional development.

So Liszt's Symphonic Poems, like Chopin's Ballades, represented not a break with previous practice but rather the adaptation of earlier practices to new technical means and new expressive aims. If Chopin's Ballades were sonatas later on, then Liszt's Symphonic Poems were symphonies later on. As the music theorist Richard Kaplan put it in accounting for this phenomenon, so long as "three fundamental aspects of sonata organization" are observed, historical continuity is maintained. These fundamental aspects, in his pithy description, are "a tonal dichotomy which eventually is resolved, a concurrent thematic duality, and a return or recapitulation."[19] We shall see very little large-scale instrumental music from the nineteenth century, no matter how progressive the composer, that does not meet these basic, inherited criteria of coherence.

Notes:

(18) Andrew Bonner, "Liszt's *Les Préludes* and *Les Quatre Élémens*: A Reinvestigation," 19th-*Century Music* X (1986–87): 107.

(19) Richard Kaplan, "Sonata Form in the Orchestral Works of Liszt: The Revolutionary Reconsidered," 19th-*Century Music* VIII (1984–85): 145.

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Franz Liszt

Octatonic

Whole-tone scale

Liszt: B minor Piano Sonata

Liszt: 'Faust-Symphonie'

THE NEW MADRIGALISM

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 Midcentury
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

There was another way in which the new emphasis on poetic or literary content affected New German musical style, and it proved ultimately the more subversive one. In curious fashion it paralleled a much earlier striving for the "unity of the poetic and the musical," when in the late sixteenth century the composers of those sophisticated Italian part-songs known as madrigals became carried away with the project of representing strong emotion in their music and infused it with a degree of chromaticism without precedent, and without equal until precisely the moment we are now investigating, when a similar impulse (though now more strongly motivated by philosophical than by emotional content) turned Liszt into the nineteenth century's most zealous harmonic experimenter.

His experiments revolved in oddly systematic fashion around two harmonies with longstanding but limited diatonic application: the diminished-seventh chord and the augmented triad. In ordinary diatonic usage both of these chords often function as altered and intensified dominants. The diminished-seventh chord, built on the leading tone, adds an extra tendency-tone demanding resolution to the fifth degree of the tonic. The augmented triad on the fifth degree adds an extra tendency-tone demanding resolution to the third degree of the tonic. In any case, the altered pitch in an augmented triad is traditionally prepared and resolved as a chromatic passing tone. By treating other tones in these chords as tendency-tones, whether leading tones or passing tones, avenues of quick enharmonic modulation can be opened up. This sort of harmonic punning can be found as early as C. P. E. Bach, and had been a common device since Beethoven (Ex. 8-3).
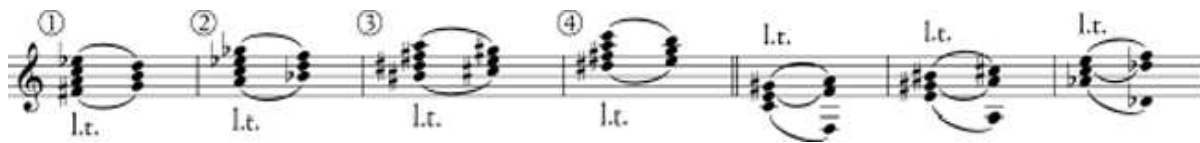
ex. 8-3a Normal resolutions of diminished-seventh and augmented triads

ex. 8-3b Ludwig van Beethoven, "Pathétique" Sonata, I, "Tempo I" Tempo I

ex. 8-3c Franz Schubert, Quintet in C, I, mm. 11-24

Following on these precedents, but particularly on Schubert's usages, Liszt emancipated the diminished seventh and augmented harmonies from their diatonic contexts in two ways. First, he exploited the equidistance of the tones in these rootless harmonies to create circles of major and minor thirds, the former based on the tones of the augmented triad, the latter on those of the diminished-seventh chord. For these, as we have already seen, there were especially salient precedents in Schubert. For the circle of major thirds the precedents were explicit, based on sequences of flat submediants (revisit Ex. 2-11 from Schubert's Mass in E- flat). For the circle of minor thirds the Schubertian precedents were subtler, implicit in the part-writing rather than categorically expressed as harmonic progressions, as in the passage from the G-major Quartet cited in Ex. 2-14.

In his so-called "Mountain Symphony"—actually the Symphonic Poem No. 1 (first sketched in 1847), titled *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne* ("What one hears atop the mountain") after a poem by Victor Hugo—Liszt contrived an explicit descending circle of minor thirds to match Schubert's major thirds in Ex. 2-11. The keys are even the same,

which suggests that the Schubert passage may have been not just a precedent but an actual model. And just as Schubert had connected the bass notes of his circle with passing tones to produce a descending whole-tone scale, so Liszt connected his bass notes to produce a descending tone-semitone or octatonic scale, perhaps the first one ever to be explicitly set out in a single voice (Ex. 8-4).

ex. 8-4 Franz Liszt, Symphonic Poem no. 1, *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne*

The octatonic scale may thus be counted Liszt's innovation, and it was taken up enthusiastically by many later composers, especially in Russia. The whole-tone scale, by contrast, was already a known quantity by the time Liszt came upon the scene, having been previously adapted from Schubert's original usage by a number of composers, again with Russians (who used it to conjure up fantastic or magical effects) in the lead. The original Russian precedent had been set by Glinka, to represent the evil sorcerer Chernomor in his "magic opera" *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1842). It is quoted in Ex. 8-5 from the popular overture to the opera, where its connection to the circle of major thirds is evident.

fig. 8-6 The sorcerer Chernomor in Glinka's *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, costume sketch by A. Roller for the first production (St. Petersburg, 1842).

ex. 8-5 Glinka, Overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila*

Elsewhere in the opera Glinka uses it as an unharmonized scale. When sounded without harmonic support, its construction out of intervals of equal size inhibits any sense of degree-identification, which in turn prevents any sense of functional hierarchy among the pitches. This is just a fancy way of saying that a whole-tone scale is not centered unequivocally on a tonic, but putting it in terms of an abolition of hierarchy casts it in a Hegelian emancipatory light that heightened its appeal to the New Germans as well as the New Russians.

Liszt knew the scale not only from Schubert and Glinka, but also from the overture to an opera called *Mazeppa* by an altogether obscure Russian composer, a noble dilettante named Boris Scheel (1829–1901), who composed under the pen name of Baron Vietinghoff. A friend had sent the overture to Liszt as a sort of joke, since Liszt himself had based a symphonic poem on the legend of Mazeppa, a Ukrainian chieftain whose wild nocturnal ride, tied to the back of a runaway stallion by the enraged husband of his paramour, had been immortalized in another poem by Victor Hugo.

Liszt responded in kind with a humorous letter in which he parodied the tendency of which he himself was the titular figurehead. Although couched in ironic exaggeration, the letter accurately expresses the sense of historical necessity that drove Liszt and his party in their preoccupation with innovation.

> When you have the opportunity, will you give my best compliments to the author, and give him also the little scale of chords that I add? It is nothing but a very simple development of the scale, terrifying to all whose long ears protrude that Mr. de Vietinghoff employs in the final presto of his overture.
>
> [Carl] Tausig [1841–71, a Polish disciple of Liszt] makes pretty fair use of it in his [impromptu for piano] *Das Geisterschiff* ("The Ship of Ghosts"); and in the classes of the Conservatory, where the high art of the mad dog virtuoso is duly taught, the existing elementary exercises of the piano methods which are of a sonority as disagreeable as it is incomplete, ought to be *replaced* by this one which will thus form the unique basis of the method of harmony—all the other chords, in use or not, being merely arbitrary curtailments of it.
>
> In fact it will soon be necessary to complete the system by the admission of quarter and half-quarter tones until something better turns up!
>
> Behold the abyss of progress into which the abominable Musicians of the Future are hurling us! Take care that you do not let yourself be contaminated by this pest of Art![20]

As students of twentieth-century music know very well, every one of the harmonic absurdities Liszt strains to imagine—twelve-note universal harmonies (sometimes expressed, as here, as the superimposition of two whole-tone scales), quarter- and eighth-tones, and all the rest—would eventually be quite seriously advanced in the same spirit as Liszt was advancing his own harmonic novelties: to wit, in the name of progressive emancipation.

Liszt's own use of the whole-tone scale reached a blazing climax, after he had returned to composing for the piano, in

Sursum corda ("Lift up your hearts," 1867), the last number in the long cycle *Années de pèlerinage* ("Years of pilgrimage"). Although clearly the result of the interpolation of passing tones into a French-sixth chord on F♯ ("V of V" in the key of E major), the effect is one of a harmonic blur preceding the massive return of the main theme in the main key (Ex. 8-6).

ex. 8-6 Franz Liszt, climax of *Sursum corda* (last number in Années de pèlerinage)

As for the diminished seventh, perhaps the most dramatic use to which Liszt ever put it is found in his single-movement Sonata in B minor for piano (1853), a work dedicated to Schumann as if in return for the dedication of the latter's *Phantasie*, and cast along the same lines as Liszt's own concertos but, at half an hour's duration, grander by far. If provided with a program it would have been a virtual symphonic poem for the keyboard; that Liszt preferred to give it a neutral designation shows him still willing to make generic distinctions that some of his followers would abandon.

Ex. 8-7a shows the first page of the Sonata, containing three themes (or better, motives) that will be subjected to extensive "transformation" over its course. The first is the descending introductory scale marked *lento assai*. Its two occurrences already show the nature of the transformations that lie ahead: the former, beginning as if in the natural minor, is given a Phrygian inflection at the end; the latter, with its two augmented seconds, is cast in what Liszt called the "Gypsy" scale, associated in his mind with his native Hungary. (Naturally it is most commonly found in his famous "Hungarian Rhapsodies" for piano.) The two motives at *allegro energico* together make up what might ordinarily be called the Sonata's first theme, except that from the very beginning they are varied, developed, and transformed quite independently. The former is the one fashioned so strikingly (and from a tonal point of view, so indeterminately) out of appoggiatura-heavy diminished seventh arpeggios. Ex. 8-7b, showing a few of its transformations, gives a heady foretaste of the Sonata's expressive behavior. The resolution of chromatic arpeggios into diatonic ones sets up the basic harmonic polarity that in this Sonata largely preempts the usual tonal dichotomy.

ex. 8-7a Franz Liszt, Sonata in B minor, mm. 1-17

ex. 8-7b Franz Liszt, Sonata in B minor, transformations of diminished-seventh motive (mm. 18-22, 55-60, 125-34, 385-88)

Most radical of all are the passages in which Liszt allows diminished sevenths and augmented triads to succeed one another in parallel motion (that is, as consonances), usually by semitones along a chromatic scale, thus invoking another uniform-interval cycle devoid of any built-in degree hierarchy, so that traditional harmonic functions are held in abeyance. The Storm section of *Les préludes* contains a famous instance using the diminished-seventh chord. Even more celebrated is the theme heard at the very outset of Liszt's monumental trilogy of symphonic poems known as the *Faust-Symphonie* (1857), in which each movement purports to describe one of Goethe's characters (Faust, Gretchen, and Mephistopheles in that order).

ex. 8-8a Franz Liszt, *Faust-Symphonie*, opening

The theme seems to mirror the title character's fateful quest of occult knowledge (Ex. 8-8a). Following the initial A♭, it consists of four augmented triads arpeggiated in a descending semitonal sequence that exhausts all the pitches of the chromatic scale. Again, the use of chords of uniform intervallic structure, deployed along a scale that is similarly uniform, prevents any tone (even the first one) from emerging as a functional center and creates an appropriate sense of aimless meandering. Perhaps even more remarkable is the similarly indeterminate harmonic progression that follows, in which the minor triad on the second beat of measure 5, owing to its harmonic environment, the voice-leading, and the rhythmic placement, clearly seems to resolve as a pseudo-suspension to yet another augmented triad, which the ear has by now been conditioned to accept as a normative—hence, a stable—harmony.

The first definite cadence—to a manifestly Beethovenian C minor—comes with the change in tempo from the introductory *lento assai* to the main body of the movement, *allegro agitato ed appassionato*. Passionate agitation is evoked by piling on a heap of functional dissonances. The main theme (Ex. 8-8b) starts right off on an appoggiatura to a diminished seventh chord. Like the augmented triad in the introduction, the chord thus introduced acquires a measure of stability by being made the object of a resolution. When the soprano resolution of E♭ to D arrives on the following downbeat, the bass shifts to another E♭, rendering the entire chord above it a dissonant suspension.

The key-defining tonic in root position does not appear in Example 8-8b until the middle of the fourth measure. On the way to it three more dissonant suspensions or appoggiaturas in the soprano intervene: F♯ resolving to F-natural as the third of the half-diminished ii_7 on the third downbeat, immediately followed by a dramatic skip of a seventh —itself a dissonance—to a dissonant E♭ that resolves as an appoggiatura to D, the chordal root. Such dissonant leaps to dissonant notes, a derivation from the "sighing" figuration common in operatic melodies, would remain a permanent, prominent, and very distinctive emotional signifier in the music of the Zukunftists and their heirs.

ex. 8-8b Franz Liszt, *Faust-Symphonie*, Allegro agitato ed appassionato (mm. 71-74)

Following the habit we have already observed in *Les préludes*, Liszt casts the exposition of the Faust movement over a tonal dichotomy involving a third rather than a fifth. This, too, was a permanent acquisition, derived from Schubert (though with roots in late Beethoven), and a step toward the general replacement of the circle of fifths by circles of thirds as the prime navigational compass for tonal plans. Needless to say, the third in this case is major rather than minor, which would have merely reproduced the normal or classical harmonic trajectory of a minor-mode exposition, requiring no new key signature. Instead of the customary E♭, the triumphant closing theme (*grandioso*, m. 225) comes in an untrammeled diatonic blaze of E major (Ex. 8-8c). The extra half step, seemingly so near at hand, is in fact equivalent to seven progressions along the circle of fifths. The melding of the proximate and the remote palpably bends one's sense of musical space.

ex. 8-8c Franz Liszt, *Faust-Symphonie*, Grandioso (mm. 223-28)

The emergence of diatonic simplicity out of chromatic complication is another way of signaling resolution, of course—and in its likeness to a synthesis an especially Hegelian one (as well as an increasingly necessary one as tonal trajectories became cluttered with thirds and half steps). And yet, almost needless to say, Ex. 8-8c is eventually recapitulated in C major, thus fulfilling the Beethovenian Struggle-and-Victory scenario and betokening the composer's place in the legitimate dynastic succession.

But given the suggestion, tacit but implicit in the Hegelian scenario, that the virtually deified Beethoven was being not merely emulated but in effect surpassed, the charge of virtual blasphemy had to be met and deflected. Scarcely any discussion of Liszt's achievement could avoid an accusatory or a defensive tone, depending on the attitude of the writer. Here is how one defender, a Russian, handled the problem:

> If anyone should take it into his head to dampen my rapture at Liszt's music, for example, with this question: "If Liszt writes an orchestral fantasia of unheard-of perfection, does that mean that, in your opinion, Liszt as a symphonist is better and higher than Beethoven?"—I would answer thus: "Our [Russian painter, Alexander] Ivanov, naturally, has not put Raphael or Titian or Rubens in the shade, yet people in the know have every right to say about a picture by Ivanov that *in its own way* it is a miracle of art and an unprecedented miracle at

that.[21]

But there was a problem that the theory failed to address: with closed circles of thirds and long stretches of tonally indeterminate chromatic writing competing with the diatonic fifth relations that had long driven tonal music to its climaxes, it was increasingly difficult to project tonal drama with a force commensurate with the startling new rhetoric of passionate local dissonance and orchestral splendor. In particular, it was difficult to plot a distinctive FOP (harmonic far-out point) that traditionally gave symphonic forms their overall there-and-back structure.

All became fantasia, beginning (and often ending) in medias res, which certainly accorded with the stated aims of the music of the future, but which nevertheless led to a certain arbitrary flattening of the tonal trajectory that could make the music seem paradoxically uneventful and disjointed. What was delightful when experienced within the confines of a small work like a Chopin prelude—or in Liszt's own exquisite *Bagatelle ohne Tonart* ("Bagatelle in no key"), which appeared a little ahead of schedule in the previous chapter (Ex. 7-10)—could seem bewildering and (many thought) even boring when stretched out at full symphonic length.

Another paradox was the sameness, the apparent uniformity, that often seemed to be the result of sui generis forms that followed content. This unexpected outcome may have been due to psychological principles that experiments in the realm of cognitive science have only recently confirmed: small differences with respect to a known model— tweaking, as it is sometimes called—often register more tellingly than do global (overall) differences of an apparently arbitrary character. Freedom can thus come at the price of significance. Along with constraint, the jettisoning of conventions could sacrifice effective communication.

Notes:

(20) Liszt to Ingeborg Stark, summer 1860, in *Letters of Franz Liszt*, ed. La Mara, Vol. I, pp. 436–37.

(21) Alexander Serov, "Zagranichnïye pis'ma," *Teatral'nïy i muzïkal'nïy vestnik*, 21 June 1859; in A. N. Serov, *Stat'i o muzïke*, Vol. IV (Moscow: Muzïka, 1988), p. 110.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Alexander Serov

Modest Musorgsky

ART AND TRUTH

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 Midcentury
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Difficulties like these, however real, were nevertheless tolerable within a value system that equated innovation with liberation, and that took as its objective the freeing of the artwork and its producers from dependence on social norms defined by consumers. Boring or annoying their contemporaries was not only considered by committed Zukunftists a fair price to pay, it was often taken in itself to be a mark of progress. Casting the New German or neo-Hegelian philosophy of art in terms borrowed from economics, moreover, was very much the fashion at the time, vividly illustrating the way in which the innovatory spirit in the arts reflected other modes of nineteenth-century Utopian thought. At a time of widespread Utopian theorizing, it was considered the very opposite of a defect to be ahead of one's time, in communion not with one's contemporaries but with one's progeny. The myth of the artist-prophet, to which Beethoven was at once assimilated, had its birth in these theories. It still lives.
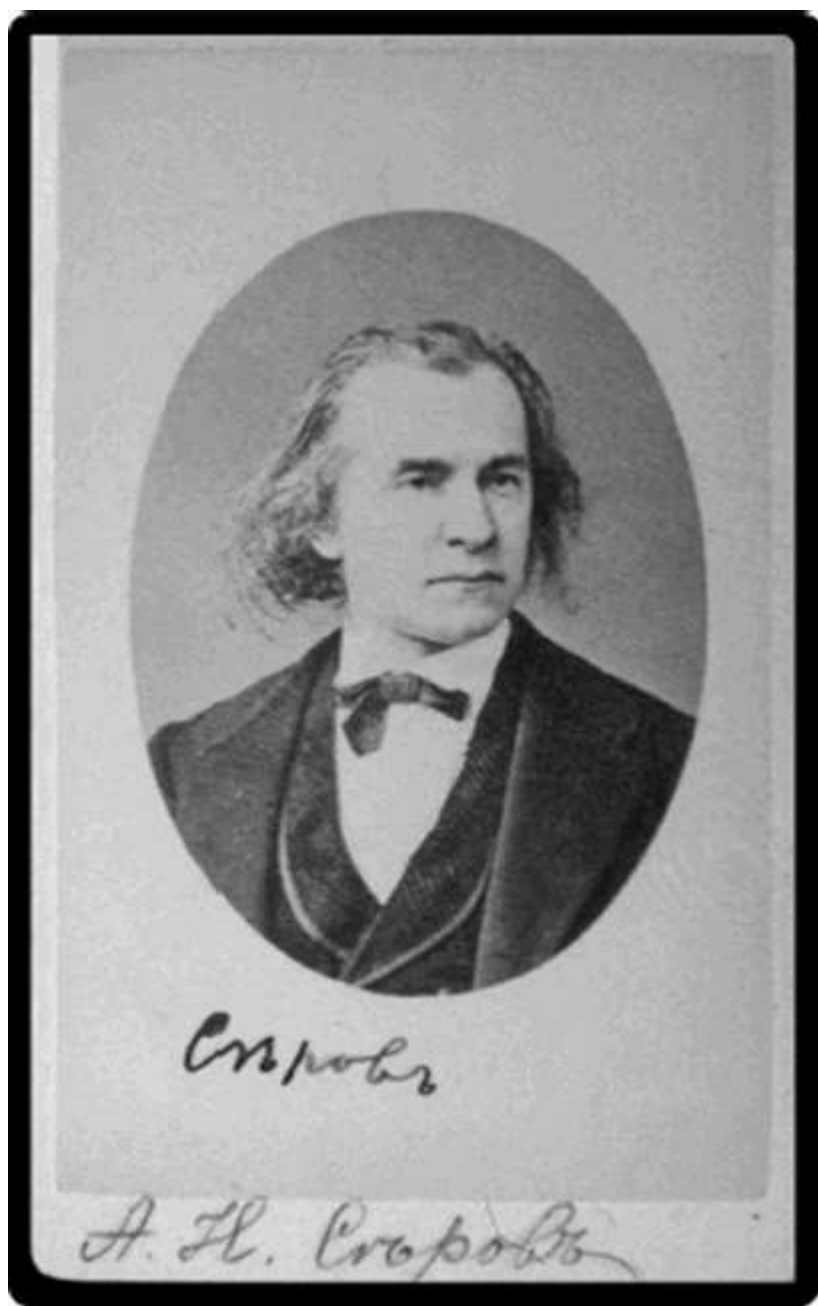
fig. 8-7 Alexander Nikolayevich Serov, autographed photo.

A striking specimen of these ideological commitments was an article by Alexander Serov (1820–71), the most enthusiastic Russian follower of the New German School (and author of the hypothetical question and answer quoted above). It appeared in Brendel's *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in 1857 in the guise of a review of *Beethoven, ses critiques et ses glossateurs* ("Beethoven, his critics and his explicators"), a book by the conservative critic and Mozart biographer Alexander Ulybyshev (1794–1858). It was already typical that a debate about contemporary musical values should have taken place behind a Beethovenian screen. Beethoven's authority, acknowledged by all sides, was the most desirable of trophies. All factions in the esthetic wars of the later nineteenth century claimed him as their founder, none more zealously than the New German School. And the debate between Ulybyshev (writing in French) and Serov (writing in German) was an indication of the role that Russians were lately playing on the main stage of European musical art.

Serov's article, published as "Ulibischeff gegen Beethoven" (Ulybyshev vs. Beethoven), came to a climax with the dogmatic assertion of two "laws" that between them summed up with breathtaking succinctness practically the whole Zukunftist position:

   1. Wenn eine Theorie nicht mit der Praxis eines Weltgenies stimmt, da wird sie nie bestehen, denn die Kunst

lebt ihr Leben nicht in Büchern, sondern im Kunstwerk. (If theory [that is, classroom music theory] does not accord with the practice of a world-genius, then it must always give way, for art lives its life not in books but in artworks.)

2.Das Criterium des musikalischen Gesetzes liegt nicht in den Ohren des Consumenten, es liegt in der Kunstidee des Producenten. (The basis of musical law lies not in the ear of the consumer but in the artistic inspiration [literally, the art-idea] of the producer.)[22]

Liszt himself pronounced a benediction on these precepts in a *Neue Zeitschrift* article of his own, "Ulibischeff und Seroff. Kritik der Kritik" ("Ulybyshev and Serov: A Critique Critiqued"). They were received with fury back home in Russia, where notions of social utility hung on with unusual tenacity in art criticism, partly because both the autocratic Tsarist regime and its revolutionary foes wanted to enlist the arts in their political struggles. But Serov and Liszt were also engaged in a political struggle. The frankly Hegelian concept of the *Weltgenie*, the world-genius—on the one hand free to abrogate the laws of ordinary mortals and, on the other, charged with the making of new and ever more binding laws—was nothing if not a site of political power.

Vladimir Stasov (1824–1906), another Russian critic and Serov's nemesis, saw in it a ploy for the establishment of a "despotism of artists,"[23] free to abuse their contemporaries in pursuit of vainglorious goals that violated the proper boundaries of art. Pyotr Ilyich Chaikovsky (1840–93), the most eminent and abundant Russian composer of the later nineteenth century, complained that "formerly, music strove to delight people—now they are tormented and exhausted."[24] The Nietzschian concept of the Übermensch, the superman who existed on a plane beyond good and evil, a figure modeled originally on the artist-prophet envisioned by the Zukunftists, was already strongly prefigured.

The role of the artist as a prophet and a lawgiver was a religious and political extension of the idea of the artist as philosopher, the idea that motivated the New German School and opened up a new era to add to Brendel's historical categories. Where Brendel had seen the Age of Beauty succeed the Age of the Sublime, his contemporaries, in large part at his enthusiastic instigation, now proclaimed the Age of Truth. And where an earlier generation of Romantics could proclaim with Keats that " 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'—that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" ("Ode on a Grecian Urn," stanza 5), the New Germans, their disciples, and even some who thought of themselves as their enemies, turned savagely on beauty as on some sort of loathsome falsehood.

Reacting a decade later than Serov (but no less angrily) against Mozart's panegyrists, whom he likewise saw as thwarting the historical tide, Friedrich Nietzsche lambasted the self-styled guardians of the classics. "Let us but observe these patrons of art at close range, as they really are, indefatigably crying 'Beauty! beauty!' " the philosopher taunted. "Do they really bear the stamp of nature's darling children who are fostered and nourished at the breast of the beautiful, or are they not rather seeking a mendacious cloak for their own coarseness, an aesthetical pretext for their own insensitivity?"[25] In a phrase that acquired a chilling resonance in the twentieth century, Nietzsche condemned the devotees of beauty as the standard-bearers of an *entartete Kunst*, a degenerate art.

In a similar vein but to a different purpose, the Russian composer Modest Musorgsky (1839–81) inveighed against the hypocritical "religion of absolute beauty,"[26] a devotion that, he believed, masked an altogether worldly "aim of winning a name and some public acclaim." In his view, "the artistic representation of beauty alone is coarse childishness—art in its infancy." Instead, the "thinking artist of the present day" must aim higher, or rather deeper: "The subtlest aspects of human nature and of humanity as a whole, the persistent exploration of these uncharted regions and their conquest—*that* is the true mission of an artist."[27] There are many truths, of course. The New Germans, Serov and Nietzsche were after metaphysical truth, an ideal truth not of this world. They followed directly in the footsteps of German romantics like E. T. A. Hoffman, and shared his veneration of Beethoven as the *Quelle der wahren Glaube*, the "source of the true faith." Their favored medium was instrumental music, a language of ineffable expression. Their tendency culminated in what the German musicologist Rudolf Stephan dubbed *Weltanschauungsmusik*—roughly, "music expressive of a philosophy of life," a music of grandiose conceptions and gigantic forms, always impressive but rarely pleasant.

Musorgsky and many of his non-German contemporaries were after experiential truth, a realistic truth very much of this world. They followed in the footsteps of Berlioz, and shared his veneration of Beethoven (the composer of *Fidelio*) as the voice of oppressed humanity. Their favored medium was opera. Their work culminated in naturalism and verismo, attempts (often didactic) to show the world and its inhabitants as they really are, warts and all, often as a spur to social change.

Against both were the keepers of the old flame, who mounted a considerable counteroffensive against what they deemed the anti-artistic bluster of metaphysicians and realists alike. Chaikovsky derided the German music of his day in newspaper articles and letters, protesting its "detestable pretensions to profundity, strength, and power." In his view it was "all seriousness and nobility of purpose, but the chief thing—*beauty*—is missing."[28] For what he considered his own countryman Musorgsky's studied ugliness he had, if anything, even greater contempt: "there is something low about him, something base," he admonished; "he passes the bounds of the possible."[29]

Notes:

(22) Quoted from Vladimir Vasilievich Stasov, "Ein Wort der Gegenwart gegen zwei Phrasen der Zukunftgilde," *Niederrheinische Musik-Zeitung* (1859); in V. V. Stasov, *Izbrannïye sochineniya v tryokh tomakh*, Vol. I (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1952), p. 40.

(23) Stasov, *Izbrannïye sochineniya*, Vol. I, p. 42.

(24) Quoted in Alexander Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man* (New York: Schirmer, 1991), p. 181.

(25) Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1868), trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 120.

(26) Musorgsky to V. V. Stasov, 26 December 1872; M. P. Musorgsky, *Literaturnoye naslediye*, Vol. I, eds. A. A. Orlova and M. S. Pekelis (Moscow: Muzïka, 1971), p. 142.

(27) Musorgsky to V. V. Stasov, 18 October 1872; *Ibid.*, p. 141.

(28) Chaikovsky to Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich, 2 October 1888; A. A. Orlova, ed., *P. I Chaikovskiy o muzïke, o zhizni, o sebe* (Leningrad: Muzïka, 1976), p. 218.

(29) Chaikovsky to Nadezhda von Meck, 5 January 1878; trans. Vera Lateiner, in *Letters of Composers through Six Centuries*, ed. Piero Weiss (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1967), p. 363.

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Eduard Hanslick

New German School

ART FOR ART'S SAKE

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 Midcentury
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

As all these Russian quotes suggest, much of the opposition to the New German School came from outside the German-speaking lands, many foreign musicians suspecting nationalistic designs behind the School's universalist pretensions. And yet the opposition's most famous single salvo came from the Austrian critic and music historian Eduard Hanslick (1825–1904), who in 1854 authored a tract called "On the Musically Beautiful" (*Vom musikalisch-Schönen*) that went through many editions (ten within the author's lifetime) and is still in print. It is difficult today to appreciate the polemical force of the title; but at the time, for a German critic to insist on beauty looked to many like virtual treason.

Unsurprisingly, Hanslick located the beautiful in music not in its freight of meaning, but in its sheer patterning ("arabesques") of sound. The object of derisive caricature from the beginning, his views are often misunderstood. Contrary to what his critics have alleged, he did not deny the emotional effects of music, nor did he deny its power to embody and convey poetic subject matter. What he did deny was the essentially musical nature of such a task (that is, its relevance to the true aims and tasks of music as an art), and hence the ultimate musical value of those effects and that embodiment.

"The Representation of Feeling," reads the title of the crucial second chapter, "Is Not the Content of Music." Needless to say, everything hinges on how the word "content" is defined, and on whether it is to be distinguished from "form" (another protean concept). The New German position cast feeling and form in opposition; the Hanslickian stance melded them. Hanslick's very definition of musical content (which became a famous and notoriously untranslatable slogan) was *tönend bewegte Form*—something like "form put in motion by sound" or "sounding form in motion."

Although his antagonists tried to brand him a reactionary, and while he himself (like any contender in a war of ideas) tried to portray his ideas as age-old verities, Hanslick's ideas were in fact new. By asserting that there were timeless musical values that took precedence over the *Kunstidee des Producenten* and the *Ohren des Consumenten* alike, Hanslick and his followers introduced a new faction to what was fast becoming a struggle over the right to inherit and define the elite literate tradition of European music. To the extreme romantic view that privileged the producer, and the old aristocratic view that privileged the consumer, was now added a "Classical" or classicizing view that privileged Art itself and its so-called inviolable laws over the designs or wishes of its ephemeral practitioners and patrons. The real privilege, of course, was enjoyed by whoever could successfully claim the right to assert the law. These were the true stakes of the game. It is arguable that Hanslick, one of whose biographers proclaimed him the "Dalai Lama of music," emerged the big winner.

And that is because more than any other nineteenth-century academic, Hanslick was a forerunner of today's musicology. His side, in other words, was the one that got to tell the story of nineteenth-century music in the twentieth century. Indeed, a more revealing and less tendentious name for his tendency would be *academic* rather than "classical," since the academy has been its main home and breeding ground. It is the very opposite of an accident that Hanslick, its chief early formulator, was hired two years after the publication of his famous treatise by the University of Vienna as an adjunct lecturer, later as a full-time professor.

He spent forty years at the university, lecturing on what we would now call music appreciation. He was the first musician ever to occupy a German university chair; hence he was the first academic musicologist in the modern sense of the word. His formalist esthetic is the one that has underwritten the concept of classical music ever since his time. His neo-Kantian "art for art's sake" views have been the (sometimes tacit) mainstay not only of music

appreciation but of practically all university music study until at least the middle of the twentieth century.

By presuming to draw a hard and fast distinction between what was "musical" and what was not in the work of his contemporaries; by insisting that the musical must be identified with the beautiful (rather than the spiritual or the expressive or the sublime or the true); and by so effectively propagating his views in the teeth of formidable opposition, Hanslick set the terms of an unsettleable (perhaps misconceived) debate that continues into our own time. Its terms would probably have been altogether unintelligible to musicians of the early nineteenth century and before; so in this sense, too, the middle of the nineteenth century marks the beginning of the musical world we have inherited and inhabit today.

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CHAPTER 9 Slavs as Subjects and Citizens

Smetana, Glinka, and Balakirev

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Slavs as Subjects and Citizens
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

PROGRESSIVE VS. POPULAR

If the New German School did not lack opponents at home, neither did its influence stop at the border. One of its most enthusiastic disciples was Bedřich Smetana (1824–84), who is now chiefly remembered (to quote the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*) as "the first major nationalist composer of Bohemia" (or, in today's vocabulary, the Czech lands). How could a Czech nationalist also be a "New German"? There are some paradoxes to sort out.

The first is best savored through a letter Smetana wrote to his friend and former pupil Ludevit Prochazka, the conductor of a men's singing society (Männerchor) in Prague, on 11 March 1860, shortly after his thirty-sixth birthday:

> First of all I must ask you to excuse all my mistakes, both in spelling and grammar, of which you will certainly find plenty in this letter, for up to the present day I have not had the good fortune to be able to perfect myself in our mother tongue. Educated from my youth in German, both at school and in society, I took no care, while still a student, to learn anything but what I was forced to learn, and later divine music monopolized all my energy and my time so that to my shame, I must now confess that I cannot express myself adequately or write correctly in Czech.[1]

Indeed Smetana, the son of a prosperous brewer who serviced the local gentry (including Count Waldstein, one of Beethoven's patrons), was brought up to call himself Friedrich rather than Bedřich, and to aspire to a cosmopolitan career like any urban, educated, middle-class child of a loyal Bohemian subject of the kaiser (Austrian emperor). Indeed, his place of birth (Bohemia), his native language (German), and his early cultural orientation were all the same as Hanslick's, although (as his surname, which means cream in Czech, suggests) his ethnicity was different. At first that did not matter.

So in one important sense he did not come from beyond the borders of the German lands at all, since those borders (as drawn politically) extended far beyond the German-speaking nucleus. The fact that Smetana ultimately came to identify with his Slavic ethnicity, rather than with his original native language, his Teutonic cultural milieu, or his lifelong political allegiances, encapsulates more vividly than any other single musical-historical fact the metamorphosis that the idea of nation underwent over the course of the nineteenth century.

The divine music that claimed Smetana's time and energy from his early years was the music of German cultivated society—simply music to a German-speaking bourgeois in Bohemia or anywhere else—rather than the music of the Czech countryside, which like the Czech language was regarded as the property of illiterate peasants, baggage that could only keep one down on the farm. He never did learn to speak the language flawlessly, nor did he ever get to know much authentic Czech folk music. (Instead, he eventually became quite good at manufacturing his own.) A piano prodigy, Smetana had a life-shattering experience in 1840, when at the age of sixteen he heard Liszt play in Prague. Against the wishes of his father, who refused to support him, Smetana renounced higher education in favor of the life of a professional musician. For three years he worked as live-in piano teacher to the children of a German nobleman in Prague, meanwhile taking lessons in harmony and counterpoint from the best local teacher, a blind pianist and composer named Josef Proksch who had studied in Berlin and set up a private conservatory in his home. Smetana looked forward to becoming "a Liszt in technique and a Mozart in composition."[2]
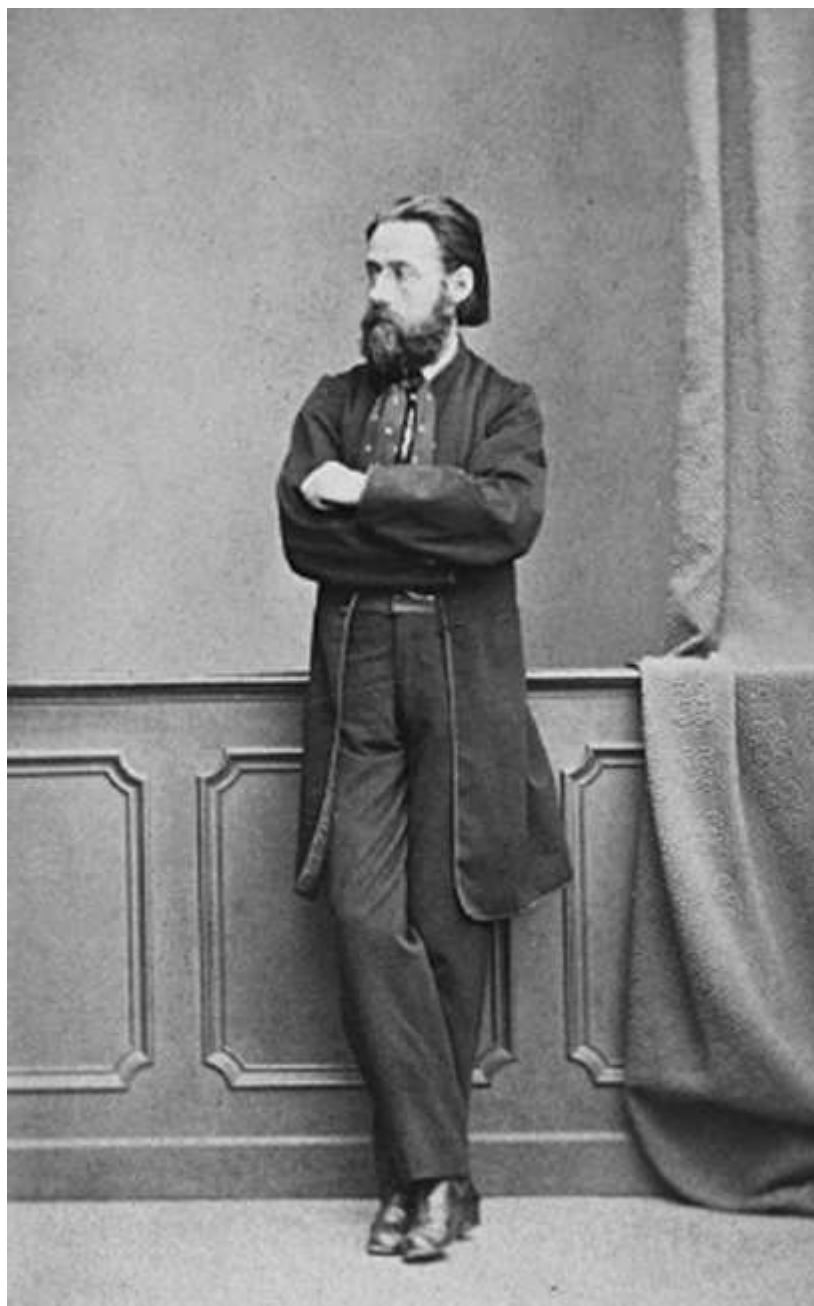
fig. 9-1 Bedřich Smetana.

But when the children of the house he lived in grew up and left, their piano teacher had to face reality, which for him meant the prospect of desperate poverty. Early in 1848, not knowing where else to turn, Smetana impulsively sent Liszt, who knew his teacher, the manuscript of his *Six morceaux caractéristiques* (that is, *Charakterstücke*) for piano, op. 1. The pieces in this set, all individually titled in German despite the French title page, were far from the first he had written; but they were the first (or so Smetana thought) that reflected a contemporary composerly outlook worthy of Liszt's approval, since all six pieces were unified by an idée fixe à la Berlioz.

Together with the music went three requests: first, for permission to dedicate the pieces to Liszt; second, for Liszt's assistance in getting them published; and third, for a loan of money to help Smetana set up a music school of his own like Proksch's.3 Liszt ignored the last request, but he lavishly praised the *Morceaux caractéristiques* by return mail and placed them with a publisher, winning Smetana's eternal gratitude. They spent three years in press, however, during which time Smetana took the risk of opening the music school anyway—he called it the Lehr-Institut im Pianoforte-Spiele (Teaching Institute for Piano Playing)—in August 1848. He lived practically hand to mouth, teaching at the institute and giving occasional concerts, for the next eight years.

The year 1848 was as politically eventful in Bohemia as elsewhere, and Smetana's early compositions reflected its

turbulence. He wrote his share of patriotic marches and anthems during the Prague revolt in June, but a far less ephemeral token of his political allegiances were the works inspired not by the revolt itself but by the consequent abdication of the Austrian Emperor Ferdinand in favor of his eighteen-year-old nephew Franz Joseph, who would reign gloriously for almost seventy years, dying at the age of eighty-six in the midst of the First World War, thus mercifully spared his empire's defeat and dissolution.

Like most patriotic Bohemians of his social background, Smetana greeted Franz Joseph's accession with joy; for what they really wanted was not the full independence of their ethnic homeland (whose language they did not speak) but only its legislative and fiscal autonomy within a federalized empire. (Among Austrian territories, only Hungary would achieve this status, and not until 1867.) Franz Joseph was perceived as favoring this idea, which he was expected to implement by accepting the historic Bohemian throne, vacant since 1620.

In anticipation of this great event Smetana wrote his earliest orchestral works: a very old-fashioned *Jubel-Ouvertüre* ("Festive overture") in D major, op. 4; and a big, brassy, cumbersomely titled *Triumph-Symphonie mit Benützung der österreichischer Volkshymne* ("Triumphal Symphony Utilizing the Austrian National Hymn") in E major, op. 6. Even the patriotic marches of 1848 had quoted German songs (including a verse of Haydn's Austrian hymn), and Smetana gave further evidence of his loyalty to the house of Hapsburg by becoming a kind of court pianist to the deposed Emperor Ferdinand, who took up residence beginning in 1849 in the venerable Prague Castle.

Instead of constitutional reform and kingdom status, however, the Czech lands received stern treatment under Alexander Bach, Prince Metternich's successor as chief minister of state, whose repressive and ultimately counterproductive policy of "Centralization and Germanization," enforced by a ruthless secret police, created a stifling political atmosphere during the 1850s and did more to stimulate the growth of Czech cultural nationalism over the next few decades than liberalization could possibly have achieved.

Despite the effort to stamp it out, the use of the Czech language among the educated classes grew; as a result of its spread, and of some significant demographic changes that followed the industrial revolution, Prague was transformed over the second half of the nineteenth century from a German- to a Czech-speaking city. Smetana himself reflected this change in his own linguistic habits, as we have seen; but the more immediate result of political and financial discouragement was his decision, in 1856, to emigrate. The two changes coincided: Smetana's first attempts to communicate with his countrymen in Czech followed his move to Göteborg (Gothenburg), a seventeenth-century university town on the Kattegat strait, Sweden's main seaport and second largest city.

He was an instant success in Göteborg. During his first year he opened another music school which immediately became the most fashionable one in town; he was named the director of the city's leading choral society; and he inaugurated a prestigious series of chamber music concerts at which he regularly appeared as pianist. Perhaps most decisive of all in reshaping Smetana's career, though, was renewed contact with Liszt, whom he visited at Weimar in the summer of 1857. After this visit, Smetana became so committed a disciple that Liszt invited him (along with Serov and a few other favored foreigners) to attend the great 1859 convocation in Leipzig and become a member of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein.

Smetana became in effect the exemplary New German, in some ways the most advanced of all. As he wrote to Liszt after another year in Göteborg,

> Since I spent those unforgettable September days with you in Weimar… I conceived, not just the "notion" (for this I already had), but the *necessity* of the progress of art, as taught by you in so great, so true a manner, and made it my credo. Please regard me as one of the most zealous disciples of our artistic school of thought, one who will champion its sacred truth in word and deed. At present the means at my disposal are, it is true, scant,… but as far as my limited means go, I work for the liberation of our art from the chains which bind it, and in which incomprehension, incompetence and egoism have sought to have cast it for ever.4

The first fruit of his conversion was, of course, a series of symphonic poems, among the earliest to follow Liszt's example. The first was *Richard III* (1858) after Shakespeare, which had its counterpart in Liszt's *Hamlet*; next came *Wallensteins Lager* ("Wallenstein's camp," 1859) after Schiller, a "battle piece" that had its counterpart in Liszt's *Hunnenschlacht* ("Battle of the Huns"). Although the title character, Albrecht Wenzel Eusebius von Wallenstein (1583–1634), was nominally a Bohemian (the progenitor of the Waldsteins, in fact), he was (like Smetana) a loyal vassal of the Holy Roman Emperor, and actually laid waste to Bohemia during the Thirty Years' War.

Schiller's dramatic trilogy, on which Smetana based his symphonic poem, concerned Wallenstein's defeat by the Swedes and his later treasonable attempt to negotiate a separate peace with them; Smetana's symphonic poem was, in ironic effect, an attempt to reap the approval of his Swedish audience at the expense of Bohemian nationalism. Smetana's third symphonic poem, *Hakon Jarl* (1861), about a mythical Norwegian usurper and the victory of Christianity over paganism in Scandinavia, also catered to the nationalism of his audience rather than expressing his own. The music, however, displays no particular Scandinavian coloration; its themes (both musical and poetic) are universally heroic and religious.

Where Smetana actually went beyond his mentor in his commitment to the aims of the New German School was in *Macbeth* (1859), later retitled *Macbeth a čarodějnice* ("Macbeth and the witches")—a symphonic poem in every sense except medium, for it was composed for piano solo, possibly envisioned as a vehicle for a comeback on the recital stage. Even Liszt, as we have seen, held back from transferring the programmatic method to the keyboard, at least where major works (like the Sonata in B minor) were concerned. But Smetana was determined to take the musico-poetic principle into every instrumental genre.

In this sense Smetana could be fairly described as Europe's most progressive musician as of 1859, and so he remained, one could fairly argue, virtually to the end of his career, when he wrote a programmatic—indeed autobiographical—string quartet (*Z mého zivota, From My Life*, 1876) that culminates with fine contempt for beauty in a ghastly high violin harmonic mimicking the onset of the deafness that heralded the composer's eventual deterioration from syphilis. If Smetanais remembered differently, if he is slotted into conventional historiography not as a leading progressive but as a leading nationalist, we shall have to seek the explanation not only in his music, but also in the conventions of historiography.

Even without the additional information given later by retitling it, it would be obvious that Smetana's "piano poem" took its cue from Macbeth's encounters with the witches in Shakespeare's tragedy. The piece is constructed in two parts, of which the first, in G minor, pits chilling Lisztian cadenzas for the witches, all based on heavily (and dissonantly) embellished diminished triads and sevenths, against a triumphant march theme that must surely represent not only Macbeth but also the nature of the witches' prophecies to him. The second part, in the devilishly tritone-related key of C♯ minor, must surely represent the dramatic reversal of the plot, Macbeth's triumphant melody now being disfigured by a whole-tone scale, a device with a considerable history by 1859 (at least among progressive musicians), and one specifically associated with horror in several works (by Glinka, Vietinghoff [Scheel], and Tausig) well known to Lisztian adepts, and to us. The triumph music must now pertain to Macduff.

Like Liszt's *Bagatelle ohne Tonart*, Smetana's *Macbeth* was published only posthumously. That is one of the reasons why despite its astonishingly advanced style it does not figure more prominently in Smetana's historiographical image. The more important reason, of course, has to do with the composer's return to Prague and to a new calling as founder of a national school. What lured him home was no abstract or idealistic commitment but a career opportunity: the announcement in 1861 of a competition for a Czech opera to open a new national theater where Smetana eventually became the music director. After one last season in Göteborg, Smetana came home to stay in June 1862.

Ever since Weber's *Freischötz*, and especially since Glinka's triumph with *A Life for the Tsar*, it was assumed —especially among the Slavic peoples, but also among the other ethnic minorities within the Austrian empire—that the founding of a truly national musical life could be achieved only through an inspiring representation of the nation on the operatic stage, a purpose that could be served only by a "real opera" with big numbers and recitatives, not just a folksy singspiel. Chopin's teacher Józef Elsner was very disappointed at his pupil's failure to become that founder in Poland. The one who eventually did was Stanisław Moniuszko (1819–72), with *Halka*, an opera with a conventional plot about a peasant maiden (but here obviously standing for Poland) who is seduced and abandoned by a heartless feudal lord (just as obviously standing for the powers that had "raped" the motherland in 1795); it was first performed in concert in Vilna (now Vilnius, Lithuania) in the revolutionary year 1848, and was first staged in Warsaw in 1858.

The Hungarian founder was Ferenc Erkel (1810–93), with several historical operas beginning with *Hunyádi László* (1844), about a martyred fifteenth-century patriot, and culminating in *Bánk bán* (1861), which concerned a thirteenth-century revolt against foreign domination. The founder of Southern Slavic (Croatian and Slovenian) opera was Vatroslav Lisinsky (1819–54), with *Ljubav i zloba* ("Love and malice," 1846), much touted in its homeland as the first opera after Glinka with a libretto in a Slavic language. Smetana was determined to play that decisive role in the Czech lands, where as of 1861 the only vernacular operas (mainly by the Prague conductor František Škroup) were

still singspiels about merry tinkers and cobblers.

Smetana's maiden opera—the first of seven that covered all genres and established Czech opera as a "world" repertoire—could not have been more different from its local predecessors. Written to a libretto by Karel Sabina (1813–77), a major patriotic writer (but also, it later turned out, a secret police informer), it was called *Braniboři v Čechách (The Brandenburgers in Bohemia)*. Like Erkel's *Bánk bán* it concerned a medieval war of liberation; and it began with these lines, set to a forceful accompanied recitative in the most progressive operatic manner, which could just as easily be read as pertaining to the nineteenth-century Austrians as to the thirteenth-century Prussians (Ex. 9-1 a):

Já ale pravim: Nelze déle	But I say to you we must no longer
tu trpěti cizácké sbory.	Suffer foreign troops in the country.
Už potřebí se chopit zbraně	Now is the time we must take to arms
a vyhnat z vlasti Branibory,	And expel the Brandenburgers,
již hubí zem, náš jazyk tupí,	Who ruin the land and blunt our language,
pod jejichž mečem národ úpí!	Under whose sword the people suffers!

A little later the same character, the venerable Bohemian knight Oldoich, gives vent to an even timelier complaint: "Lord Otto Brandenburg has also suppressed our language, that glorious Czech language, so that you wouldn't recognize Prague!" Yet for all the emphasis on language—not just declared but exemplified in Sabina's libretto (as John Tyrrell, a historian of Czech opera, has pointed out)[5] by the use of meters that faithfully reproduce the peculiar accentual pattern of the Czech vernacular—there is not the slightest hint of vernacular music in the score. On the contrary, Smetana (unlike Erkel, Glinka, Moniuszko, and the rest) actively resisted its influence, preferring to couch his national opera in the most advanced international musical style of the day, as a later recitative of Oldoich's (Ex. 9-1b) will show with its restless diminished harmonies, ending in a baldly displayed scale issuing directly out of the Lisztian technique of interpolating passing tones between the notes of a diminished-seventh chord. These are badges not of nationalism but of "progress-ism."

Notes:

(1) František Bartoš ed., Bedšich *Smetana: Letters and Reminiscences*, trans. Daphne Rusbridge (Prague: Artaria, 1955), p. 59.

(2) Diary entry, 23 January 1843; *Smetana: Letters and Reminiscences*, p. 5.

(3) *Smetana: Letters and Reminiscences*, pp. 24–26.

(4) *Smetana: Letters and Reminiscences*, pp. 47–48.

(5) John Tyrrell, *Czech Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 258.

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Nationalism

Branibori v Cechách

Smetana: Orchestral works

THE NATIONALIST COMPACT

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Slavs as Subjects and Citizens
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Smetana was adamant that a true national opera need not and should not rely on folk songs, even in the case of comic operas where their use had always been traditional. The Czech writer Josef Srb-Debrnov, a close friend of Smetana's who later translated a libretto for him, recalled a heated debate between the composer of *The Brandenburgers in Bohemia* and František Rieger, the director of the theater where the opera was to be produced. Rieger maintained that a national style had to depend on folk songs if it was to be recognizable as such. Smetana flew into a rage and (in Tyrrell's paraphrase) told Rieger that an opera written to such a prescription "would be a mere collection of songs, a potpourri, and not a unified artistic whole."[6] Later he wrote that "imitating the melodic curves and rhythms of our folksongs will not *create* a national style, let alone any dramatic truth—at the most only a pale imitation of the songs themselves." Ironically enough, he might have been describing Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies, potpourris not of Hungarian folk songs but (mainly) of Gypsy cabaret tunes. Liszt composed them, in full awareness of their ethnic spuriosity, not to give his ostensible countrymen an icon of self-representation, but to give his Western European audiences an exotic treat. (That Hungarian audiences nevertheless accepted them joyfully as a national icon adds a typically ironic wrinkle to the story; but their joy in the music was conditioned partly, even primarily, by the "world" celebrity of the composer.)

ex. 9-1 Bedřich Smetana, *Braniboři v Čechách*, two recitatives for Oldoich

There is an echo of New German ideology in Smetana's rejection of *Volkstümlichkeit* (folk-likeness), recalling Brendel's stipulation that national character is mere *Schmuck* (decoration) rather than substance, and can act only as a brake on musical progress. There is also an echo of the object lesson implicit in Glinka's achievement, to the effect that national musics had to be internationally respectable and competitive if they are even to prove nationally viable (that is, a dependable source of national pride and prestige). What makes the matter seem paradoxical is the insistence of Czech musicians and music lovers, from Smetana's day to this, that his style is despite everything intensely and inherently national in character, instantly recognizable as such by any native listener.

In such an insistence there is always a pinch of mystique, a trusty and (some would say) indispensable component of all nationalistic or patriotic ideologies. The mystique is finely encapsulated in a much-quoted statement on Smetana's *českost* ("Czechness") by the writer Jan Branberger, dating from 1904, when Bohemian separatism, a sentiment Smetana never knew, had become rife:

> When he began to write Czech folk operas, Smetana could not rely on any theory of Czech song, for he did not know its characteristics. He was, however, a great genius, a musician in whose soul slumbered unconscious sources of melody delightfully and faithfully Czech. He had no need to develop his Czechness, and with his first operatic note, he at the same time created a Czech dramatic style. Smetana grew out of his Czech inner

self, thereby solving at a stroke all questions of style: he wrote just as his enormous instinct led him.7

There may be less of paradox here than meets the eye. Branberger's theory of Smetana's instinctual Czechness, which imbued anything he wrote with national character simply because he wrote it, is more than an avowal of nationalism. It is also heavy with the Germanic (and specifically New German) concept of "world-genius," casting Smetana as a musical Prometheus who created *českost* out of nothing but his own *Kunstidee* (artistic inspiration, to recall some terminology encountered in the last chapter).

More modern treatments of the subject, like that of Michael Beckerman, the leading American authority on Czech music, counter the theory that Smetana's *českost* was the unalloyed *Kunstidee des Producenten* by making room for what New German theory specifically rejected as a source of artistic law, namely the *Ohren des Consumenten* (the "ears of the consumer"), in the construction of national character. In Beckerman's interpretation, *českost* (or Russianness, or Germanness, or any -ness at all) arises not directly out of style, whether a personal style or a collective vernacular, but out of "musical symbols rich in associative possibilities." The source of these possibilities may lie in the national history, or in stylistic resonances, or even in a strongly asserted *Kunstidee*. But for their actualization a compact or bargain is required between producer and consumer. "*Českost* comes about," Beckerman writes, "when, in the minds of composers and audiences, the Czech nation, in its many manifestations, becomes a subtextual program for musical works, and as such, it is that which animates the musical style, allowing us to make connections between the narrow confines of a given piece and a larger, dynamic context." It is this dynamic consensus that Smetana must have been trying to describe to Rieger. And although he sought first (and, in his own mind, foremost) to realize it in the realm of opera, we can also observe it within the Lisztian genre of the symphonic poem, which Smetana continued to cultivate, albeit less progressively and more popularly than before. During the 1870s, he created a monument of *českost* in this medium that many (especially outside the Czech lands, where the language of his opera librettos is not understood) have regarded as his masterpiece.

Between 1872 and 1879 Smetana composed a cycle of six symphonic poems to which he gave the collective title *Má vlast* ("My fatherland"). It is actually a rather heterogeneous collection of pieces, all separately premiered; it was not until the first four had been composed that the idea of performing them as a cycle even occurred to the composer. Three of the poems—including the first two, *Vyšehrad* ("The high castle," 1872–74) and *Vltava* ("The Moldau," 1874)—are descriptive of places or of nature. (The remaining nature piece is no. 4, "From Bohemian Fields and Groves," 1875.) One (no. 3, *Šarka*, 1875) is drawn from pre-Christian Slavic mythology. The last and longest pair (no. 5, *Tabór*, 1878; no. 6, *Blaník*, 1879) deal with episodes in the fifteenth-century religious wars led by Jan Hus, the pre-Reformation Protestant, whose achievements the Austrian authorities were just then bent on eradicating through a policy of "re-Catholicization."

Despite its poetic and stylistic heterogeneity, the cycle is unified by the use of recurring musico-poetic emblems of the kind that Beckerman describes. *Tabór* and *Blaník* are both shot through with a prefabricated symbol in the form of a Hussite hymn, *Ktož jsú Boži bojovnící* ("Ye warriors of God"), first printed in 1530, which all Czechs know by heart, but which non-Czechs can learn to recognize in the course of listening (Ex. 9-2). The technique is anything but new, of course; as embodied in the emblematic cantus-firmus Mass cycles of the fifteenth century, it could be traced all the way back to Jan Hus's time. It could also seem a throwback to the kind of reliance on found objects that Smetana made such a point of despising in the case of folk songs. (But of course noble hymns had a better social pedigree than folk songs.)

ex. 9-2 Hussite hymn: *Ktož jsú Boži bojovnìcì* **("Ye Warriors of God")**

Smetana's use of the old Hussite hymn is in any case of less historical interest than another musico-poetic emblem

in *Má vlast*: a *Kunstidee* of Smetana's own devising that frames the entire cycle like a Berliozian idée fixe or an operatic reminiscence motif. But where operatic reminiscence motives and Berliozian idées fixes derive their significance from within the work in which they figure, Smetana's emblem achieves the wider resonance that Beckerman describes. It is first heard as a harp solo at the very beginning of *Vyšehrad* (Ex. 9-3), where its evocative "bardic" timbre (previously employed in *Hakon Jarl* to evoke Scandinavian antiquity), coupled with the composer-poet's explanatory preface to the score, invests it with a sort of invented past. "At the sight of the venerable rock," Smetana writes,

> the poet's memory is carried back to the remote past by the sound of the harp of the bard Lumír. There rises the vision of the rock in its ancient splendor, its gleaming golden crown that was the proud dwelling place of the Premysl kings and princes, the ancient dynasty of Bohemia. Here in the castle, knights would assemble at the joyous summons of trumpets and cymbals to engage in splendid tourneys; here the warriors would gather for combat, their arms clanging and glittering in the sunlight. Vyšehrad resounded with songs of praise and victory. Yearning for the long-perished glory of Vyšehrad, the poet now beholds its ruin. The devastation of furious battle has thrown down its lofty towers; fallen are its sanctuaries; and demolished the proud abodes of its princes. Instead of songs of triumph and victory, Vyšehrad quakes at the echo of savage war-cries. The tempests are stilled. Vyšehrad is hushed and bereft of all its glory. From its ruins there comes only the melancholy echo of Lumìr's song, so long forgotten and unheard.[8]

ex. 9-3 Harp solo at the outset of Smetana's *Vyšehrad*

Of the motivic kernel of "Lumír's song," set off at the beginning of the score (like the opening *échappée* figure in *Les préludes*) with a fermata, Beckerman notes that its actual sounds, I – vi – V^6 – I in the key of E♭, are in no way "specifically Czech." In fact, whatever specific imagery the theme conveys probably comes by way of its rhythmic resemblance to the "Valhalla" motif, evoking the palace of the gods in Richard Wagner's opera *Das Rheingold* (1854); see Ex. 10-21. And yet, Beckerman observes, "when Smetana juxtaposes these chords with the image of the great rock Vyšehrad, and that image is further abstracted into a symbol of the enduring quality of the Czech people, the chords become imbued with a sensibility, and the sensibility becomes tied to something concrete."[9] He calls the method, derived as it is from nothing more ancient than Liszt, an attempt "to recreate the past with the technique of the future." And just as the Vyšehrad motif acquires its national significance from a context and a calculated audience response, it then creates a context to lend national significance to other moments in the cycle, "redefining and enhancing," as Beckerman puts it, "the very sensibility that produced it." Two of its strategic returns are especially telling. One comes at the end of *Vltava* ("The Moldau"), the second poem in the cycle, which has established itself as a repertory item independent of the cycle.

Notes:

(6) Tyrell, *Czech Opera*, p. 217.

(7) Jan Branberger in Ças, 24 January 1904; quoted in Tyrrell, *Czech Opera*, p. 218.

(8) Michael Beckerman, "In Search of Czechness in Music," *19th-Century Music* X (1986–7): 67.

(9) Beckerman, "In Search of Czechness," p. 73.

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FLUIDITY

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Slavs as Subjects and Citizens
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Various reasons for its separate popularity, especially with non-Czech audiences, are not difficult to surmise. It makes virtuosic use of some very traditional, widely accepted representational devices; its program, or sequence of events, is represented in the music in an unusually straightforward, descriptive fashion; and its style, while never actually quoting a Czech folk song, is of a marked (and for Smetana, atypical) popular character that appeals to foreign audiences by virtue of its exoticism, the reverse side of the nationalist coin. Yet where patriotic symbolism is concerned, the famous main theme of *Vltava* is heavily fraught with irony, both on the producing and on the consuming ends.

By adding a few enumerations to the program as printed in the published score, one arrives at a serviceable list of its musical sections:

- 1: (E minor) The river springs from its two sources, splashing gaily over the rocks and glistening in the sunshine.

- 2: (E minor) As it broadens, the banks re-echo with the sound of:

- 3: (C major) hunting horns ["Forest hunt" in the score] and

- 4: (G major) country dances ["Peasant Wedding" in the score].

- 5: (A♭ major) Moonlight—gathering of nymphs.

  [reprise of 2: (E minor)]

- 6: (modulatory [developmental?]) See now, the Rapids of St. John, on whose rocks the foaming waves are dashed in spray.

- 7: (E major [=2 in parallel key]) Again the stream broadens toward Prague, where it is welcomed by

- 8: (E major [=Ex. 9-3 in augmentation]) the old and venerable Vyšehrad.

The pictorial effects are as deft and effective as they are traditional. The undulating springs and rivulets in section 1 partake of a convention with a centuries-old tradition behind it. The hunt fanfares (section 3) go back just as far conceptually, and their orchestral realization derives from *Der Freischütz*. The country dance that represents the peasant wedding (section 4) is cast as a polka, a dance that Smetana treated very much the way Chopin treated the mazurka, with eighteen original polkas for piano (and another four in a larger set of *České tance* or "Czech Dances") composed over the course of his entire career and covering a whole spectrum of tempos and moods.

The name of the dance, incidentally, is evidence of a pre-nationalistic exchange among neighboring Slavic populations. It derives from *polska*, Czech for "Polish girl," and most scholars agree that this Bohemian national dance was originally appropriated from the Polish *krakowiak*, described in connection with Chopin in chapter 7. But

in the heyday of Czech nationalism this etymology was widely denied in favor of derivations from *půlka* (Czech for "half," wishfully applied to the short heel-and-toe half steps of the dance) or *pole* (Czech for "field," i.e., peasant land). What was once a generalized Slavic affinity had narrowed to a specifically national one. To claim that the latter is incorrect or inauthentic merely because it is recent is to misread, from an outsider's position, the whole process by which music acquires—and keeps on acquiring—significance. As historical and cultural contexts change, so does musical signification.

The best possible illustration of this fluidity involves the recurrent broad theme representing section 2, the main stream of the river, the most famous melody Smetana ever wrote (Ex. 9-4a). Needless to say, as the emblem of the Czech national river, hence as a beloved emblem of nationhood in its own right, the theme has been presumptively identified, by Czechs and non-Czechs alike, as a folk song. And it *is* a folk song. But not a Czech one. It is a Swedish tune that Smetana heard in Göteborg as part of the incidental music to a folk pageant by a playwright whose sister-in-law was a pupil in Smetana's piano institute (Ex. 9-4b).

While it is unlikely that the composer remembered its provenance when appropriating it as an epitome of *českost* (probably accepting it when it came to him as the product of his own imagination), the fact that his memory could thus treacherously disguise itself as an invention—let alone one of such crucially fraught character—is all the evidence we need to refute the notion that *českost*, or any other kind of national character, is an immanent ("in-dwelling") or inherent property of a tune (invented or otherwise), or even of the *Kunstidee* of a *Weltgenie*. The Swedish origin of the melody that has represented Czech nationalism to the world for more than a hundred years is an eternally piquant reminder that art is artful rather than natural. Neither *českost* nor any other artistic character is an essence waiting to be tapped by genius. Like all the others, *českost* is a construction in which producer and consumer must collaborate.

ex. 9-4a Bedřich Smetana, *Moldau* theme

ex. 9-4b Swedish folk song: *Ack, Värmeland, du sköna*

ex. 9-4c Zionist hymn, *Hatikvah* ("The Hope")

And the consumer is just as free as the producer to alter the terms of the bargain. A decade after Smetana's *Moldau* had become an international repertory standard, its big tune was co-opted by an arranger named Popovici for a collection of "Moldavian" (Eastern Romanian) songs, where it was given the title *Carul cu boi* ("Cart and oxen"), and where it was spotted in 1888 by Samuel Cohen, a Bohemian-born musician then living in Palestine, and fitted to the words of *Tikvatenu* ("Our hope"), verses published in Jerusalem two years earlier by the Polish-born Hebrew poet Naftali Herz Imber (1856–1909). The resulting hymn, *Hatikvah* ("The hope," Ex. 9-4c), was first published as such in

1895 in Breslau, a city in East Prussia (now Wrocław, Poland). Two years later it was adopted by the First Zionist Congress, meeting in Basel, Switzerland, as the official Zionist anthem, and as such became the national anthem of the State of Israel on its founding in May 1948.

The *Moldau* theme, in its Czech manifestation, can thus be looked upon as a stage in the history of a melody as it passed from its Swedish origins to its Israeli destination. But of course even this characterization is misleading. There are no origins and no destinations in such histories, only stages.

The only place in *Vltava* that retains the aggressively progressive approach of Smetana's earlier symphonic (and keyboard) poems is section 6, the portrayal of the rapids, where the violence of the imagery justifies the extravagant harmonic effect of a sudden stall on an augmented sixth chord in its most dissonant voicing (comparable to the 4/2 position of a dominant seventh), which then becomes the occasion for a swirling surface counterpoint of clashing scales figuring contending eddies and surges. When the harmony is adjusted (by the inflection of C to C♯) to a diminished seventh chord, the scales become near-octatonic for a spell, only their D-naturals holding them within the orbit of the chord's traditional function.

The other way in which the Lisztian precedent governs this symphonic poem is in its tonal plan, outlined within the program as set forth above. If item 4, the most overtly folkish component, is temporarily left out of the account, the scheme conforms to the same circle of major thirds found in Schubert's *Wanderer*-Fantasie (where Liszt first found it). Of course if item 4 is taken into account (as it must be in the actual listening experience), the circle of major thirds coexists somewhat uneasily with a diatonic arrangement of thirds around a C major triad (or, more pertinently, thirds above and below the tonic E).

The two-tiered scheme may in fact represent a programmatic set of tonal alternatives: the diatonic arrangement (leaving out A♭) omits the one fantastic or mythological element, while the symmetrically chromatic arrangement (leaving out G) omits the one folk—or even specifically human—element. The opposition of diatonics and symmetrically arranged chromatics to distinguish the human and magical spheres within a folk or mythological narrative was a convention, first established by Glinka in *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1842), that turns up in many Slavic operas, and also (as we have seen) in Smetana's *Macbeth and the Witches*.

But Smetana wrote no operas with supernatural plots or characters, and it would be very rash to assume that Glinka's operas, epoch-makers though they were, were among his models. Smetana, a loyal Austrian subject who saw his country's best chance for national revival within the structure of a liberalized empire, remained cool throughout his career toward cultural emanations from the Slavic east, which (like Chopin) he associated with Russian (alias "Pan-Slavic") imperialism. His nationalism, though it occasionally found expression in vernacular terms, remained more a civic than an ethnic (let alone a racial) nationalism. And so he made scant common cause with Balakirev when the Russian composer came to Prague in January 1867 to conduct the first performances of Glinka's operas outside Russia.

As the newly named chief conductor of the Prague opera theater, Smetana was tangentially involved in these productions, and Balakirev blamed him for everything that went wrong with them, calling him a swine and accusing him of sabotage on behalf of what he called the "Polonophile" party, Slavs who had taken up the Polish cause against Russia after the bloody events of 1830–31. A letter from Balakirev to Glinka's sister, Lyudmila Shestakova, suggests another dimension to the Russian's animosity toward his hosts: "When the curtain went up [on *A Life for the Tsar*]—oh, horror! What costumes!! The peasants were wearing some kind of peaked caps and overcoats with white buttons, and they had beards, but not Russian ones—Jewish ones!!!"[10]

fig. 9-2a Poster announcing the premiere performance of Smetana's opera *The Bartered Bride*.

fig. 9-2b *The Bartered Bride*, stage design for act III.

Payback time came four years later, when Smetana's second (and best known) opera, a Figaro-ish comedy of

peasants and landowners called *The Bartered Bride*, received its foreign premiere in St. Petersburg, where the chief conductor, Eduard Nápravnìk, was a naturalized Czech. César Cui, Balakirev's comrade-in-arms, was waiting. An excerpt from his review, published in the Russian capital's leading daily on the morning of 18 January 1871, will be enough to put to rest forever any notions of pan-Slavic solidarity among musical nationalists, or any idea of an ecumenical nationalist movement in music. "I frankly confess to my readers," Cui began,

> that it is much more pleasant to write about the Czech composer Smetana than about Beethoven. No matter what I write about Beethoven, I will always remain beneath my subject, while no matter what I write about Smetana, I will always be above it, so empty and nonsensical is this opera of his …. Mr. Smetana is obviously an experienced musician who has filled up a lot of music paper …. The best thing about *The Bartered Bride* is its slight whiff of Czech music, related to ours, which gives the opera a bit of color and makes it more bearable …. But as to quality, the music is simply a blank. Every sort of nothingness passes in review: sentimental nothingness, and pastoral nothingness, and poetic nothingness, and plain nothingness …. It's not a composition, it's the improvisation of a tolerably gifted fourteen-year-old.[11]

And on and on in this vein. Yet one must suspect that there was more at work here than just personal spite. The German music historian Carl Dahlhaus once speculated about

> the possibility that the different manifestations of musical nationalism were affected by the types of political nationalism and the different stages in political evolution reached in each country: by the difference between those states where the transition from monarchy to democracy was successful (Great Britain, France) and unsuccessful (Russia), or between states formed by the unification of separate provinces (Germany, Italy) and those formed by the secession of new nation-states from an old empire (Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, Finland).[12]

What may seem naive about this meditation are its universalist assumptions: that there is a single political evolution (toward democratic nation-states) in which all countries participate, successfully or unsuccessfully; that is a lingering legacy of Hegel. But if we look at things not from the perspective of political progress but from that of imperial powers vs. ethnic minorities, Dahlhaus's idea may bear more interesting fruit. It may suggest a more convincing way of accounting for the haughty tone a lordly Russian took toward the work of his ostensible brother Slav, who in his homeland was not master but vassal.

Notes:

(10) Quoted in Brian Large, *Smetana* (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 209.

(11) César Cui, "Muzïkal'nïye zametki: 'Prodannaya Nevesta', komicheskaya opera g. Smetanï," *Sankt-Peterburgskiye vedomosti*, 6 January 1871.

(12) Carl Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, trans. Mary Whittall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), p. 89.

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Smetana: Orchestral works

Libuše

FOLK AND NATION

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Slavs as Subjects and Citizens
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

After these many digressions let us return to *Má vlast* and witness the outcome of its musico-poetic strategies by comparing the coda of *Vltava* (Ex. 9-5) with the peroration of *Blaník* (Ex. 9-6). The former brings the *Moldau* theme into sudden juxtaposition—or collision—with the explicitly labeled "Vyšehrad Motive," the theme on which the previous poem in the cycle had been built. The castle-rock theme is in a grandiose threefold rhythmic augmentation with respect to the rushing river music that continues beneath it, carrying echoes of the forest fanfares, and so the effect of climactic magnificence is inescapable, even to an audience unaware of the thematic recall. To an audience properly aware, of course, the effect is an ecstasy of *českost*.

ex. 9-5 Bedřich Smetana, *Vltava*, mm. 359−62

**ex. 9-6 Culmination of Bedřich Smetana's *Blaník* with its combination
of emblematic themes**

But it pales beside the orgy of *českost* at the end of *Blaník*—the culmination of the whole cycle—when the "Vyšehrad Motive" is reprised in counterpoint with the Hussite hymn, first cited in Ex. 9-2. The thematic juxtaposition here has no express narrative or pictorial import. It is sheer nationalistic pomp, symbolic of a national glory that was only a dream in 1880, when the cycle was first performed as a totality. Its counterpart is the final act of *Libuše* (first performed the next year), an opera based on the central founding myth of Bohemia, in which the title character, the legendary first queen of the land, has a prophetic vision in which all the heroic events of the national history (to her the national future) pass in review, culminating in a phantasmagoria of the Prague castle, magically illuminated, while the clairvoyant queen sings exultantly, "Můj drahý národ český neskoná!" ("My beloved Czech nation will not perish") (Ex. 9-7). During World War II, when the Czech lands were temporarily annexed to Nazi Germany, not only *Libuše* but also *Blaník* (and hence complete performances of *Ma vlast*) were banned as potentially seditious. The remarkable fact was that Smetana's Lisztian technique—in its day a trophy of rampant Germany—had made it possible to rouse an anti-German rabble wordlessly.

ex. 9-7 Bedřich Smetana, *Libuše*, Act III, "Můj drahý národ český neskoná!"

Except for the G-major episode in *Vltava*, moreover, the nation-building deed is done without any recourse to *Volkstümlichkeit*, conventional folksiness. The folk, the implication is clear, was for Smetana—as for the urban, educated, politically ambitious public that he served—only one part of the nation, and by no means necessarily the most significant one. The Nazis agreed. Smetana's comic operas, socially conservative works that celebrated the peasantry in idealized harmony with the gentry, and did it by an infusion of folksy charm (replete with pastoral drones and even a quoted peasant tune or two; see Ex. 9-8), were perfectly innocuous in the eyes of the occupiers.

Almost from the time of its premiere, moreover, and despite César Cui's sullen hostility, *The Bartered Bride* has proved a highly exportable commodity, affably representing the Czech nation to other nations, perhaps in its friendly exoticism reinforcing a reputation for bumpkinry that breeds condescension. Where *The Brandenburgers in Bohemia* was never produced during the nineteenth century except in the *theater* where it had its premiere, and *Libuše* only in the Czech lands, *The Bartered Bride* went around the world, playing by 1897 in fourteen cities in nine countries on two continents, and in eight languages. By now the Czechs themselves regard this most popular Czech opera as a national treasure, a compendium of folk life and character types expressed (quite Mozarteanly!) through a compendium of national dance rhythms. Originally, however, it was Smetana's monumental and progressive compositions, not his *volkstümlich* ones, that appealed most to Czech national sentiment.

Thus for a long time Smetana was honored at home as the composer of *Libuše* and *Má vlast*, and abroad as the

composer of *The Bartered Bride* and *The Moldau*. That difference in perception embodies many hidden realities about nationalism in art, and highlights in particular the role of reception in defining both what is national, and its relationship to the exotic. Dahlhaus's dictum that "what does and does not count as national depends primarily on collective opinion,"[13] needs only one qualification: there can be more than one such opinion, representing different collectivities or interpretive communities, and they are always negotiable.

Notes:

(13) Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, pp. 87–88.

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Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka

Folk music

Anton Rubinstein

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HOW THE ACORN TOOK ROOT

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Slavs as Subjects and Citizens
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

ex. 9-8a Furiant: "Sedlák, sedlák," from K.J. Erben, *Napevy prostonarodnich pisni ceskych* ("The Tunes of Czech Peasant Songs"), no. 588

ex. 9-8b Bedřich Smetana, *The Bartered Bride*, II, Furiant, mm. 7–14

It was the Russians (or some Russians) who at midcentury put the most faith in traditional *Volkstümlichkeit* as the carrier of objective, non-negotiable national character even in instrumental music. There were two reasons. First, the Russians (or some Russians) were particularly eager to form a national school in opposition to what they saw as the threat of German hegemony; and second, the arts in Russia were particularly inclined toward realism, or (in Glinka's phrase) toward the embodiment of "positive data,"[14] a truth-content that required no interpretation. As we shall see, the second ideal proved quixotic: artistic content, being a human product and a social one, always requires interpretation. But even the first was fraught with ironies.

The attempt to build a national Russian school on a foundation of folklore can be traced to Glinka, just as the New German School can be traced to Beethoven, although neither Glinka nor Beethoven ever had any premonition of such a project or historical role. For Glinka left a work that composers of the next generation took so zealously as a model that one of them, Chaikovsky, called it "the acorn from which the whole oak of Russian symphonic music grew."[15] But it was no spontaneous germination. The oak was very much a hothouse growth. Tracing the process through which composers of the post-Glinka generation tried to transform his legacy will offer a revealing insight into the difference between national and nationalist art.

Glinka, as we know, was by strong preference an operatic composer, not a symphonic one. But toward the end of his life he composed three *Fantaisies pittoresques* (picturesque fantasies) for orchestra under the spell of Berlioz, whom he met in Paris in 1845. Two of the three were based on Spanish themes; for Glinka (as for Berlioz) national character did not have to be native, just colorful. The third fantasia, originally called "A Wedding Song and a Dance Song" (1848), was based on two Russian folk themes. The title by which it is known today, *Kamarinskaya* (accent on the second syllable), is that of the second song, actually a well-known instrumental dance tune *(naigrïsh* in Russian)

consisting of a single three-measure phrase that is repeated ad infinitum as the basis and framework for extemporized variations played by wedding bands, or else by a single player on an accordionlike bayan, a concertina, or a strummed balalaika (as in Fig. 9-3), to accompany a strenuous and often competitive type of male dancing (performed *v prisyadku*, in a squat) well known in the West as typically Russian thanks to its exportation by professional folk-dance ensembles.

fig. 9-3 The Kamarinskaya dance (anonymous nineteenth-century woodcut).

Glinka noticed an unexpected resemblance between the famous *Kamarinskaya* tune and the melody of a lyrical wedding song that was one of his personal favorites: the notes of the dance song marked with asterisks in Ex. 9-9, most of them in strong, conspicuous rhythmic positions, correspond with the first six notes of the wedding song. He based his brilliantly orchestrated fantasia on what thus amounts to a sort of abstract musical pun. The two themes are first given in stark contrast, as in a conventional symphonic first movement (Introduction and Allegro). But all at once, over a thirty-one measure passage in the midst of the Allegro, the fast theme is magically transformed into a reprise of the slow one, by means of the progressive revelation of their kinship.

ex. 9-9 Folk themes in Glinka's *Kamarinskaya*

It is a beautifully executed maneuver, but perhaps even more remarkable is the way Glinka derived the fantasia's introductory and transitional passages from the melody of the wedding song by extracting motives from it (labeled *x, y*, and *z* in Ex. 9-9). The very opening is built entirely on a sequential treatment of *y*, led to a surprising conclusion on B♭ This prepares, at short range, the first downbeat harmony of the wedding song. (At the long range, as we shall see, it is even more strategic.) The first transition from the wedding song to the dance song consists of a neat contrapuntal juxtaposition of motives *x* and *y* (Ex. 9-10a), and the second such transition makes similar use of motive *z* (Ex. 9-10b), meanwhile modulating with marvelous economy to the unexpected (but not unprepared) key of B♭, picking up the harmony left hanging at the end of the introduction.

Most striking of all is the final modulation. The reprise of the dance song having been made in the key of the flat submediant, the triumphant return to the D major tonic (Ex. 9-10c) is made by the same bass resolution as at the end of Ex. 9-10a, derived there from the incipit of the wedding song, motive *x*. The underlying tonal progression that lends contrast and a heightened structural unity to the dance song variations thus turns out to be a long-range projection of the opening motive of the wedding song. Such a thorough interpenetration of melodic and harmonic structures through the use of motives is the kind of thing one is used to finding (and therefore seeking) in Beethoven.

ex. 9-10a Motivic derivations in Glinka's *Kamarinskaya*, mm. 35–48

ex. 9-10b Glinka, *Kamarinskaya*, mm. 155–169

ex. 9-10c Glinka, *Kamarinskaya*, mm. 202–209

It was precisely the reason for Beethoven's preeminence among symphonists. That Glinka managed to emulate the trick using nothing but folk songs as his melodic material was an astonishing tour de force. No wonder *Kamarinskaya* was so influential.

But note that what made it so was not its folkloric content per se, but the way in which it vied with the greatest protagonist of the German mainstream. That is the first irony we must contend with if we are to understand the nature of the Russian response to musical Germany, which had turned aggressive (or so it seemed to Glinka's nationalistic heirs) in the years after the great composer's death.

The protagonist of that aggression, where Russian nationalists were concerned, was Anton Rubinstein (1829–94), the indefatigable organizer of Russian musical life, who in 1859 founded the Russian Musical Society, the sponsoring organization behind the country's first full-time professional symphony orchestra, and who three years later founded the St. Petersburg Conservatory, the first school of its kind on Russian soil. A piano virtuoso of international fame and an incredibly prolific composer of German schooling, Rubinstein saw the future of Russian music in terms of its professionalization under the sponsorship of the aristocracy and the stewardship of imported master teachers. (It was a measure of his colossal energy and fame that he was able to gain such sponsorship despite his Jewish birth.) In 1855, Rubinstein had published an article in a Vienna arts journal called "Russian Composers," in which he outlined his Peter the Great–like program for Westernizing Russian music, and also hinted that Russian musical nationalism was merely a sign of immaturity and dilettantism. Although even Rubinstein's worst enemies recognized that his motives were patriotic, and although everyone acknowledged that Rubinstein, both as lobbyist and as role model, deserved credit for creating the social and institutional means through which a professional musical life might flourish in Russia, his tactless words met with a chorus of righteous indignation. It could even be said that Russian musical nationalism, as a self-conscious artistic tendency, was touched off by this article from the pen of a musician for whom music was inherently and essentially "a *German* art," and in whose opinion "a deliberately national art cannot claim universal sympathy but awakens an ethnographical interest at best."[16]

fig. 9-4 Anton (right) and Nikolai Rubinstein, in a photograph from the late 1860s, when both were directors of conservatories.

The leaders of the nationalistic backlash were two figures whom we have already met: the arts publicist Vladimir Stasov, a librarian by profession, who inveighed lustily against the establishment of a conservatory system in Russia, and Miliy Balakirev, known to us thus far as a musical orientalist, who competed directly with Rubinstein as a public musician and educator. It was in this spirit of opposition to the German-dominated professionalization of St. Petersburg's musical life that Balakirev gathered around him his famous "mighty little band" (*moguchaya kuchka*) of talented musical mavericks and autodidacts.

They included the military fortifications expert César Cui (known to us as a journalist), the chemist Borodin (known to us as the composer of *Prince Igor*), the guards officer Modest Musorgsky (known to us as a musical realist), and the young naval cadet Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908). The group's name was inadvertently invented by Stasov, in a journalistic puff about a concert of new Russian music conducted by Balakirev in 1867. It ended "with a wish: God grant that our audience never forget today's concert; God grant that they always remember how much poetry, feeling, talent, and skill there is in the small but already *mighty little band* of young Russian musicians."[17] The earliest truly "kuchkist" composition was Balakirev's *Overture on Russian Themes*, composed in 1857–58, about a decade before the group was named. It was at once a creative response to Glinka's *Kamarinskaya* and a calculated

rejoinder to Rubinstein's slur, written as if on purpose to prove that Russian national instrumental music need not be immature or provincial. Unlike Glinka, Balakirev went looking for his themes. The determination to write a symphonic work on Russian folk songs preceded the specific embodiment (already a mark of the difference between "national" and "nationalist"). Unlike the themes in *Kamarinskaya*, the three songs Balakirev chose were all available in published anthologies, which was where he sought them out. They are set forth, both as Balakirev found them and as they are found in the Overture, in Ex. 9-11.

ex. 9-11 Folk songs in Miliy Balakirev's *Overture on Russian Themes* (1858)

The criteria for their selection are obvious if one knows *Kamarinskaya*, and show how closely Balakirev sought to model his work on Glinka's. Like *Kamarinskaya*, the Overture is set out in a slow-fast Introduction and Allegro scheme; moreover, the pair of tunes that together make up the thematic content of the Allegro, although they are full-blown melodies rather than *naigrïshi*, are both built up out of three-measure phrases analogous to the single varied phrase in *Kamarinskaya*. This enabled Balakirev to achieve a headlong ostinato drive just as unremitting as Glinka's—in fact more so, since there is no interrupting return to the slow theme. (Instead, the slow theme returns nostalgically at the very end.)

But Balakirev's piece makes use of three folk songs, not just two, and this turns out to be more than a mere quantitative difference. A glance at the two Allegro tunes reveals the reason for it: in B minor and D major respectively, they are the first and second themes in a bithematic sonata form exposition, with a conventional development section providing the pretext for an excursion to Glinka's flat submediant, here functioning as a traditional far-out point (FOP), and for a wealth of skillful contrapuntal juxtapositions of extracted motives.

Balakirev's *Overture on Russian Themes* can thus be viewed as a principled advance over Glinka's *Kamarinskaya* both as regards sheer dimensions, and also as regards symphonic character and procedure. Paradoxically, though, it is also a far more conventional composition. The advance was purchased at the price of a reconciliation with the standard operating procedure of German music, as Balakirev understood it—a seeming submission to the very hegemony Balakirev had made it his business to oppose. But the contradiction was in a sense built into the terms of the bargain: only a piece that could seem respectable by Germanic standards could counter Rubinstein's taunts. And unlike Glinka, Balakirev wanted more than just to write a piquantly impressive piece: he aimed at founding a school, and that meant establishing, observing, and handing down traditions (that is, conventions).

Notes:

(14) Glinka to Nestor Kukolnik, 18 April 1845, in M. I. Glinka, *Pis'ma i dokumentï* (Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1953), p. 276.

(15) Diary entry, 27 June 1888; quoted in David Brown, *Mikhail Glinka: A Biographical and Critical Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 1.

(16) Anton Rubinstein, *Muka i yeyo predstaviteli* (Moscow: P. Jurgenson, 1891), pp. 40, 83–84.

(17) V. V. Stasov, "Slavyanskiy kontsert g. Balakireva," *Sankt-Peterburgskiye vedomosti*, 13 May 1867; in Stasov, *Izbrannïye sochineniya*, Vol. I (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1952), p. 173.

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NATIONAL BECOMES NATIONALIST

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Having established a type, Balakirev went on to develop it. Six years later, in 1864, he produced a second *Overture on Russian Themes* that marked as great an advance over his first in formal scope and symphonic procedure as the first had marked over *Kamarinskaya*. At the same time it exhibited a new determination on the composer's part to purify the national character of his style. In their symbiosis these two traits marked a new stage in the emergence of oak from acorn, because in conjunction they led to an unshakeable perception of programmatic content in the music.

In *Kamarinskaya* and in Balakirev's first Overture, the motivating impulse (hence the content) could be simply construed as entertaining song and dance. But the second Overture exhibited such a reweighting of priorities in favor of process—transition and development, departure and arrival—as to imply a narrative content, or what Balakirev later termed (after Berlioz) "instrumental drama." When such a piece is based upon characteristic material of any kind, the question immediately raised is not just "What is it?" but "What is it *about*?"

To use the more precise vocabulary of the music theorist Leonard B. Meyer, the "kinetic-syntactic" processes of Balakirev's Second Overture are so highly developed as inevitably to lend a "connotative" dimension to its musical material.[18] When that material is so obviously national, the piece no longer seems to be a *Fantaisie pittoresque* guided solely (as Glinka said he had been guided) by "innate musical feeling." It *means* something. It is in some sense—but *what* sense?—a statement about Russia. It is this programmatic element, brought about by the conjunction of a highly elaborated and kinetic structure with a highly characteristic thematic content, that made possible Balakirev's authentic and powerful musical nationalism.

In the years immediately following the composition of his first Overture, Balakirev had made a close study of Russian folk songs with an eye toward their creative exploitation. Dissatisfied with the quality of existing publications, he made his own collecting expedition along the Volga River, Russia's Mississippi, in the summer of 1860. The songs he collected in the Russian heartland were issued in an epoch-making volume of forty arrangements—Balakirev's *Sbornik russkikh narodnïkh pesen* ("Anthology of Russian folk songs")—in 1866.

The most significant aspect of the collection was the technique of harmonization that Balakirev worked out for it. The method preserved two aspects of the folk original that Balakirev particularly prized: first, the diatonic purity of the minor mode (both the natural minor and what Balakirev christened the "Russian minor," corresponding to what is otherwise known as the Dorian mode); and second, the quality of tonal mutability (*peremennost'* in Russian), whereby a tune can seem to oscillate between two equally stable points of rest, as if two tonics. These often coincided with the ordinary relationship of tonic to relative major or minor, but just as often the relationship involved the lower neighbor to the tonic in the minor mode, a degree for which there is not even an ordinary "Western" name. (Most often it is called the flat seventh since it lacks the sharpening it would receive in the harmonic or melodic minor.) In most previous collections of folk songs, and in most art music that quoted folk tunes, both of these features had been obscured by the use of the harmonic minor and of secondary dominants (or dominant embellishments). These devices Balakirev virtually banished from his harmonizations, as may be seen in Ex. 9-12, which reproduces from Balakirev's book a *protyazhnaya* or slow melismatic folk song cast in the Russian minor pitched on D. There is not a sharp or flat in sight, and the first cadence is made to C, the *peremennost'* tone. There is no chord that can be called a proper dominant. The cadences to D are introduced by the minor V, which lacks a leading tone, and in measure 6 the minor V and the major IV, precisely the chords the harmonic minor is designed to avoid, are placed side by side, lending the music a modality that contradicts and tries to neutralize conventional tonal expectations. In 1867, while in Prague for the production of Glinka's operas, Balakirev had the satisfaction of hearing

a local conservatory professor pronounce his harmonizations *ganz falsch* (all wrong).

ex. 9-12 Protyazhnaya pesnya (melismatic folk song) from the Nizhny-Novgorod District, as harmonized in Miliy Balakirev, *Sbornik russkikh narodnïkh pesen* **(St. Petersburg, 1866).**

Ex. 9-13 shows the three songs Balakirev chose from his anthology (slightly in advance of its publication) for use in the second Overture, with the motives (*p, q, r*, and *s*) that will be extracted for development enclosed in brackets. For the slow introduction Balakirev picked a wedding song in the Russian minor ("There was no wind, then suddenly it blew…"), and for the Allegro he chose two *khorovod* or round-dance tunes: "I'm off to Constantinople," in the major, which will function as the first theme, and "Merry Kate, black-browed Kate," in the natural minor, for use as the second theme. (The Overture also contains a graceful theme of Balakirev's own invention, which functions as a close or codetta in the exposition and the recapitulation.)

ex. 9-13 Themes from Miliy Balakirev's second *Overture on Russian Themes* (1864), as printed in his anthology *Sbornik russkikh narodnïkh pesen*

It should be emphasized that the harmonic style of these settings, which colored not only Balakirev's Overture but any number of other compositions that came out of the school he founded, was Balakirev's personal invention. It is not a folk style at all; actual peasant harmonizations sound nothing like them, and Balakirev probably knew that as well as he knew that his "Georgian Song" (Ex. 7-19b) did not sound truly Georgian. But the style is instantly recognizable to connoisseurs of art music as generically Russian thanks to its thorough assimilation into the later compositional practice not only of Balakirev himself but that of his followers Rimsky-Korsakov, Musorgsky, and Borodin. Rimsky-Korsakov, who became a great and famous teacher, passed it along in turn to his many pupils. So it may not be an authentically peasant or folk style, but it is indeed the authentic and distinctive style of the New Russian School, alias *moguchaya kuchka.*

And it not only governed local harmonizations like those in the folk song anthology, but when used in large-scale instrumental compositions also controlled the long-term tonal organization in a novel and original (hence identifiably "Russian") manner. The slow introduction of the second Overture (Ex. 9-14a) is a case in point. Like the wedding song in *Kamarinskaya*, the one in the second Overture begins with a unison statement, but the final pair of measures is fully harmonized. The whole gesture is then immediately repeated, forming parallel periods. The cadence of the first period is harmonized very much like the setting in the folk song anthology: a plagal cadence through a major IV, evoking Russian minor. The second period has a different termination, however: the pair of horns picks up the A♭ (the lower neighbor or *peremennost'* tone), and the continuation is transposed down a step so that the A♭ is tonicized in mm. 23–25, but again through a plagal—that is, dominantless—cadence.

Thus the tonal mutability of the original melody is reinforced through a tonal progression. Indeed, in keeping with his general avoidance of dominant harmony in the minor mode, Balakirev does not employ a single authentic cadence over the whole course of the introduction, only plagal ones. They are often deployed in chains suggesting the use of a term like "applied subdominant." At the very end of the introduction, for example, a progression along the circle of fourths (or fifths in reverse) leads back from the *peremennost'* tone (A♭) to the tonic for the final cadence: A♭–E♭–B♭. To a degree unprecedented in music Russian or otherwise, tonal properties of folk music, and techniques derived from them, have been allowed to invade and govern those of art music.

ex. 9-14a Miliy Balakirev, second *Overture on Russian Themes*, mm. 5–25

ex. 9-14b Miliy Balakirev, second *Overture on Russian Themes*, mm. 169–74

The second Overture is cast, like the first, in the form of a sonata allegro embedded within a larger ABA form created by a concluding reprise of the slow introduction in the form of a coda. Overall, the key relations are Lisztian, showing Balakirev to be, like Smetana (however profoundly they may otherwise have differed), a musical descendant not just of Germany but of New Germany. The sonata allegro, in D major, is sandwiched between slow outer sections in B♭ minor; and the development section, beginning in F♯ major, completes a full rotation around the Lisztian circle of major thirds. Not at all by accident, moreover, the main keys of the piece—D and B♭—are the very ones on which the notable modulation in *Kamarinskaya* had turned, and Balakirev pays it further tribute by exactly modeling the transition into the first theme after the introduction on Glinka's striking modulation (compare Ex. 9-10c with Ex. 9-14b)—with one highly characteristic difference: Balakirev goes directly from to I, eliding out the dominant harmony and (by touching G in the bass right before the first theme begins) turning the progression into what amounts to a plagal cadence.

In his second Overture on Russian Themes Balakirev really did what Rubinstein, for one, thought impossible: he constructed an extended, sustained symphonic composition almost wholly out of folkloric material with no loss of scale or gravity. Unlike *Kamarinskaya* or the first Overture, the piece is ample, even imposing in its dimensions and its complexity of design. All its themes are presented *Eroica*-fashion, with momentary departures leading back to climactic statements. Its tonal tensions, while not always classical, are urgently dynamic. Perhaps most conspicuously of all, Balakirev constructs marvelous mosaics and collages out of motives *p, q, r*, and *s* at transitional and developmental moments, of which there are so many.

Notes:

(18) Leonard B. Meyer, "Universalism and Relativism in the Study of Ethnic Music," *Ethnomusicology* IV, no. 2 (1960): 49–54.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Mily Alekseyevich Balakirev

Nationalism

THE POLITICS OF INTERPRETATION

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Slavs as Subjects and Citizens
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

So, it is high time to ask, what's it all about? What kind of a statement about Russia was Balakirev making? What kind of a story was he telling? As in all interpretative matters, there is room for alternatives and negotiations. Perhaps the most interesting fact about Balakirev's second Overture, and surely the most fascinating aspect of its history, is how many mutually exclusive alternatives and how much negotiation originated with the composer himself.

The period of truculent musical politics immediately preceding the founding of Rubinstein's Conservatory in 1862 had coincided with what was generally a turbulent moment in Russian history: the aftermath of the Crimean War and the multiple far-reaching reforms of the early reign of Tsar Alexander II. A typical incident of those years was a series of student demonstrations at the beginning of the 1861–62 academic year that led to a great number of arrests and the temporary closing of the three leading Russian universities, those at St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Kazan (where Balakirev had briefly studied).

From his London exile the radical democrat Alexander Herzen (1812–70) greeted this outbreak of political activism among the youth of Russia with an enthusiastic editorial in his journal *The Bell (Kolokol)*, entitled "The Giant Wakes!" It ended with an impassioned call to the students at the shut-down institutions:

> In Russia the universities are closed, in Poland even the churches have been shut down, defiled by the police. There is neither light of reason nor light of faith! Where would they thus lead us in the dark? … So, where will you turn, brave youths, you who have been shut out from your studies? Where, indeed?
>
> Listen, closely, since darkness does not prevent hearing: from all sides of our enormous fatherland, from the Don and from the Urals, from the Volga and the Dnepr, a moan is growing, a rumble is rising—it is the beginning of a tidal wave which is boiling up, attended by storms, after a horribly fatiguing calm. *To the people! With the people!*—That's where you belong.[19]

Stasov, whose library post gave him privileged access to censored and foreign literature, was a regular reader of Herzen's *Kolokol*. According to a letter from Stasov to Balakirev,[20] the conception of Balakirev's urgently dynamic second Overture was connected with their reading "The Giant Wakes!" together, and in particular with Herzen's image of the rising tidal wave. That interpretation of the piece naturally appealed to critics during the Soviet regime, which traced its intellectual ancestry back to Herzen and other pre-Marxist Russian radicals. On the basis of Stasov's letter, one such critic wrote that Balakirev's Overture was "a picture of Russia as seen through the eyes of one who has felt the powerful strength, the spiritual beauty, and the poetic gift of the 'awakening populace.'"[21]

But when the work was published in 1869, it was given the programmatic title *1,000 Years: A Musical Picture*, alluding to the recently celebrated millennium of the legendary founding of the Russian state by the Scandinavian Prince Rurik in 862. No evidence survives to suggest that Balakirev had any such idea in 1862, but there is a letter from Stasov to Balakirev, dated 17 December 1868, discussing a proposed design for the title page, which gives some idea of the program they then envisioned: "On the left there will be a drawing of 'primeval Russia'; in the middle, Moscow, or perhaps one of the autonomous princely cities; and finally, as if disappearing in the distance, 'modern times'—some city, a rushing locomotive, telegraphs, some new buildings."[22]

This is pretty far from a rising wave of popular discontent. It flies in the face of the previous conception, putting

meliorism, the notion that things get better and better with time, in place of social criticism. In fact, the vicissitudes of the second Overture's program were just beginning. In the mid-1880s, having suffered a nervous breakdown and a prolonged interruption of his musical activities, Balakirev eased himself back into the swim of things by lightly revising a number of early compositions, *1,000 Years* among them. He retouched it in 1884 and published it in 1890 with a new designation—symphonic poem—and a new title: *Rus*', the Old Slavonic name of his country, known in modern Russian as *Rossiya*. The preface now described the program in detail:

> The unveiling in 1862 in Novgorod of a monument to the Russian millennium was the occasion for the composition of this symphonic poem. As its basis I selected the themes of three folk songs, by which I wished to characterize three elements in our ancient history: the pagan period, the Muscovite order, and the autonomous republican system, now reborn among the Cossacks. Strife among these elements, expressed in the symphonic development of these themes, has furnished the content of the instrumental drama.[23]

Far from either a social protest or a melioristic panorama, we are now faced with a glorification of Russian antiquity, particularly of those quasi-communal forms of social organization that were maintained by the Cossacks, for which they were admired by nationalist reactionaries, such as Balakirev had evidently become, and reviled by every progressive or liberal element. And he went even further. In the last edition of the score to come out within his lifetime, he amended the last sentence to read: "Their strife, culminating in the fatal blow dealt all Russian religious and national aspirations by the reforms of Peter I, has furnished the content of the instrumental drama."[24] In a letter to a fellow Pan-Slavist he actually maintained that his original intention in composing *Rus*' had been "to depict how Peter the Great killed our native Russian life."[25] What an anomaly this is: from its putative beginnings in Herzen, the ideological content of Balakirev's overture (or picture, or symphonic poem) had swung 180 degrees to the right, along with the composer's political and social outlook: from a progressive man of the sixties the composer had become a xenophobic reactionary. Without knowledge of the history of the piece, all three interpretations of its music might seem equally plausible. But all would be equally absurd if applied to *Kamarinskaya*. So the radical expansion of form Balakirev achieved in his second Overture can best be viewed as an effort to accommodate an ideological, not merely an evocative content—an effort demanded by a commitment to artistic nationalism that the aristocratic composer of *Kamarinskaya* not only lacked but despised.

Balakirev's nationalism, whether on the left or on the right, arose out of a self-imposed requirement, uniquely prevalent in Russia, that art be *engagé*—that it engage with civic and social issues. That need arose out of Russia's unique nineteenth-century status as the one remaining autocratic despotism in Europe, where censorship of public speech and public press was uniquely stringent, and where open debate about public policy was uniquely circumscribed by law. Under such circumstances, discussion of political and social issues had to go underground, into historiography and art (and, perhaps above all, into historiographically informed art). As Friedrich Nietzsche, in a typically brilliant aphorism, observed in 1880, "Music reaches its high-water mark only among men who have not the ability or the right to argue."[26] He was not talking about Russia at the time, but his astonishing sentence does more to encapsulate the peculiar history of music there, and explain its extraordinary sudden flowering in the late nineteenth century, than any other single sentence could ever hope to do.

Notes:

(19) "Ispolin prosïpayetsya," *Kolokol*, no 110 (1 November 1861); in Alexander Herzen, *Sochineniya*, Vol. VII (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1958), p. 392.

(20) See A. S. Lyapunova, ed., *M. A. Balakirev i V. V. Stasov: Perepiska*, Vol. I (Moscow: Muzïka, 1970), p. 27.

(21) E.L. Frid, "Simfonicheskoye tvorchestvo," in *Miliy Alekseyevich Balakirev: Issledovaniya i stat'i* (Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1961), p. 136.

(22) Lyapunova, ed., *M. A. Balakirev i V. V. Stasov: Perepiska*, Vol. I, p. 262.

(23) Quoted in Lyapunova, ed., *M. A. Balakirev i V. V. Stasov: Perepiska*, Vol. II, 279.

(24) Quoted in Frid, "Simfonicheskoye tvorchestvo," p. 132.

(25) *Ibid.*

(26) Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (1880), in *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, ed. Geoffrey Clive (New York: New American Library, 1965), p. 303.

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CHAPTER 10 Deeds of Music Made Visible (Class of 1813, I)

Wagner

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Deeds of Music Made Visible (Class of 1813, I)
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

THE PROBLEM

A specter has been haunting the last six chapters of this narrative—the specter of Richard Wagner. We met him first as the pseudonymous author of a violent and rancorous tract, published in 1850, that heralded a new, aggressive phase of European nationalism. Next we saw him applying this new idea of nation, and the role of art within it, to the interpretation of Weber's *Freischütz*. We heard tell of him later still as a political revolutionary, temporarily exiled from Germany, and as an artistic revolutionary, the dread darling of Weimar, where Liszt's performance of Wagner's opera *Lohengrin* in 1850 was the very event that led to the christening of the music of the future. Now it is time to meet him as a composer and dramatist, and encounter at first hand the musico-poetic imagination in which these nationalistic, revolutionary, and artistic personas intersected—an imagination so powerful, backed up by a technique so novel and so impressive, that neither the music of his own day nor that of succeeding generations (even, some would say, down to the present) is conceivable without him.

So emblematic is Wagner of his time and his country, in their most glorious as well as their most horrible aspects, that he has become a figure of furious and apparently unendable debate. "Suffering and great as that nineteenth century whose complete expression he is, the mental image of Richard Wagner stands before my eyes," wrote the thoroughly haunted German novelist Thomas Mann in 1933 ("not, I confess, without misgivings"[1]), right before going into temporary exile from a Germany whose violent and rancorous new leaders saw themselves as Wagner's heirs. Yet Mann saw himself as Wagner's heir, too; and so, willy-nilly, have all twentieth-century Germans, and all European and Euro-American musicians regardless of nationality.

fig. 10-1 Richard Wagner (1865) by August Friedrich Pecht.

And not only Germans, and not only musicians. Wagner's influence has been so great that the intellectual historian Jacques Barzun—in a once widely read book called *Darwin, Marx, Wagner*—cast him as one of the three pivotal figures of the mid- to late nineteenth century who ushered in the agonizing modern age, the age of the godless and materialistic twentieth century. The threat to Christianity posed by Darwinism, with its rival history of creation, and by Marxism, with its rival theory of social justice, is obvious. The nature of Wagnerism is more difficult to pin down, and not only because Wagner worked in a nonverbal medium (for he wrote words, too, well-nigh graphomaniacally). Clearly he was no materialist in the sense that Darwin and Marx were materialists. He even wrote a couple of ostensibly Christian dramas about knights of the Holy Grail: the already-mentioned *Lohengrin* (1848) and *Parsifal* (1882), his last work, whose title character was Lohengrin's father. Wagner was in an important sense a religious thinker in his own right. That is why Wagner's name—uniquely among artists—has become an "ism."

But his religion was not Christianity. *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal* were based on German legends that were only incidentally Christian, and it was German myth and legend that formed the basis of Wagner's mature work. The ecstatic and redemptive religion his works proclaimed was in effect a new paganism born of ethnic rather than political nation-worship, and anyone who knows the history of the twentieth century knows that ethnic nationalism has been an even more volatile force in that history than Darwinism or Marxism have been. Wagner's words and

music, with their colossal power of suggestion and persuasion, played a crucial role in disseminating that baleful impulse.

Thus, even if we conclude that Wagner was no true intellectual bedfellow of Darwin or Marx, his comparable rank as a culture hero cannot be denied. Also undeniable is the fact that of all the artists of the nineteenth century, only Wagner demands (or deserves) to be placed in such company. To say this is not to say that he was the best or greatest of all nineteenth-century artists. (How could it be proved that he was better or greater than Beethoven—to pick the most obvious "rival"—except on specious Zukunftist grounds?) But the work of no other artist looms as large as Wagner's as a cultural and political watershed. And for a third undeniable thing, only a musician could have made such a list of nineteenth-century figures, and no such list could have been complete without a musician. Such was the stature of music among the nineteenth-century arts, and it was Wagner who preeminently embodied that stature.

Finally, like Darwin's and Marx's, Wagner's legacy has been one of quarrels and fanaticism. Alone among nineteenth-century composers, perhaps alone among composers, Wagner can still provoke a riot in the concert hall, especially in the state of Israel, where a strict if unofficial ban on the public performance of his works is occasionally breached and invariably enforced with loud spontaneous protests. Jacques Barzun's book was especially bound to include Wagner among the giants of the nineteenth century in view of its date of publication: 1941, when Europe (soon to be joined by the United States) was engaged in a war that had been provoked by the same self-designated and enthusiastic Wagnerians who had impelled Thomas Mann into voluntary exile eight years before.

Wagner, in short, is one difficult and problematical artist who has never stopped being a problem. That in its way is the supreme attestation of his genius: only an artist of the greatest and most unshakeable stature could have become so great and unshakeable a problem. Our task, then, will be an especially complicated one where Wagner is concerned. We cannot say it is done until we have grappled both with the greatness and with the problem.

Notes:

(1) Thomas Mann, "Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner"; in *The Thomas Mann Reader*, ed. J. W. Angell (New York: Knopf, 1950), p. 420.

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ART AND REVOLUTION

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Deeds of Music Made Visible (Class of 1813, I)
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

In view of his eventual transformative stature in history, the most extraordinary fact in Wagner's biography is the ordinariness of his beginnings. No composer of comparable achievement—at least none up to then—had ever had a slower start. Wagner was no Mozartian or Mendelssohnian prodigy. He was no Lisztian virtuoso. A native Leipziger, he manifested no early signs of unusual talent for music. Like many late starters, he never developed perfect pitch, often taken as a measure of natural aptitude for music. His earliest artistic interest was, perhaps significantly, in Greek epic and drama. At school he made translations from the *Odyssey* and tried to compose an epic of his own. His first completed creative effort was a pseudo-Shakespearean tragedy, written in 1828, when he was fifteen. It was a wish to set the play to music that led Wagner to his first lessons in music theory and composition that year, with a local theater conductor. Later he studied violin and counterpoint at the Leipzig Thomasschule, where Bach had taught a century before.

By the time Wagner reached the age at which Schubert died, he had gained some experience as a conductor at a couple of provincial East Prussian opera houses, first in Königsberg (now Kaliningrad, Russia) and then in Riga (now the capital of Latvia, located in Wagner's time within the borders of the Russian empire). But as a composer he had accomplished practically nothing worth remembering. "I still remember, around my thirtieth year," the world-famous composer wrote in his fiftieth year, "asking myself whether I possessed the capacity to develop an artistic individuality of high rank; I could still detect in my work a tendency toward imitation, and contemplated only with great anxiety my chances of developing into an independent original creator."

This was a harsh judgment, perhaps (and in retrospect he could afford it), but it was not unfair. The work Wagner had produced up to 1842 had included three complete operas, several overtures (including one on "Rule, Britannia"), a hymn in honor of the Russian Emperor Nikolai I (required by the terms of his Riga contract), three piano sonatas, and some songs, but none of it survives in repertory with the exception of the occasionally exhumed overture to the third opera, *Rienzi*, a Meyerbeerian grand opera on a subject from Roman history. The two earlier operas were both comic works: *Die Feen* ("The fairies," never performed during Wagner's lifetime) after an old scenario by the Venetian playwright Carlo Gozzi, and *Das Liebesverbot* ("The ban on love," performed, once only, in 1836) after Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure.* The music, as Wagner admitted in retrospect, was completely derivative of the repertory current at the German theaters of the day, and bizarrely eclectic, mixing Weber with Bellini.

In 1839, having been fired from his post in Riga, Wagner made for Paris, where he fancied the as yet unfinished *Rienzi* might be staged, and remained there for two and one-half years. He utterly failed to establish himself as a composer, and kept from starving only by accepting low-paying work from music publishers making piano arrangements of popular operas, and by writing reviews and other articles (not all of them on music) for publication both in Paris and at home. When *Rienzi* was finally accepted for performance, it was in Dresden, not Paris. It became the occasion not for his success in the French capital, but for his leaving it. The lifelong resentment with which Wagner looked back on his three years in Paris had a considerable impact on the subsequent direction of his work.

But as of 1842, five years before the death of his contemporary Mendelssohn, seven years before the death of his contemporary Chopin, and fourteen years before the death of his contemporary Schumann, Wagner was still at square one, both creatively and in terms of his career. That is why one tends to forget that he was an only slightly

younger member of the same generation as the three composers just named, and why he is associated even more firmly and exclusively than Liszt with the somewhat later period whose "complete expression" (to recall Mann) he unexpectedly became.

Wagner did receive one all-important musical impression in Paris, however—though he did his best in later life to cover it up. In the fall of 1839 Wagner heard Berlioz conduct his own dramatic symphony *Roméo et Juliette*, a work in the symphony-oratorio tradition of Beethoven's Ninth and David's *Le Désert*, in which vocal music alternated with instrumental—that is, texted music with absolute—in the delineation of Shakespeare's tragedy of ill-starred love. In Wagner's own recollection, it opened for him "a new world of possibilities which I had not then dreamed of,"[2] both in the handling of the orchestra and in the transmutation of drama into instrumental music—or, to put it the other way around, in the dramatic concretization of textless music.

Wagner never forgot this lesson from Berlioz, and acknowledged it a quarter of a century later in a presentation copy of the orchestral score to one of his own operas, inscribed "To the great and dear author of *Roméo et Juliette*, the grateful author of *Tristan und Isolde*." He also acknowledged it to Liszt, in a letter dating from the time of the *Lohengrin* premiere, when he averred that "there are only three of us who belong together nowadays, because only we are our own equals, and that's you—*he* [Berlioz]—and I."[3] At the very least, this was an enormous slight to Schumann, then the most eminent German composer by far. But Schumann had put himself at a distance from the New German School in reaction to Franz Brendel's critical excesses (see chapter 8), and (as we may remember from chapter 6) he had been somewhat chary in his praise of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. In light of the alliance Wagner now claimed with his French and Hungarian senior colleagues, the claims of the New German School to a bona fide national birthright seem more equivocal than ever.

But for public consumption Wagner told another story. In his autobiography *Mein Leben* ("My life"), written in the 1870s, when Wagner was widely if grudgingly recognized (in Carl Dahlhaus's words) as "the uncrowned king of German music,"[4] and after a newly powerful and united Germany had at last avenged itself in war against post-Napoleonic France, Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* was replaced in Wagner's account by a fictitious performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony as the shattering event of Wagner's Paris days, the purifying experience that ended "that whole period of deterioration in my musical taste" brought about by "my superficial theatrical activities," which "now sank away before me as if into an abyss of shame and remorse."[5]

Wagner now professed having been put off, in *Roméo et Juliette*, by "a great deal that was empty and shallow."[6] He performed something like a ritual of exorcism to purge his soul, and the souls of his readers, of any sense of kinship with French art, even Berlioz's: "While admiring this genius, absolutely unique in his methods," Wagner now admonished, "I could never quite shake off a certain peculiar feeling of anxiety; his works left me with a sensation as of something strange, something with which I felt I should never be able to be familiar, and I was often puzzled at the strange fact that, though ravished by his compositions, I was at the same time repelled and even wearied by them."[7] He was, in short, a *German*, to whose essential nature French culture was, by *its* essential nature, insuperably alien. This mystique of unanalyzable essences—"essentialism" as it is now usually called—was already on display twenty years before in his tract on Jewishness in music. A necessary component of racism (if not by itself a sufficient one), it was Wagner's signal contribution to music criticism.

The Dresden premiere of *Rienzi*, at the Royal Court Theater of Saxony on 20 October 1842, was a huge success, followed almost immediately by an incredible break: the sudden death of the Royal Court Kapellmeister, an Italian named Francesco Morlacchi (whose music, quoted in Ex. 6-3, may have had a chance influence on Schumann). Wagner, who until then had conducted only at Königsberg and Riga, and nowhere for the last three years, was offered the job. It was as if the former conductor of the Portland Junior Symphony were suddenly named director of the Metropolitan Opera. To cement the deal, Wagner supervised a production of his next opera—*Der fliegende Holländer* (*The FlyingDutchman*), his first on a German legendary subject and by common consent his first masterpiece—in February 1843.

The six-year tenure at Dresden thus so auspiciously inaugurated would reach its conclusion in the spring of 1849 on the city barricades, with the opera house in flames and Wagner so obviously delighted at the sight of the blaze that he was accused of having started it. A musician, spotting him in the crowd, yelled a merry parody of Schiller's and Beethoven's Ode to Joy: "Herr Kapellmeister, der Freude schöner Götterfunken hat gezündet!" ("Mr. Conductor, the divine spark of joy has ignited!"). A warrant for Wagner's arrest was issued on 16 May; eight days later, with Liszt's help, he escaped to Switzerland. He would not set foot on German soil for more than a decade.
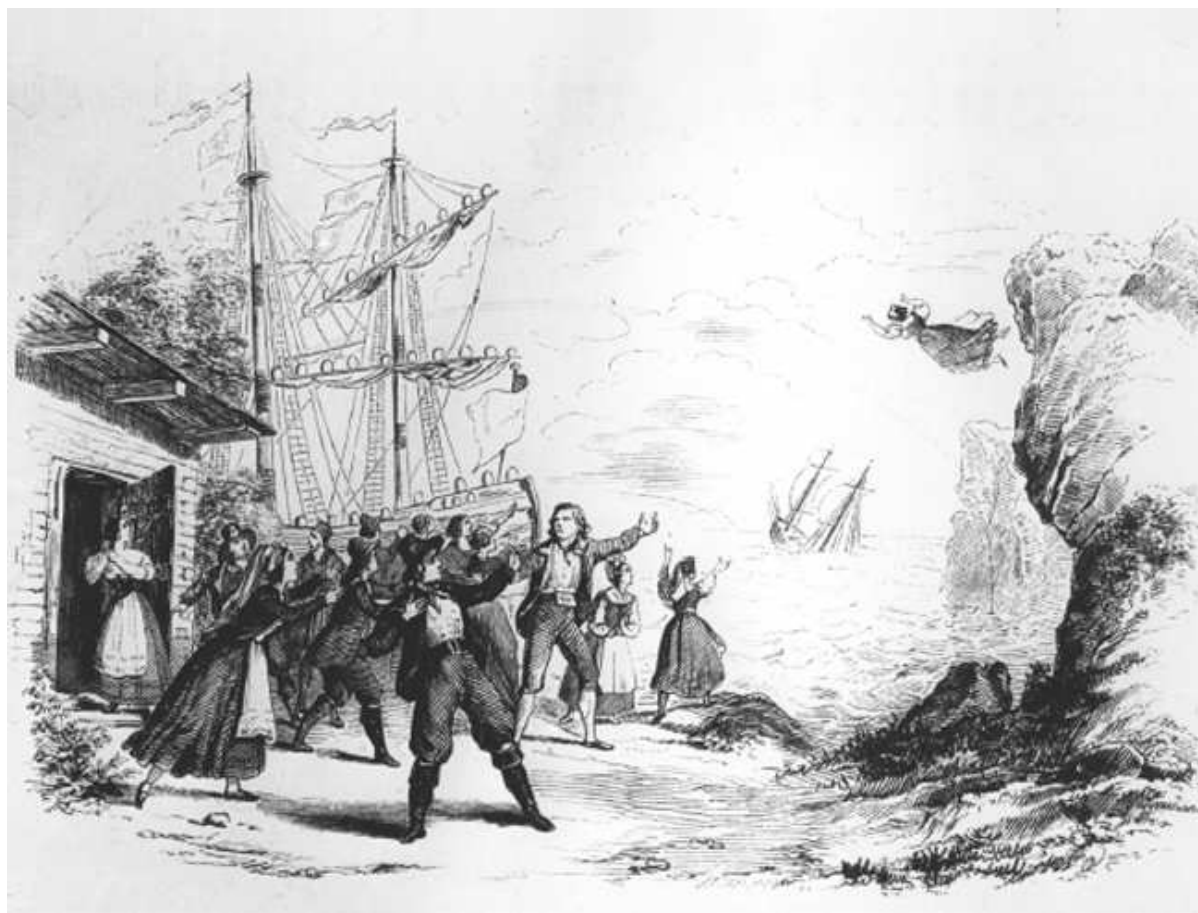
fig. 10-2 *The Flying Dutchman*, final scene of the first production (1843).

By then Wagner had composed his grand romantic operas *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, which continued his series of German legends for the stage and marked him out as the white hope of the New German School. The combination of antiquarian romanticism in the work with revolutionary politics in the life is only a surface paradox: both the futuristic politics and the nostalgic esthetics were symptoms of a general utopianism that seized the European cultural avant-garde during the revolutionary decade. Moreover, the title characters of all three of Wagner's romantic operas—the Dutchman, Tannhäuser, Lohengrin—were heroic intruders whose advent irrevocably disrupts a corrupt or complacent social order: revolutionaries, in short, with whom Wagner, resentful parvenu that he was, identified intensely.

The Flying Dutchman (who should really be known as the Roaming or Wandering Dutchman) was a legendary symbol of uprooting and persecution akin to the Wandering Jew, condemned to roam unceasingly because he taunted (some say struck) Christ on the day of his crucifixion. In Wagner's version, borrowed from Heine, the title character, a phantom sea captain condemned to eternal maritime wandering in his phantom ship as penalty for the sin of pride, is redeemed by the sacrificial love of a pure maiden (Senta), daughter of a greedy merchant sailor who had plighted her to the Dutchman for the sake of material gain. To her father's despair she willingly perishes to free the stranger. The stormy D-minor Overture to *The Flying Dutchman*, Wagner's earliest palpable hit, is one of the most successful of the many emblematic nineteenth-century rewritings of the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth.

Tannhäuser was a historical figure, one of the thirteenth-century German knightly poet-musicians known as *Minnesänger*. In the opera, the full title of which is *Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg* ("Tannhäuser and the singers' contest on the Wartburg"), he is a knight crusader who has dallied (both sacrilegiously and anachronistically) with Venus, the Roman love goddess, and has scandalized his peers with his lascivious songs, but is redeemed by the sacrificial love of Elisabeth, a pure maiden who inspires sincere remorse, by pilgrimage, and by divine forgiveness despite his sin (and despite the pope's obduracy).

The musical tour de force in Wagner's setting is the brilliant contrast between the impressive chorale-like solemnity of the pilgrimage music and the extraordinary sensuality of the music suggestive of the "Venusberg" (Mount of

Venus or Mons Veneris, the goddess's abode). The Venusberg music certainly flaunts the lessons in timbre and orchestral texture that Wagner had learned from Berlioz. In the form in which it is performed today, however, the episode is an interpolation made for a (famously unsuccessful) Paris revival in 1861, after Wagner had broken through (in *Tristan und Isolde*) to a harmonic idiom unforeseen in 1845.

In retrospect, however, the most Wagnerian moment in *Tannhäuser* is the title character's long narrative monologue in the third and last act, in which the composer achieved what the Wagner scholar Barry Millington calls an unprecedented "musico-poetic synthesis,"[8] something inescapably reminiscent of earlier attempts to invent or re-invent opera along neoclassical lines. As in a recitative, say, by Monteverdi or by Gluck, Wagner's vocal line closely follows the contour and rhythm of the spoken language, while the form seems to follow no preconceived structure but responds instead, and with great flexibility, to the anecdotal and emotional sequence of the narrative. And following the unacknowledged example of more recent French composers, the orchestra supports the vocal line with a supple web of expressive and illustrative reminiscence motifs.

Later, however, another Wagner scholar, Carolyn Abbate, discerned a crucial additional element in the Wagnerian synthesis. She showed that underlying the apparently free form of the narrative is the traditionally strophic form of the narrative ballad, long associated (at least, in our experience, since the days of Goethe and Schubert) with Germanic imitation folklore. This was a particularly fertile insight since it bridged the modernistic (revolutionary) and the folkloric or archaic aspects of Wagner's legend-spinning technique.[9]

fig. 10-3 *Lohengrin*, **costume design by Julius Schnorr von Carosfeld for the first production (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris).**

In *Lohengrin*, finally, the title character is a legendary knight of the Holy Grail. The opera follows no single literary prototype but is Wagner's own synthesis derived from anonymous medieval epics and from the romances of the Minnesinger Wolfram von Eschenbach (ca. 1170–ca. 1220), a contemporary of the historical Tannhäuser. In the plot the composer crafted from these sources, the pure knight comes out of nowhere in a boat drawn by a white swan, to aid a pure maiden (Elsa of Brabant) who has been falsely accused of murder by a scheming claimant to the throne to which her slain brother was heir. Lohengrin restores order to the troubled land, banishes the schemer and his sorceress wife, and prepares to marry Elsa. Because she could not contain her curiosity and demands to know his identity, he is forced to renounce her and she dies of grief, but not before her brother is miraculously released from the transmogrified swanlike state in which he had conveyed his sister's deliverer to his noble mission.

Like Tannhäuser, Lohengrin sings a self-revealing ballad-narrative in the third act, establishing it as the quintessential Wagnerian form. The other item in the opera that in retrospect assumes the character of a Wagnerian first is the Prelude (*Vorspiel*) to the first act. Instead of a conventional overture in several contrasting sections (or with several contrasting themes), a Wagnerian prelude aspires to complete formal unity, carried along as if on a single breath by what Wagner later termed *unendliche Melodie* ("endless" or "infinite melody"), a seamless stream in which every note is thematic. Many of Wagner's later preludes could be described as scene setters, but this one is something else. It is a summary of the opera's ideal content: the musically (that is, nonverbally) enunciated concepts and imagery of which the anecdotal plot that follows is to be a metaphor. Far from anticipating or preparing for the agitated opening scene, it contrasts with it in every way. Wagner called it a representation of a host of angels descending with the Holy Grail, and their return to heaven after delivering it. Lohengrin's serenely mysterious appearance and departure, and his powers of deliverance, are prefigured. The form of this seventy-five-bar composition is simplicity itself—a highly significant simplicity, in fact, since even here the strophic principle of the narrative ballad rules. The melody first heard in the ethereal timbre of divided violins immediately returns, reinforced by doubled woodwinds (and with a different continuation). Again, more richly yet, it returns in the horns and lower strings; yet again, powerfully, it returns in the massed brass, after which a composed diminuendo reverses the composed crescendo of perpetually strengthened instrumentation, until just four solo violins are left playing at the end.

Less audaciously simple in form, but more popular as a concert piece, is the boisterous prelude to act III with its brassy main theme sandwiching a quieter middle section for the winds in a conventional ABA form. It gives way, incidentally, to a number so popular as to have become folk music: Elsa's bridal song, known by many who are unaware of ever having heard any Wagner as "Here Comes the Bride." Even in the nineteenth century, the oral tradition remained as alert to emanations from the literate sphere as the other way around.

In keeping with his personal identification with his heroes—or, perhaps more to the point, with his wish to be identified *as* a hero—Wagner insisted on drawing links between his artistic output and his biography, many of which have been exposed as spurious. He claimed, for example, that *The Flying Dutchman* had been inspired by his own shipboard experience of storms off the Norwegian coast during a voyage to England in 1839. But examination of his manuscripts has revealed that the Norwegian setting was hastily substituted for a Scottish one only weeks before the Dresden premiere.

In a similar vein, Wagner claimed that the inspiration for *Tannhäuser* came when he caught a glimpse of the site of the eventual song contest, the famous castle at Wartburg in Thuringia (eastern Germany), on his way back from Paris to Dresden in 1842. As he put it in a famous passage from *Mein Leben*, the sight, "so rich in historical and mythical associations, so warmed my heart against wind and weather, against Jews and Leipzig commerce, that in the end I arrived hale and hearty."[10] A seemingly gratuitous dig, this; and yet, like all of Wagner's self-mythologizing, it points up the strong connections between art and myth, and between myth and contemporary politics, that guided Wagner's work from beginning to end, and that has always formed the context of its reception.

Notes:

(2) Richard Wagner, *My Life* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1927), p. 234.

(3) Wagner to Liszt, 5 July 1855; *Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt*, Vol. II, trans. Francis Hueffer (New York: Scribners, 1897), pp. 102–3.

(4) Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 4.

(5) Wagner, *My Life* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1927), pp. 214–15.

(6) Wagner, *My Life*, p. 234.

(7) *Ibid*., p. 235.

(8) Barry Millington, "Tannhäuser," in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. IV (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 650.

(9) Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 98–117.

(10) Wagner, *My Life*, p. 266.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Richard Wagner

THE ARTWORK OF THE FUTURE, MODELED (AS ALWAYS) ON THE IMAGINED PAST

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Deeds of Music Made Visible (Class of 1813, I)
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

All the more ineluctable are these connections in view of Wagner's lifelong habit, which he made a point of enunciating not merely as practice but as principle, of writing his own librettos—or, as he put it, the "poems" for his "dramas." A playwright even before he was a musician, he found this a natural enough task. But he insisted that it was a necessary prerequisite for returning drama to its true estate as the supreme artwork in which all artistic media were united. Thus it is a mistake to regard the libretto of an opera, even one by Wagner, as providing in itself a *dramma per musica*, to quote the old Florentine slogan—a "drama for [i.e., to be realized through] music." Neither the words nor the music were privileged in Wagner's conception; the drama arose out of their union.

All of this theorizing became explicit during a momentous hiatus in Wagner's composing activity, one attributable in equal measure to factors internal and external. After the Weimar premiere of *Lohengrin* under Liszt in 1850 not another Wagnerian premiere would take place until 1865. And except for a single short and intensely frustrating bout in the summer of 1850, Wagner put hardly a note on paper between 1848 and 1853. This period of musical dormancy in Wagner's career has often been compared to the chrysalis or pupa phase in the life of an insect, during which the larva is passively—and, seemingly, miraculously—transformed into the imago, or fully developed organism. Wagner's was no passive transformation, however; no artist ever reflected more furiously or with a greater sense of purpose on his art. It was a willed self-transformation, an act of genuine renunciation and heroism that has scarcely a parallel in art history. Its results were equally unparalleled, and momentous.

To deal with the external factors first: *Tannhaüser*'s poor reception in 1845, and the dismal failure of his repeated attempts to reform the administration of the court theater establishment, alienated Wagner from his job and inclined him toward increasingly open political agitation. In the big incendiary year 1848 he met the exiled Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin (1814–76), under whose spell he wrote a series of articles culminating in *Die Kunst und die Revolution* (*Art and Revolution*), written on a visit to Paris in the summer of 1849, at the beginning of his exile.

It is in this tract that we encounter for the first time, and in crude but highly concentrated (and quotable) form, the theory of music drama that Wagner would will himself into embodying over the next half-dozen years, and to which he gave most detailed expression in an extended pamphlet called *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* ("The artwork of the future," 1849) and a full-length book called *Oper und Drama* ("Opera and drama, 1851, rev. 1868). Like most of the reformist tracts in operatic history, these writings purported to revive and renew the ritual theater of ancient Greece, and recapture its fabled ethos. Unlike earlier reformers, however, but very much in the spirit of his time, Wagner conceived of that ethos in social terms. The Greek tragedy, the union of Apollo and Dionysus, of strength of character and creative vitality, was in his view the mainstay of Athenian democracy.

This was the essential link—the essential allegory—binding art and the public weal. "Hand-in-hand with the dissolution of the Athenian State marched the downfall of Tragedy,"[11] Wagner vociferated in *Art and Revolution*. "As the spirit of community (*Gemeinschaft*) split itself along a thousand lines of egoistic cleavage, so was the great united work (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) of Tragedy disintegrated into its individual factors." Those disunited splinters, sad fruit of social degeneration, were the proud separate arts as practiced in modern times: poetry, music, painting, and the rest, each with its own canons of illusive isolated excellence, each with its own zealously guarded traditions of craft and technique. No wonder that the arts had degenerated into playthings of the wealthy and the titled, or—worst of all—sites of commercial ("Jewish") activity.

The spiritual condition the modern arts expressed, according to Wagner, was one of abjectness, "soft complacence,"

social alienation. Or rather, this fallen state expressed itself through the modern arts, for such debased artistic practices could not truly express anything, least of all the despairing state of the modern world. "Of such a condition Art could never be the true expression," Wagner sneered. "Its only possible expression was *Christianity*," which emphasized not the free actions of free men, but only "*Faith*—that is to say, the confession of mankind's miserable plight, and the giving up of all attempt to escape from out this misery."[12] Christianity, Wagner said here more explicitly than anywhere else, was the contemptible consolation of the weak. Here he came closest to the other pair of thinkers with whom Jacques Barzun linked him in infamy. (Compare Marx, for whom religion was "the opium of the people.")

But unlike Marx, Wagner did not oppose all religion. Art was his religion, as art (or so he conceived it) had been the religion of the Greeks. "To the Greeks," he wrote, "the production of a tragedy was a religious festival, where the gods bestirred themselves upon the stage and bestowed on men their wisdom."[13] The surest proof of the modern debasement of art and religion alike, for Wagner, was the fact that almost every government had censorship laws that prohibited the theatrical portrayal of religious sacraments: "our evil conscience has so lowered the theater in public estimation, that it is the duty of the police to prevent the stage from meddling in the slightest with religion," while all the while the stage should be religion's natural habitat. But what sort of religion, if not Christian? Here again the Greeks had the answer: "With the Greeks,"[14] Wagner wrote, the perfect work of art, the Drama, was the abstract and epitome of all that was expressible in the Grecian nature. It was the nation itself—in intimate connection with its own history—that stood mirrored in its artwork, that communed with itself and, within the span of a few hours, feasted its eyes upon its own noblest essence. All division of this enjoyment, all scattering of the forces concentrated on *one* point, all diversion of the elements into separate channels, must needs have been as hurtful to this unique and noble artwork as to the like-formed state itself.

Thus the result of that division was not just the debasement of the separate arts, but the downfall of the "public conscience" as well. The reuniting of the arts in the perfect Drama, then, will be a regeneration of society. And here is where the nexus of Art and Revolution becomes an explicit prescription.

> Each one of these dissevered arts, nursed and luxuriously tended for the entertainment of the rich, has filled the world to overflowing with its products; in each, great minds have brought forth marvels; but the one true Art has not been born again, either in or since the so-called Renaissance. The perfect Art-work, the great united utterance of a free and lovely public life, the *Drama, Tragedy*,—howsoever great the poets who have here and there indited tragedies—is not yet born again: for the reason that it cannot be *re-born*, but must be *born anew*.
>
> Only the great *Revolution of Mankind*, whose beginnings erstwhile shattered Grecian Tragedy, can win for us this Art-work. For only this Revolution can bring forth from its hidden depths, in the new beauty of a nobler Universalism, *that* which it once tore from the conservative spirit of a time of beautiful but narrow-meted culture—and tearing it, engulfed.[15]

That, of course, is the reconstituted social cohesion that only a reconstituted art-religion can vouchsafe. As Edward Gibbon presciently wrote in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* some sixty years before, "the exercise of public worship appears to be the only solid foundation of the religious sentiments of the people," adding pointedly that "the memory of theological opinions cannot long be preserved, without the artificial helps of priests, of temples, and of books."[16] Gibbon was reflecting on the death of the national pagan religion that had sustained Rome's glory days. It was the religion that Wagner—as artist-priest, author of books, and builder of temples—wanted to restore by providing the means for the renewed exercise of public worship.

As an ostensible follower of Bakunin, who preached the violent overthrow of all political states so as to restore mankind to its naturally virtuous and pacific nature, Wagner made a point, in his tract of 1849, of forswearing all political nationalism. "If the Grecian Art-work embraced the spirit of a fair and noble nation," he wrote, "the Art-work of the Future must embrace the spirit of a free mankind delivered from every shackle of hampering nationality; its racial imprint must be no more than an embellishment, the individual charm of manifold diversity, and not a cramping barrier."[17]

And yet he could not follow Bakunin all the way to the radical individualism that the Russian, a true anarchist, favored. Possibly in unwitting accord with his Lutheran upbringing, Wagner sought emancipation not in individual autonomy but in *Gemeinschaft*—community, or group spirit. Art's great task, as Wagner formulated it, was "to teach

man's social impulse its noblest meaning, and guide it toward its true direction."[18] The envisioned brotherhood was that of "*the strong fair Man*," as the composer put it, italicizing every word, "to whom *Revolution* shall give his *Strength*, and *Art* his *Beauty*!"

So the Art-work of the future celebrated and guided a cult of strength. "Only the *Strong* know *Love*," Wagner continued, italics still lending his prose a fever pitch,

> only Love can fathom *Beauty*; only *Beauty* can fashion *Art*. The love of weaklings for each other can only manifest itself as the goad of lust; the love of the weak for the strong is abasement and fear; the love of the strong for the weak is pity and forbearance; but the love of the strong for the strong is *Love*, for it is the free surrender to one who cannot compel us. Under every fold of heaven's canopy, in every race, shall men by real freedom grow up to equal strength; by strength to truest love; and by true love to beauty. But Art is Beauty energized and turned to Knowledge.

> And as the Knowledge of all men will find at last its religious utterance in the one effective Knowledge of free united manhood: so will all these rich developments of Art find their profoundest focus in the Drama, in the glorious Tragedy of Man. The Tragedy will be the feast of all mankind; in it,—set free from each conventional etiquette,—free, strong, and beauteous man will celebrate the dolour and delight of all his love, and consecrate in lofty worth the great Love-offering of his Death.[19]

Needless to say, these ravings are of interest to us only because after a long, ruthlessly honest, and heroically self-disciplined quest, Wagner found the creative wherewithal to realize this dream in a fashion that many then and since have found overwhelmingly convincing. In themselves Utopian pronouncements matter little. They come as dependably from cranks, charlatans, and adolescents as from geniuses, and they usually possess nothing but historical interest (that is, as signs of the times). If Wagner's career had ended at this point he would be remembered today for his three romantic operas, and as a blustery "campus radical" in the enthusiastic but ineffectual spirit of '48. Not the theorizing but the creative work—not the intention, in other words, but the deed—has won Wagner his towering stature. The controversy that continues to surround his name is above all a controversy over the extent to which the deed necessarily embodied the intention. What it finally comes down to is a debate as to whether the identification of Wagner's creative achievement with his political and social purposes amounts to anything more than a particularly noisome and destructive instance of the genetic fallacy: the confusion of the actual nature or essence of a thing with the circumstances of its origin or its motivating premises.

Notes:

(11) *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, Vol. I, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895), p. 35.

(12) *Ibid*., p. 37.

(13) *Ibid*., p. 47.

(14) *Ibid*., p. 52.

(15) *Ibid*., p. 53.

(16) Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. III, Chap. xxviii, Part 3.

(17) *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, Vol. I, pp. 53–54.

(18) *Ibid*., p. 56.

(19) *Ibid*., pp. 57–58.

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Wagner: Dramatic works

Der Ring des Nibelungen

FROM THEORY INTO PRACTICE: THE RING

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Deeds of Music Made Visible (Class of 1813, I)
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

To return now from the speculative to the historical plane and continue our narrative, the intentions implicit in *Art and Revolution* could hardly have been embodied more explicitly than they were in Wagner's next creative project. And equally obvious is the persistent identity of the Wagnerian cult of strength with a cult of nation after all—a nation conceived not in political but in ethnic (or "racial") terms. As Wagner put it shortly after returning from Paris to Zürich, his Swiss abode, exile had made him homesick—but not "merely for the modern homeland":

> As though to get down to its root, I sank myself into the primal element of Home, that meets us in the legends of a Past which attracts us the more warmly as the Present repels us with its hostile chill. To all our wishes and warm impulses, which in truth transport us to the *Future*, we seek to give a physical token by means of pictures from the Past, and thus to win for them a form the modern Present never can provide.[20]

Thus was Utopia tinged by nostalgia. Under cover of a universalism that nevertheless drew exclusively on pre-Enlightened Germanic sources, nationalism had reentered through the back door.
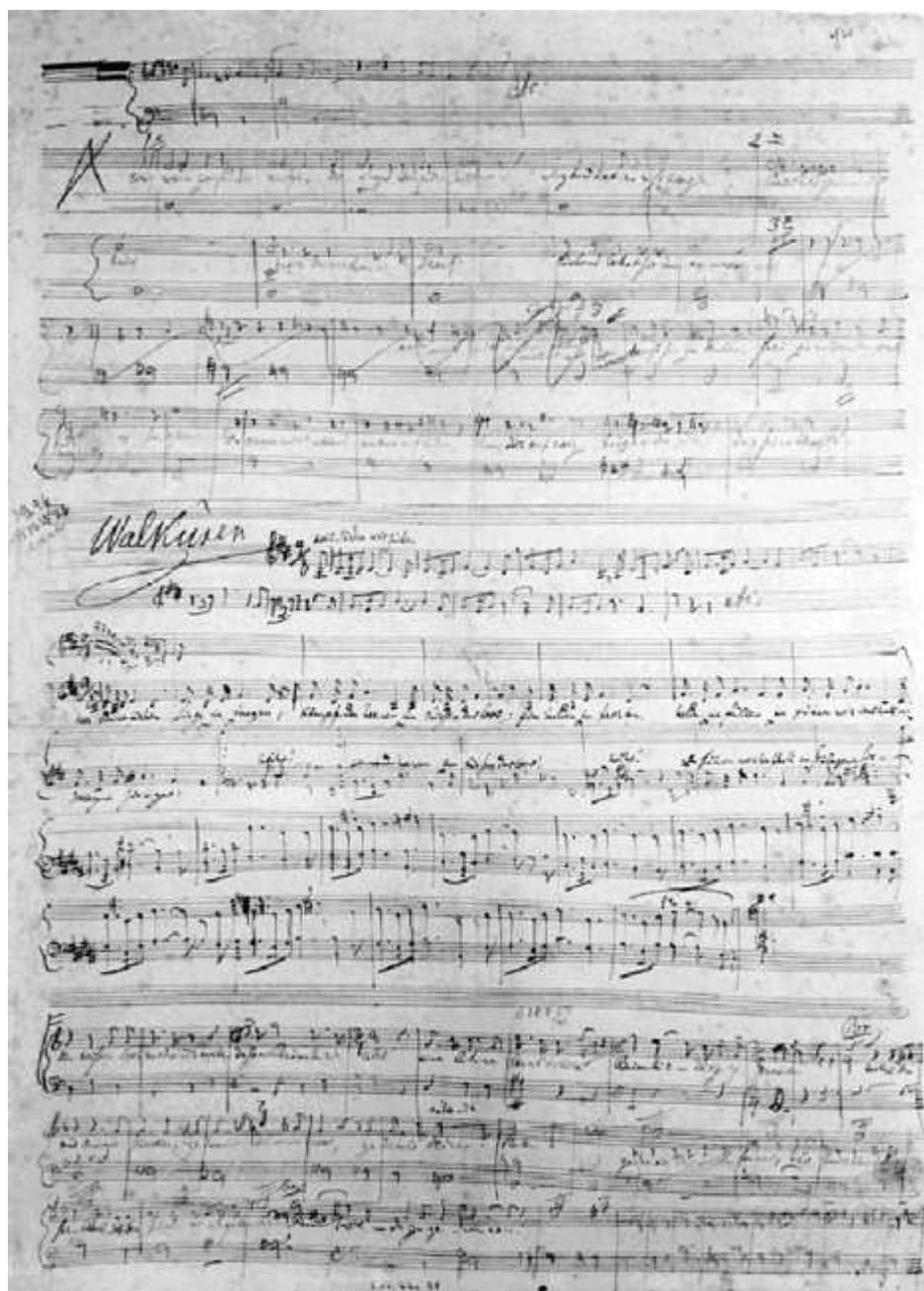
fig. 10-4 Wagner, sketch for *Siegfrieds Tod* (1850), containing music that later went into *Die Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung* (Library of Congress, Gertrude Clarke Whittall Foundation).

The combination of futuristic utopianism by way of Bakunin and nostalgic utopianism by way of Nordic myth was a volatile one, to say the least. Wagner met Bakunin in the summer of 1848. He spent the fall of that year drafting the "poem" for a *grosse Heldenoper* ("great heroic opera") to be called *Siegfrieds Tod* ("The death of Siegfried"). Siegfried (or Sigurd) the Dragon-Slayer was the great folk hero of the early and medieval Germanic mythology in which Wagner was immersing himself. For Wagner, Siegfried was a revelation of "the fair young form of Man, in all the freshness of his force, the real naked Man, in whom I might spy each throbbing of his pulses, each stir within his mighty muscles, in uncramped, freest motion: the type of the true *human being*."[21] Siegfried's legend looms especially large in the *Volsungasaga*, an Icelandic epic that recounts the mythic origins of the Nordic peoples, and in the *Nibelungenlied*, a thirteenth-century epic by an anonymous South German poet, which recounts many of Siegfried's exploits, including his brute seizure for his superior Volsung race of the great gold hoard of the Nibelungs (a race of dwarfs), his capture of Brynhild, the Icelandic queen, his death through her treachery, and her atonement through self-immolation, leading to the golden age of gods and Germans.

Wagner's enthusiasm for these old texts was not his alone. As the Wagnerian scholar Barry Millington has pointed

out, by the 1840s the *Nibelungenlied* had become the object of a cult in Germany, where it had become "a potent symbol in the struggle for national unification."[22] None other than Franz Brendel, the force behind the New German School, had called for an operatic setting of the myth, no doubt already thinking of Wagner: "I believe the composer who could accomplish this task in an adequate manner would become the man of his era,"[23] he declared. But Wagner had his own reasons to be drawn to Siegfried. As George Bernard Shaw dryly observed in his lighthearted but instructive pamphlet *The Perfect Wagnerite* (1898), Wagner saw Siegfried as a sort of Norse "Bakoonin," a great (if thwarted) revolutionary figure.

Wagner first learned about the Volsungs and the Nibelungs by way of *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835), a best-seller by the great philologist Jacob Grimm of fairy tale fame, which contained alongside detailed synopses of the sagas a description of the Norse theogony (the genealogy and history of the gods), as preserved in the medieval Icelandic epics known as Eddas. The aim of *Siegfrieds Tod* was to link the personal tragedy of Siegfried, a traditional sort of operatic subject (and one already foreshadowed in the previous works of Wagner's early maturity), with the Edda myths, the history of the gods, and so elevate the drama to the level of a cosmogony (the story of the origins and destiny of the world). That would provide a suitably hallowed subject for his socially transforming "Art-work of the future." The libretto he came up with portrayed Siegfried's death as the end result and expiation of a curse on the Nibelung hoard, placed there long ago (according to the Eddas) by the dwarf Alberich from whom the gods had stolen it. In this blend of tragedy and epic (something, incidentally, that the Greeks said couldn't be done), the tragic element was to be portrayed through action, the epic through a wealth of ballad-narratives of a kind for which Wagner had already shown a strong predilection.

This time, however, it did not work. The biggest ballad-narrative in *Siegfrieds Tod* came right at the beginning, in a lengthy prologue that showed the three Norns, figures comparable to the three Fates of Greek mythology, who weave eternally the rope of destiny. As they weave, they tell the story of how the dwarf Alberich, of the Nibelung race, stole the gold hoard from the Rhine and fashioned from it a ring; how the gods contracted for themselves a magnificent castle and paid for it by stealing the ring from the Nibelungs, who cursed it, and by giving the cursed ring to the giants who built the castle; how Siegfried slew the surviving giant, who had assumed the form of a dragon; how the hero won the sleeping Brynhild (Brünnhilde in the opera), awakened and loved her (an archetypal Wagnerian "love of the strong for the strong") but failed to heed the portent of her treachery. This final section of the narrative brings the story to the point at which direct action can commence. A true ballad, it was even equipped with a refrain that is heard at the beginning and at every point where a semicolon occurred in the foregoing summary (Ex. 10-1).

Wagner sketched a setting of this narrative, and also began the next scene, a duet for Brünnhilde and Siegfried, before breaking off in despair. In a later tract, *Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde* ("A communication to my friends"), published in 1851 as the hundred-page preface to a collected edition of the "poems" to his romantic operas, Wagner gave an account of his travails. "Just as I was setting Brünnhilde's first address to Siegfried," he wrote, "all my courage suddenly failed me since I could not refrain from asking myself which singer could bring such a heroine to life." Another reason for losing heart was the knowledge, as he put it, that "I should now be writing this music only for paper,"[24] that is, without any imminent prospect of a performance, exiled as he was from his homeland.

But as Carolyn Abbate has suggested, these were rationalizations, not reasons.[25] There was more to Wagner's impasse than practical concerns or temporary dejection. It peeps through the lines of his "Communication" where Wagner wrote—somewhat clumsily, at an uncharacteristic loss for words—of his "fear that my poetic purpose could not be conveyed in its full aspect to the only organ at which I aimed, namely the *Gefühlsverständnis* of any public whatsoever."[26] The best that Wagner's first English translator, William Ashton Ellis, could do with the crucial word, *Gefühlsverständnis*, was "feelings-understanding." It would be fruitless to look for a better English phrase, since the German itself is murky. A gloss is required, an interpretation in the light of subsequent events. But first, back to Wagner. After some hemming and hawing, he continues his confession. If he continued setting the existing poem as it stood, he realized,

> I should have had willy-nilly to tax myself to *suggest* a host of huge connections in order to present the action in its full meaning. But these *suggestions*, naturally, could only be inlaid in *epic* [i.e., narrative] form into the drama; and here was the point that filled me with misgiving as to the efficacy of my drama, in its proper sense of a scenic exposition. But these connections were of such a nature that they could proclaim themselves only in actual plot situations, that is in situations that can only be intelligibly displayed *in Drama*. Only in this way could I have any chance of succeeding in *artistically conveying my purpose to the true emotional* (not just the critical) *understanding* of spectators who shall have gathered together expressly to learn it.[27]

ex. 10-1 Norns' refrain and First Norn's first speech from Wagner's sketches for *Siegfrieds Tod*

Usually this passage, and the one before it, is interpreted to mean that Wagner wanted to convert the narrative component of the drama, which recounted all those "suggestions" of previous history, into directly portrayed action, which meant expanding the conception of the dramatized myth into a whole trilogy of musical dramas plus a prologue: that is, the gigantic theatrical cycle that Wagner did in fact succeed in bringing forth (though it took him twenty-five years to do it) and that is now collectively known as *Der Ring des Nibelungen* ("The ring of the Nibelung," or "Alberich's ring").

But this explanation leaves us with a paradox: even after the remaining dramas were composed, the narratives in the last of them, which had been *Siegfrieds Tod* (now called *Götterdämmerung*, "Twilight of the Gods") not only remained in place but became even longer than before. And this applies especially to the narrative of the Norns, where all the trouble began. In the abortive version of 1850, its setting, a simple ballad with refrain, occupied 114 measures; its very complex successor in *Götterdämmerung*, even without counting the spate of orchestral music that precedes the singing, takes 277!

Thomas Mann had an inkling into what Wagner was really about when he wrote that in turning *Siegfrieds Tod* into the *Ring* Wagner was acting on "an overpowering need to bring that previous history within the sphere of his sense-appeal."[28] This begins to suggest that what Wagner felt was needed was a musically realized version of the past history of the drama that would give him the means of triggering through "sense" (that is, the sense of hearing) the kind of emotional response to the action—*whether directly portrayed or narrated*—that only music can elicit. That is what Wagner must have meant by "suggestions of connections"; and the emotional response to that sensory stimulus must be what he meant by "the feeling's-understanding." Put most simply, there had to be a preexisting *musical* reality with which the Norns' narrative, and everything else in the final drama, could suggestively connect.

Carolyn Abbate has built further on Mann's insight, casting Wagner's task as being one of creating "a past in music"[29] (rather than one merely described in words) that would be—precisely because it *was* in music—a truly mythic (or, to use Wagner's word, "engulfing") reality that the listener could be fully drawn into and could thus imaginatively inhabit for the duration of the performance. The purpose, then, of converting what was at first merely narrated by the Norns into directly portrayed action was to generate from it a fund of musical symbols with which to stock the

audience's mind, so that when the same all-encompassing narration finally arrived at the beginning of what was the last in a colossal series of four operas, it would possess a palpable, engulfing, and, finally, irresistible emotional force.

By the time Wagner wrote his "Communication to My Friends," he had formulated this grand plan, had begun implementing it, and had even (in *Opera and Drama*) recast the whole history of music and drama from the Greeks to the present in order to justify it as the inevitable outcome of that history. No artist had ever exhibited such unmitigated arrogant ambition; but by the same token no artist had ever accepted so publicly the risk of risible failure. The eventual triumph of the *Ring* was what made Wagner for the last dozen years of his life the uncrowned king of German music. But these were also the first dozen years of the German Reich, the empire that finally united all the German princedoms and dukedoms under an actual single king. The prophecy of *Art and Revolution*, linking artistic regeneration with the regeneration of the body politic, could be seen, by those who wished, as having come true.

Notes:

(20) Richard Wagner, "A Communication to My Friends," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, Vol. I, p. 357.

(21) *Ibid*., pp. 357–58.

(22) Barry Millington, "The Music: Operas," in *The Wagner Compendium: A Guide to Wagner's Life and Music*, ed. B. Millington (New York: Schirmer, 1992), p. 285.

(23) Franz Brendel in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 1845; quoted *ibid*.

(24) *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, Vol. I, p. 380.

(25) Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, p. 158.

(26) *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, Vol. I, pp. 389–90.

(27) *Ibid*., p. 390.

(28) Mann, "Sufferings and Greatness," p. 423.

(29) Carolyn Abbate, classroom lecture overheard at Princeton University, November 1993.

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FORM AND CONTENT

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Deeds of Music Made Visible (Class of 1813, I)
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

fig. 10-5 *Die Walküre*, costume and stage designs by M. Ferdinandus. At left, Siegmund and Siglinde fall in love (Act I); at right, Wotan bids farewell to Brünnhilde (Act III).

The first step was to depict the events recounted by the last segment of the Norns' narrative: Siegfried's coming of age as a hero, his killing the dragon, and winning Brünnhilde. This was accomplished in a "poem" called *Der junge Siegfried* ("Young Siegfried"), composed in the spring of 1851 right after *Oper und Drama* was completed. Next, to explain how the sleeping Brünnhilde had got where she was (on a rocky peak surrounded by fire) when Siegfried penetrated her bastion and awakened her, and to clarify Siegfried's qualifications, so to speak, for his heroic calling (being the incestuous—thus purebred—offspring of two fine Volsung specimens), Wagner preceded *Der junge Siegfried* with another "poem," *Die Walküre* ("The Valkyrie," that is, Brünnhilde), composed between November 1851 and July 1852.

In the process of composing *Die Walküre*, Wagner completely reconceived the drama under the influence of Arthur Schopenhauer, the philosopher whose pessimistic worldview had converted Wagner from the optimistic ideas of the young Hegelians. He reconfigured the *Ring* around Wotan—the chief of the Gods and Brünnhilde's father—as central character, rather than Siegfried. Wotan's original sin, that of destroying the World Ash Tree by hacking his invincible spear from it, now became the deed for which the whole history of the Ring was the expiation, an expiation that now

ended tragically, not with the redemption of the gods (as in *Siegfrieds Tod*, which now had to be drastically revised), but with their violent destruction. Finally, to show the beginning of that history, namely the theft of the gold hoard and the forging of the ring by Alberich the Nibelung (as related in the first stanza of the original Norns' narrative), Wagner wrote one last poem to serve as prologue in the form of a single mighty (two-hour) act: *Das Rheingold* ("The Rhine gold"), completed in November 1852.

fig. 10-6 *Das Rheingold*, David Bispham (1857–1921) as Alberich.

Only now could Wagner turn to the creation of his musical reality, beginning of course with *Das Rheingold* and ending with *Götterdämmerung*. Thus the composition of the poems and that of the music proceeded in opposite chronologies (see Table 10-1).

By the time Wagner returned to the Norns' scene at the beginning of what was now *Götterdämmerung* and composed its definitive version, nineteen years had passed during which he had written five "dramas"—for so he insisted on calling the works he wrote after *Opera and Drama*, in which he had pronounced conventional "opera" forever invalid. In the process he had completely transformed his methods and his style to conform with the precepts he had speculatively evolved. The big gap in the midst of *Siegfried* was due in the first instance to Wagner's despair at his prospects for

TABLE 10-1 Chronology of the *Ring*

POEMS	MUSIC
Siegfrieds Tod (1848–1849; revised 1852)	*Götterdämmerung* (3 acts) (1869–1874)
Der junge Siegfried (1851; rev. 1852)	*Siegfried* (3 acts) (acts I & II 1857; act II scored 1864–1865; act III 1869)
Die Walküre (1851–1852)	*Die Walküre* (3 acts) (1854–1856)
Das Rheingold (1852)	*Das Rheingold* (1 act) (1853–1854)

ever getting the *Ring* performed, but mainly by the composition of two other dramas, to which our discussion will eventually return: *Tristan und Isolde* (completed in 1859, performed in 1865), often cited as the supreme practical embodiment of his theories, followed by *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Wagner's one mature comedy (completed in 1867, performed in 1868).
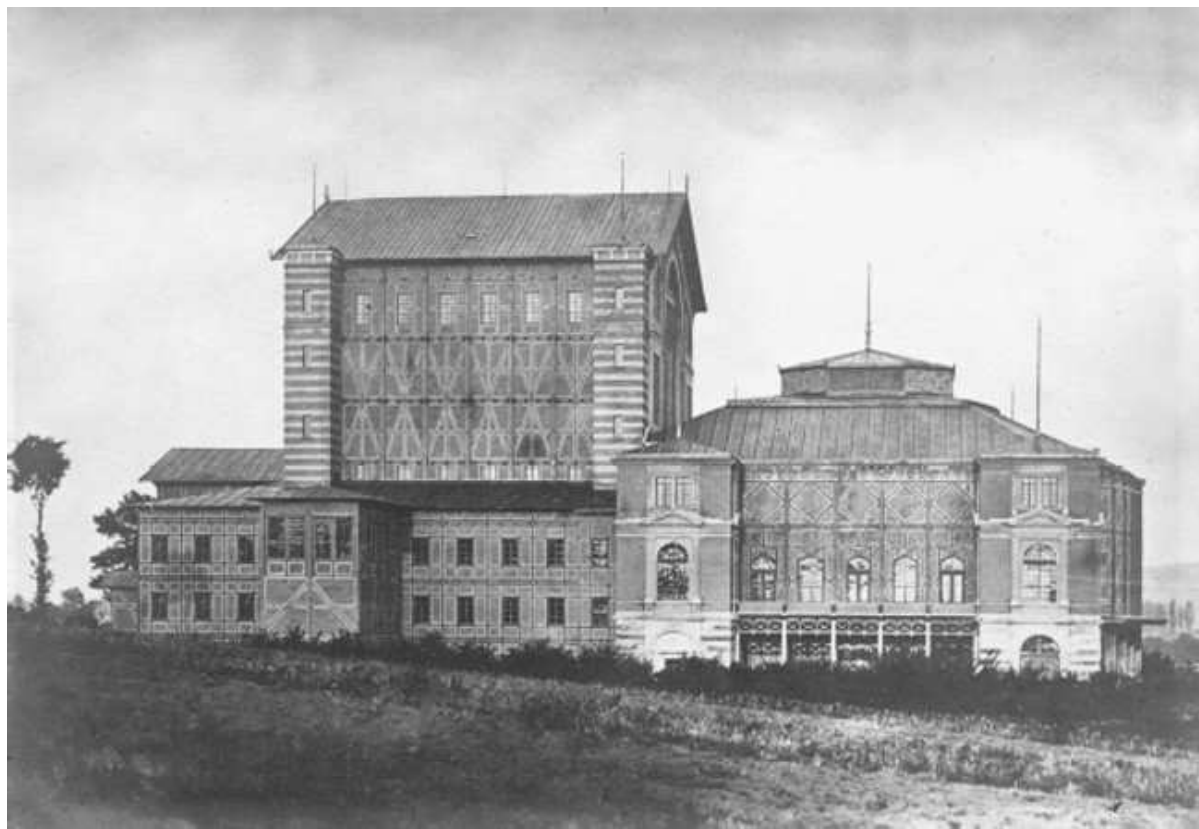
fig. 10-7 Festspielhaus at Bayreuth, 1875.
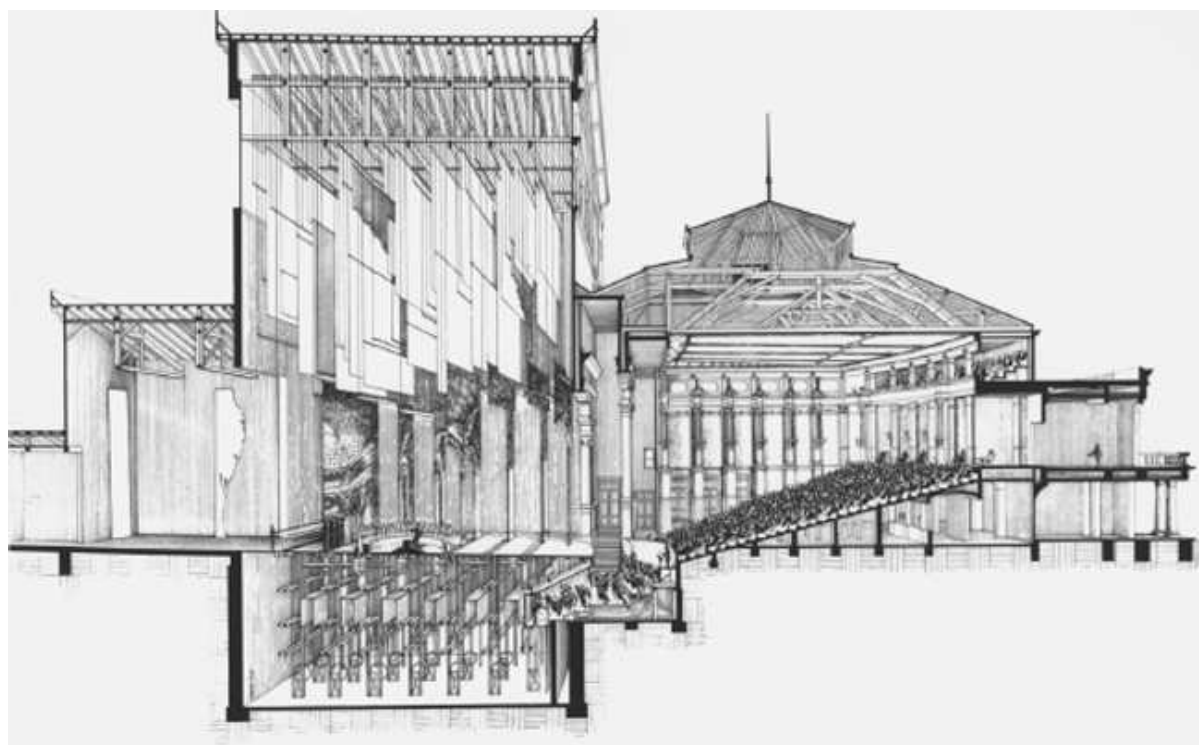
fig. 10-8 Festspielhaus in longitudinal cross section. Onstage are the flats for *Parsifal*; the orchestra, famously, is below and under the stage in the "mystic abyss"; and the auditorium is, no less famously, without aristocratic boxes.

The eventual return to the *Ring*, and its completion, were made possible by a godsend: the unsolicited intervention of Ludwig II, the newly crowned king of Bavaria (southern Germany). The infatuated eighteen-year-old monarch summoned Wagner to Munich, his capital, in 1864, paid off all of Wagner's mountainous debts, lifted all bans on his travel, commissioned the completion of the *Ring* for the unheard-of sum of thirty thousand florins, subsidized the construction of an opera house (or "festival playhouse," to use Wagner's somewhat righteous term) to the composer's specifications in the town of Bayreuth for the sole purpose of performing his works, and even made Wagner his unofficial yet very powerful political adviser. Needless to say, the king's munificence profoundly altered Wagner's political and social views, which quickly took a reactionary and loyally monarchist turn. It also brought Wagner's operatic "reform" historically into line with previous ones: like those of the Florentine Camerata in the sixteenth century or Gluck in the eighteenth, Wagner's was now no revolutionary exploit but a neoclassical revival under the protection of a crown, about as socially conservative a concept as the history of music provides.

But even if their political underpinning had now swung 180 degrees to the right, Wagner's artistic precepts remained what they were. Here is how he summarized the elements of the "music drama" in a passage toward the end of "A Communication to My Friends" (with its sections numbered for reference in the ensuing discussion). The style of the prose itself suggests the leisurely, exhaustive, finally overpowering dramatic unfolding that Wagner now sought:

> [1: The shape of the drama as a Whole] I now saw that in making the music I must necessarily proceed to a gradual but complete upheaval of the traditional *operatic form*. This opera-form was never by nature a form embracing the whole of the drama, but was just an arbitrary conglomerate of separate smaller forms of song, whose fortuitous concatenation of Arias, Duets, Trios, etc., together with Choruses and so-called ensemble-pieces, comprised the actual edifice of Opera.

fig. 10-9 Stage magic at Bayreuth: carriages that supported the swimming Rhine maidens in the first full production of the _Ring_ in 1876.

In the poetic fashioning of my material, it was henceforth impossible for me to contemplate filling out these ready-made forms. Through my music I could only aim now at bringing the drama's inherent overall shape within the grasp of Feeling. In the whole course of the drama I saw no possibility of division or demarcation, other than the Acts themselves, in which the place or time is shifted, or the Scenes in which the _dramatis personae_ change. Moreover, the pliant unity of the myth-material made it unnecessary to crowd the scenes with incident as modern playwrights do; the whole strength of my dramatic portrayal could now be concentrated in a few weighty and decisive moments of development. […] The more I extricated myself from the influence of conventional form, the more definitely the Form of portrayal now required by the peculiarities of my material and its dramatic situations took shape in my mind.

[2: The musical form] This procedure, dictated by the nature of the poetic subject, exercised a quite specific influence on the _tissue_ of my music, as regards the characteristic _combination and ramification of the Thematic Motives_. Just as the structure of the individual scenes excluded every alien and unnecessary detail and led all interest to the main all-governing mood of the whole, so did the whole construction of the drama join itself into one organic unity, whose easily-surveyed members were delineated by those few scenes and situations that determined the succession of moods. No mood could be struck in any of these scenes that did not stand in a significant relationship to the moods of all the other scenes, so that the development of the moods of each from the others, and the constant prominence of this development, should establish the unity of the drama in its very mode of expression.

Each of these chief moods, in keeping with the nature of the material, must also gain a definite musical expression, which should display itself to the sense of hearing as a definite musical Theme. Just as, in the progress of the drama, the intended climax of a decisive main mood was only to be reached through a development, continuously present to the Feeling, of the individual moods already roused, so must the musical expression, which directly influences the physical feeling, necessarily take a decisive share in this development to a climax. And this purpose was realized, as if all by itself, in the form of a _characteristic tissue of principal themes_ that spread itself not over _one_ scene only (as heretofore in separate operatic "numbers"), but _over the whole drama_, and did so _in intimate connection with the poetic aim_.

[3: The musical style] From the "absolute-music" period of my youth, I recall that I had often posed myself the question: How must I set about inventing thoroughly original melodies that should bear a stamp peculiar to myself alone? The more I approached the period when I based my musical construction upon the poetic material, the more completely this anxiety for a special style vanished, until (having gained my objective) I lost it altogether. In my earlier operas I was purely governed by traditional modern melody, whose character I imitated and, out of the concern just mentioned, I merely sought to trick out with rhythmic and harmonic idiosyncrasies that I might vainly call my own. I had always, moreover, a greater leaning to broad and

longspun melodies than to the short, broken and contrapuntal *melismus* [this evidently means something like "short turns of phrase"] proper to instrumental chamber music.

In the *Flying Dutchman*, though, for the first time, I touched on the rhythmic melody of the Folk—but only where the poetic material brought me into contact with the folk-element *per se*, here taking on a more or less national character. Wherever I had to give utterance to the emotions of my dramatis personae, on the other hand, as displayed in their passionate exchanges, I was forced to abstain altogether from this rhythmic melody of the folk; or rather, it could not so much as occur to me to employ that method of expression. It was then my purpose that the dialogue itself, conforming to the emotional content, was to be rendered in such a fashion that *not the melodic expression per se but the expressed emotion* should arouse the interest of the hearer.

The melody, in other words, must spring, quite of itself, from the verse. It could not be permitted to attract attention in itself, as sheer melody, but only insofar as it was the most expressive vehicle for an emotion already plainly outlined in the words. Having arrived at this strict conception of the role of melody, I now completely left the usual operatic mode of composition. I no longer tried intentionally for customary melody—or, in a sense, for melody at all, but absolutely let it take its cue from the feeling-utterance of the words.

[4: The form and style of the poem] The only thing that stood in my way was *the imperfection of our modern verse*, in which I could find no perceptible trace of any natural melodic source, nor any standard of musical expression. The trouble was its *utter lack of genuine rhythm*. I could never have set my *Siegfried* [that is, *Siegfrieds Tod*] if I had to rely on such verse. Thus I needed to invent a Speech-melody of an altogether different kind. And yet, in truth, I did not have to give it much thought, but only take courage; for at the same primal mythic spring where I had found the fair young Siegfried [that is, in the *Nibelungenlied* itself] I also lit, led by his hand, upon the perfect mode of utterance wherein such a man could speak his feelings. This was the *alliterative* verse, bending itself in natural and lively rhythm to the actual accents of our speech, yielding itself so readily to every shade of expression—that very *Stabreim* which the Folk itself once sang, when *it* was still both poet and mythmaker![30]

In sum then, to paraphrase section 1, in order to invest his drama with the authentic attributes of epic, and create not in the spirit of a modern composer, but in that of a folk bard, Wagner envisioned a vast, sweeping structure in which a scene or even a whole hour-long act would be articulated not by means of the customary largish units or "numbers" of conventional opera, but by means of tiny musical particles in ever-changing combinations and amalgams. This building up of a great whole out of a uniformly deployed fund of tiny but intensely meaningful parts would both lend organic unity to an unprecedented temporal span and eliminate the need for a clutter of depicted action. The action of the music drama, like that of an epic, would unfold in a kind of rapt and ritualized stasis that evoked the timeless time of myth, taking its shape within the mind of the spectator under the influence of the particles streaming by, endlessly associated and re-associated by the events depicted or described.

For this purpose description is as good as depiction, and that is why Wagner left so much narrative in place in the fully elaborated *Ring*, and why the reason usually given for its elaboration—viz., to replace events narrated in *Siegfrieds Tod* (=*Götterdämmerung*) with events actually enacted and depicted in *Das Rheingold, Die Walküre*, and *Siegfried*—is so inadequate to the task of explaining its final shape. It was to gather up the fund (or "tissue") of musical particles that would give the events of the final epic-drama a true "past in music" or musical reality, and the possibility of the kind of thematic linkages Wagner now envisioned, that made the vast, slowly unfolding preliminary trio of epic-dramas necessary.

In section 2, Wagner named the particles *Hauptthemen*, "main themes," as had become the standard nomenclature (through the writings of the music theorist Adolph Bernhard Marx) for the constituent themes in the exposition of a symphony or sonata movement. Most of them are far shorter than what is usually meant by a full-fledged theme, though, and some are really atomic particles—a mere turn of phrase (*melismus*), a chord progression, even a single chord or (at their most minimal) a single interval, if played with a characteristic timbre. They are more like what music analysts call motives, the kind of elemental ideas from which themes are built up, or (more typically) into which they devolve when developed.

At its most characteristic, then, it makes more sense to regard the Wagnerian "tissue" not as a thematic exposition but rather as a vastly extended, tonally vagrant development section. In this way its kinship with (or more strongly,

its actual origin in) what Wagner was the first to call "absolute music"—the transcendently and ineffably expressive instrumental music of German romanticism—is kept in view. In keeping with the deliberately unspecified (and therefore protean or multivalent) significance of "absolute music," Wagner never gave his themes or "particles" descriptive or programmatic designations, the way Berlioz, for example (in the *Symphonie fantastique*), designated and delimited the meaning of his idée fixe. Wagner evidently wished to let the meanings of his motives emerge by a wordless process of association with the unfolding action, as (on a much smaller scale) the use of "reminiscence motives" had worked in earlier operas all the way back to the eighteenth century.

In 1876, however, the year in which the complete four-day *Ring* cycle was first performed at Bayreuth, Wagner authorized Hans von Wolzogen (1848–1938), a young aristocratic disciple, to compile and publish what he called a *Thematischer Leitfaden durch die Musik zu Richard Wagners Festspiel 'Der Ring des Nibelungen'* ("Thematic guidebook through the music to Richard Wagner's festival play 'The Ring of the Nibelung'"), the first of countless such books, sold wherever Wagner is performed, in which the particles were isolated and listed, and given names for ready reference.

These particles, which Wagner (and following him, Wolzogen) simply called themes, had already been given another name by a number of other commentators. Its originator, ironically enough, was an old enemy of Wagner's named Heinrich Dorn (1804–92), an acquaintance from the early days in Riga, who had written a folksy opera of his own on the Nibelungen legend as early as 1854, and resented Wagner's arrogant pretensions to revolutionize the arts of music and drama. Seeking to make fun of Wagner's "particles," Dorn had dubbed them *Leitmotive* (singular, *Leitmotiv*), a term obviously related to "guidebook" (*Leitfaden*), which caricatured Wagner's thematic particles as "motives to guide you" (i.e., through this mess). Other writers immediately found the ill-meant designation useful, however, and it is now standard terminology in all languages. In English the word is usually spelled "leitmotif" (plural, "leitmotives").

Whether the labels that Wolzogen and many later writers have attached to Wagner's leitmotives are equally useful is another matter. Many writers have deplored them as simplistic or "inaccurate"—though by what measure their accuracy can be gauged is hard to guess, since Wagner never named them and so they are all inaccurate by definition—and have called for their rejection. Commentators have occasionally tried to make do with numbers. That Wolzogen's names have tended narrowly to limit their signification can hardly be denied, though, and that is indeed a drawback.

An even greater drawback is the implication that, once named, leitmotives operate as objective referents rather than (as Wagner wished) a stimulus to the listener's subjective involvement in the drama. Without knowing the non-Wagnerian origin of the labels, one could easily imagine that Wagner conceived his leitmotives abstractly or even prepared them in advance of composition, as raw material; whereas in fact they arose in the course of the compositional act in conventionally spontaneous response to the poem and functioned thereafter in a manner no different in kind from that of a reminiscence motif, albeit on a vastly greater scale, to the point where, in *Götterdämmerung*, they constituted practically the whole of the musical "tissue," just as Wagner intended from the outset. William Mann, a translator and a respected explicator of the *Ring* (and an eloquent advocate of numbers), has cautioned that "every listener must decide for himself what *The Ring* means to him, and he will do so reasonably and justly, not necessarily by mastering the labels assigned to the ninety-odd musical themes by Hans von Wolzogen or [others], but by observing at which significant moments the themes appear and what may, as a result, be deduced from this." To label them, Mann argues (echoing a sally by Claude Debussy), reduces leitmotives to the level of "musical visiting cards."[31]

And yet even the way Mann describes them shows why mere numbers will not do: the occurrence and recurrence of leitmotives, borne along in a compellingly directed temporal medium that Wagner called the "sea of harmony," are what *define* the "significant moments" in the drama. They have, in short, not only musical but dramatic significance, and do indeed evoke a conceptual as well as a sensory response; their whole intended magic, in short, lies in their capacity to link (and to *control* the link between) the sensory and conceptualizing faculties, thus producing a synergy that magnifies response (or what Wagner called the feeling's-understanding) far beyond what either music or poetry or spoken drama might individually elicit. They are the chief vehicle through which the artistic synthesis at the heart of the Wagnerian enterprise operates.

Therefore, in the discussion that follows, and in keeping with the idea behind Mann's suggestion, leitmotives will be treated not as abstract signifiers but, as far as possible, as reminiscence motives. That is, they will be identified not only with their convenient conventional labels, but also (and primarily) in terms of their first appearance in the

drama. (In the case of *Götterdämmerung*, this means they will be traced to their appearances in the earlier operas in the cycle.) In this way their status as concrete references through which every moment in the unfolding drama is linked, both conceptually and sensorily, with other moments, can be savored the way Wagner meant it to be savored: that is, as the elements out of which a mythical world and its history—amounting to nothing less than a mythic or alternative reality—is assembled not only in the composer's imagination, but in the listener/spectator's as well. But it will not do to scorn the verbal labels in principle: as word-savers they are indispensable.

Before observing Wagner's tissue of leitmotives in action as the articulator of epic drama, there is one more idea to investigate, the very important but often overlooked point raised in sections 3 and 4 in the extract from Wagner's "Communication," where the matter of personal style comes into collision with that of "folk" (that is, common or communal) style. Wagner clearly hankered after a style that would be both personal and in some sense communal, because he wanted both the prestige of a romantic genius (who had to be original) and the social potency of a bard (who partook of the language of his community).

His early, artificial attempts at originality, he confesses, were futile, lacking in social potency. Later, in The *Flying Dutchman*, he attempted to write in a folk style, but that style limited his originality, and in any event was only available for use when the characters singing were plausible representatives of "the folk" (that is, for the most part, faceless peasants in chorus). What was needed was a communal language that not only his characters but Wagner himself could use and adapt into a modern personal style. What Wagner wanted, in short, was a folklore (or an archaic lore, which for him meant the same thing) that could be used not merely as an object of representation, but as a source of personal style.

This sort of folklorism was given a name—"neonationalism"—in the twentieth century, not by musicologists but by art historians, originally with reference not to German but to Russian art. It fits Wagner's ideals and methods perfectly, however: from the *Stabreim* of old bardic poetry (short for *Buchstabenreim*, "rhyming with letters," that is, with initials) he educed a highly rhythmic but unrhymed verbal idiom full of assonance and alliteration on heavily accented syllables, out of which arose a compelling rhythm that animated the music in turn. In his stylistic impersonation of an ancient bard Wagner paradoxically found the path to a modern, original, and instantly recognizable personal idiom. As Jean Cocteau, a theorist of twentieth-century modernism, once said, an original creator has only to copy something in order to demonstrate his originality.[32]

Wagner was in this sense perhaps the first modern artist. The community to which he gave voice was at first an imaginary community. But imaginary or no, he was its authentic voice, and around his work a real community of Wagnerian adepts did eventually form, a community unlike any other that ever arose around a composer. As the philosopher Bryan Magee has marveled, "the worship of Wagner by people of all kinds, including some who were themselves possessed of creative ability of the highest order, and in fields quite different from music, is something unique in the history of our culture."[33] To investigate the source and the mechanism of the Wagnerian magic will be to investigate simultaneous revolutions in art and in national ideology.

Notes:

(30) *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, Vol. I, pp. 367–76, condensed.

(31) William Mann, "Down with Visiting Cards" (1965), in *Penetrating Wagner's Ring*, ed. John L. DiGaetani (New York: Da Capo Press, 1978), p. 303.

(32) Jean Cocteau, "Cock and Harlequin," in *A Call to Order*, trans. Rollo Myers (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1926), p. 32.

(33) Bryan Magee, *Aspects of Wagner* (New York: Stein and Day, 1969), p. 57.

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Götterdämmerung

Dmitri Shostakovich

THE TEXTURE OF TENSELESS TIME

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 10 Deeds of Music Made Visible (Class of 1813, I)
Source: MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The obvious place to make contact with the mature Wagnerian magic is the Prologue to the first act of *Götterdämmerung*, which opens with the somber scene of the Norns and continues with the ecstatic morning-after duet of Siegfried and Brünnhilde. These, of course, are the very scenes with which Wagner had begun his abortive attempt to compose *Siegfrieds Tod* in 1850. He finished them around two decades later, in 1870, after having provided the past in music he had lacked the first time around. Because of these circumstances, and because the scene of the Norns at their weaving remained the most extended and "universal" narrative in the *Ring cycle*, this Prologue contains perhaps the most densely woven tissue of leitmotives Wagner ever produced. The Norns' colloquy, moreover, does not introduce a single new leitmotif; it is a ceaseless warp and woof of well-worn tunes.

ex. 10-2a Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Revival" leitmotif
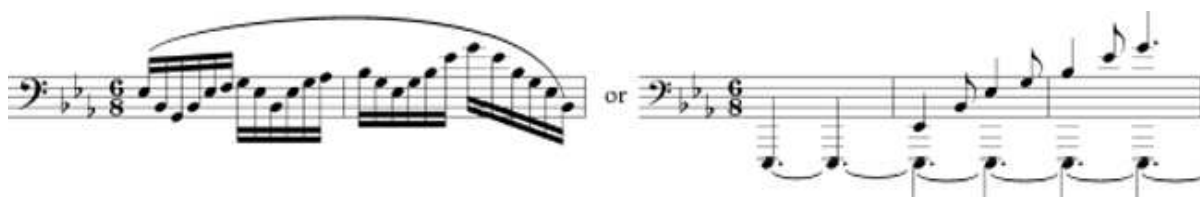
ex. 10-2b Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Rhine" leitmotif

ex. 10-2c Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Erda" leitmotif

ex. 10-2d Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Fate" leitmotif

ex. 10-2e Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Death" leitmotif

ex. 10-2f Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Loge" leitmotif

ex. 10-2g Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, Norns' ballad refrain
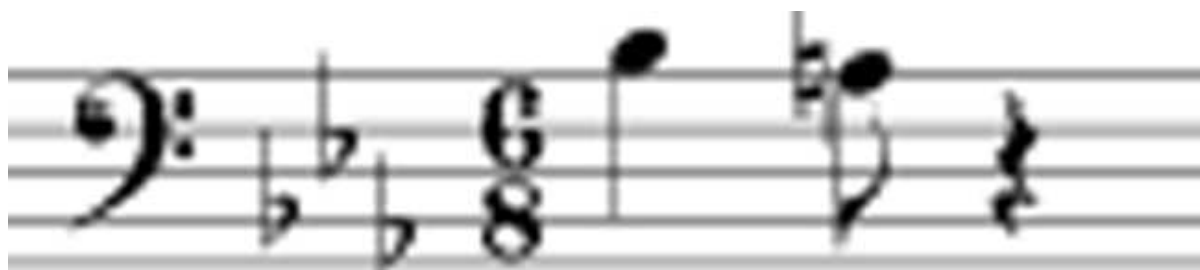
ex. 10-2h Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Genesis" leitmotif

ex. 10-2i Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Valhalla" leitmotif

ex. 10-2j Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Treaty" leitmotif

ex. 10-2k Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Götterdämmerung" leitmotif

ex. 10-2l Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Ring" leitmotif

ex. 10-2m Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Authority" leitmotif

ex. 10-2n Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Omen" leitmotif

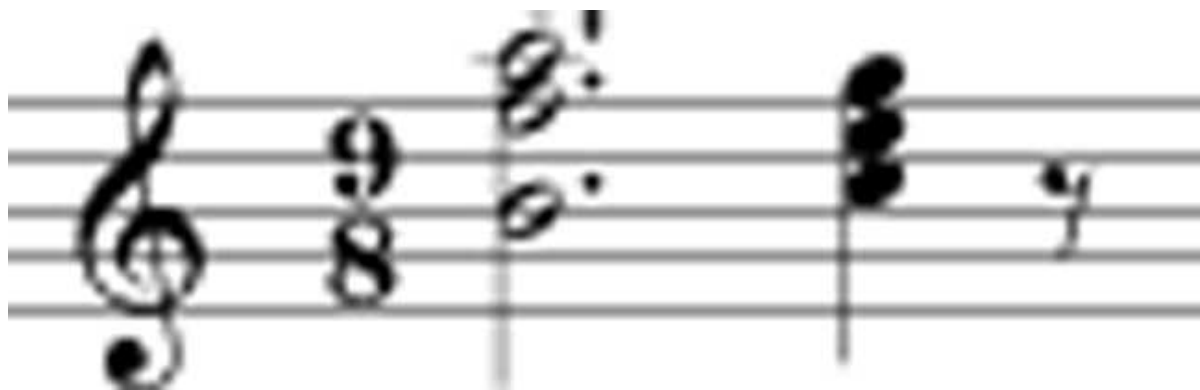**ex. 10-2o Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Oblivion" leitmotif**

ex. 10-2p Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Grief" leitmotif

ex. 10-2q Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Liebe-Tragik" leitmotif

ex. 10-2r Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Rhine gold" leitmotif

ex. 10-2s Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Joy" leitmotif

ex. 10-2t Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Gold's dominion" leitmotif

ex. 10-2u Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Sword" leitmotif

ex. 10-2v Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, Siegfried's horn call leitmotif

ex. 10-2w Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, "Curse" leitmotif

ex. 10-3a Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung* in vocal score, leitmotives labeled (on first occurrence only) as in Ex. 10-2, mm. 105–111

ex. 10-3b Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung* in vocal score, leitmotives labeled (on first occurrence only) as in Ex. 10-2, mm. 27–29

The denseness of the motivic weave is in itself an illustration of the poem, which (to recall the setting of 1850, sampled in Ex. 10-1) concerns the weaving of the rope of destiny. As Wagner put it in an exultant letter to King Ludwig on finally finishing the scene where it had all started in May 1870, "I contemplated the Norns' scene with real horror, and for a long time I refused to get involved in it. But now, at last, I have woven this horror into the fabric of the rope, and I admit that it is a unique webbing."[34] And yet for all its complicated webbing the Norns' weaving song is still a ballad-narrative, just as it had been the first time around. Wagner, the epic bard, sings his tale in the manner of his medieval predecessors. Its refrain—

singe, Schwester,	Sing, my sister,
dir werf ich's zu:	I throw [the rope] your way:
weisst du, wie das wird?	Do you know what will be?

—is an excellent example of Wagnerian Stabreim incantation with its patterns of S's and, most obviously, W's (Ex.

10-3a). An even more striking example is the first line in the scene (Ex. 10-3b), sung by the Third Norn, which sets the tone for the whole opera: "Welch' Licht leuchtet dort?" ("What glow glimmers there?" in the translation by Rudolph Sabor,35 who summons apt alliteration's artful aid). But Wagner's alliterations are not confined to initials. The combination *-lch-* at the end of *Welch'* is expanded first to *Lich*t and then to *leuch*tet, while the new combination *-cht* at the end of *Licht*, also repeated in leu*cht*et, is echoed in the final *t* of *leuchtet* and *dort*. These combinations and recombinations correspond on the verbal plane to the tissue of combining and recombining leitmotives in the music.

The verses assembled out of the shifting alliterative patterns, together with the music that carries it aloft, serve to reconstitute the Wagner world in the mind of the spectator, and to recapitulate its history up to the point at which the action of the final opera will begin: that is, the point immediately preceding the catastrophic dénouement. The Norns' song in its final version does not correspond exactly to the story of the three preceding operas, since it begins at an earlier point in time. Rather, it is a summary of the all-encompassing world-epic that the four *Ring* dramas each partially enact. Here is a somewhat straightened-out and filled-in summary of the summary:

Long ago, as they worked, the Norns had slung their rope upon the world ash-tree, at the foot of which a spring whispering wisdom welled up. One day Wotan, king of the gods, came to drink from the spring and hacked himself a branch from the tree with which to make himself a shaft for his spear, upon which he inscribed the runes of binding treaties honorably respected, by virtue of which he made himself ruler of the world. Later, Wotan commissioned the giants Fasolt and Fafner to build him a stronghold, Valhalla, which was to be garrisoned with the souls of heroes fallen in battle. It was the duty of the Valkyrie maidens, daughters of Wotan and the earth-goddess Erda, to bring in these heroes from the battlefield. In payment of the giants' labors, Wotan promised Fasolt and Fafner Freia, the goddess of youth, which promise, however, trusting to the specious cunning of Loge, god of fire, he did not intend to honor. When called upon to do so, he tricked Alberich, lord of the dwarf Nibelung smiths, out of his hoard of gold, and with this he then bought off the giants. From this moment of Wotan's perfidy, the world ash-tree began to wither and the spring to dry up.

The Nibelung hoard contained a magic ring, the gold for which had been stolen from the daughters of the Rhine by Alberich, who had been able to fashion it only by forswearing love. Mastery of this ring would eventually lead its possessor to mastery of the world. When deprived of it by force, Alberich had laid a curse on it: death to whoever possessed it; a great deal of the story of the *Ring* is the story of the workings of this curse. Realizing that he had only escaped death himself by a technicality—that he had only briefly held Alberich's ring on its way to the giants (one of whom immediately kills the other for its sole possession) —Wotan has resolved that it be returned to the Rhine whence it was originally filched.

Because she attempted to execute her father's *secret* desire in defiance of his *expressed* wish (with respect to the outcome of a battle of heroes), Wotan was obliged to imprison his Valkyrie daughter Brünnhilde, locked in sleep, on a rock surrounded by Loge's fire. There she was to remain inviolate until such time as a hero who knew not the meaning of fear should come to wake her. Siegfried, son of the Volsung twins Siegmund and Sieglinde, appeared, set upon accomplishing this. Siegfried, however, was tainted by possession of the fateful ring, which he won by killing the surviving giant (in the guise of a dragon) at the behest of his foster father Mime, the brother of Alberich, who had raised Siegfried in hopes of gaining the ring for himself. With his spear, Wotan attempted to bar the young hero's passage to the flame-girt rock upon which Brünnhilde slumbered. The spear's might was shattered by the sword that Siegfried had inherited from his pure father Siegmund, after which the young superman continued on his way to Brünnhilde unopposed. Thwarted in his attempt to recover the gold for the Rhine maidens, foreseeing Siegfried's and Brünnhilde's deaths from the ring, and knowing that the world was doomed, Wotan dispatched heroes from Valhalla to hew the withered trunk and branches of the world ash-tree in pieces and pile them up around Valhalla so that they might catch fire, when the time came, from Siegfried's funeral pyre.

The spring of wisdom has dried up forever. Wotan sits in Valhalla surrounded by all the gods and heroes, awaiting the coming of the end. The Norns, deprived of their former abode, have moved to Brünnhilde's rock, where they have resumed their weaving, attaching the rope to the branch of a pine tree and to a promontory on the rock. The second Norn prophesies that Wotan will kill the cunning Loge, who led him fatally astray, with the shards of his shattered spear and will hurl it onto the pyre. These somber imaginings, coupled with the thought of the stolen gold still unreturned to its rightful guardians, trouble the minds of the Norns and cloud their vision. They fail to see that the rope is fraying against the rock until it is too late. Heaving on it to

tighten its twist, they cause it to snap. Terrified, crying that eternal wisdom is ending and that they can speak to the world no more, the Norns sink down to their mother Erda, and vanish forever.[36]

The whole narrative is about the rupture of linear time and about the fatal necessity that interrelates and intermeshes past, present, and future, producing the tenseless time that myths inhabit. This, of course, was the very thing the tissue of leitmotives was devised to portray, and Wagner's music starts right out by proclaiming it. The majestic opening chords are a near replay of the music to which Brünnhilde greeted the sun after receiving the title character's awakening kiss in the third act of *Siegfried*, the finale of the previous drama ("Heil dir, Sonne," Ex. 10-2a). The allusion is no mere reminder of where the previous drama had left off, however, but a "transformation" (à la Liszt, it is fair to say) of the earlier passage.

ex. 10-4 Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung* in vocal score, leitmotives labeled (on first occurrence only) as in Ex. 10-2, mm. 1–26

Where at the end of *Siegfried* these chords made a gleaming progression from E minor to C major, at the beginning of *Götterdämmerung* (Ex. 10-4), the tonality is darkened considerably by transposition down a half step: E♭ minor and C♭ major. (In effect, it has been transposed to the key of Wagner's early sketch for *Siegfrieds Tod*, nor will this be the only instance of Wagner's uncanny recall of that twenty-year-old sketch which, scholars have determined, was no longer in his possession when he finally returned to the scene.) In tone-color, too, the sound is muffled, and in an especially Wagnerian way. The trumpets and horns heard in *Siegfried* are replaced by horns and "Wagner tubas."

The latter—more formally, tenor tubas in B♭ and small bass tubas in F, each pitched an octave lower than the corresponding French horn—were first built to Wagner's specifications for the earliest performances of *Das Rheingold*, which took place in 1865, although the parts for them were composed in 1854. Adapted from the "saxhorn" (French band instruments manufactured beginning in the early 1850s by the Paris firm of Adolphe Sax, the inventor, somewhat earlier, of the saxophone), the Wagner tuba was meant to fill the gap between the horns and the standard contrabass tuba with the softened and covered timbre of conical-bore brass, rather than the thinner, more penetrating cylindrical-bore timbre of trombones.

Trumpets and trombones remained, of course; the Wagner orchestra, with its standard complement of seventeen brass instruments (from four to eight horns, up to four "tuben," four trumpets including the otherwise rare bass trumpet, four trombones, and standard tuba), complemented by fourteen woodwinds and a specified minimum of sixty-four strings, was the largest ever. But it was not large merely for the sake of volume. The "cushioned" sound of the Wagner orchestra, on its soft bed of brass—and especially when played, as Wagner further specified, in a covered pit such as the Bayreuth theater possessed—produces a sound of unprecedented pliant sensuality. The opening chords of *Götterdämmerung*, unlike their shining predecessors in *Siegfried*, are sublimely tranquilizing, trance-inducing. In this, they accomplish what countless accounts of actual bardic recitation describe as the function of the instrumental prelude that invariably preceded the singing of the tale.

But the most potent and (literally) telling part of the chords' transformation is what follows the first and accompanies the second; for here Wagner displays his mastery of what he called "the art of transition"—the bringing of musical entities into harmonious juxtaposition and the seamless passing from one to another. It is nothing less than the eternally rolling Rhine itself (Ex. 10-2b), as originally set forth in the Prelude to *Das Rheingold* at the very beginning of the *Ring* cycle (or even more primevally, in the accompaniment to the Norns in the early sketch as shown in Ex. 10-1), to which all will return at the end of *Götterdämmerung*.

This fluent commingling of primeval origins and eventual destiny with the moment at hand evokes what the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) would later term the "epic chronotope" or epic time-mode, the "timeless past" or "time out of time" of myth.[37] As Bakhtin described it in his essay *Epic and Novel* (1941), the epic chronotope is a wholly alien, sealed-off quality of time that is understood to be an "absolute past" unfolding not as a linear

development potentially leading to the present but as a completed, closed "circle" on which "all points are equidistant from the real, dynamic time of the present, as if the fullness of time were contained in a world in which we cannot participate," but in which we are easily absorbed. Bakhtin wrote with reference to Homer. Wagner's *Ring* is the supreme modern embodiment of this ancient time mode, and it is the musical texture that seals it off and makes it so perfectly and untouchably whole.

When the recall of Brünnhilde's awakening reaches its fourth chord (D♭ minor), the slower Rhine motif is transformed into the leitmotif associated with Erda, the Norns' mother, who is as primeval as the Rhine itself (Ex. 10-2c, quoted from its first appearance in *Das Rheingold*). In its original form, Brünnhilde's awakening motif circled back on itself with a repetition of the opening pair of chords. In *Götterdämmerung,* the second chord in this final pair is preempted, in a stunning example of "transition-art," by the weird progression that ever since the second act of *Die Walküre* has been associated with the concept of fate (Ex. 10-2d). It acquired this association from the original dramatic context: Brünnhilde appearing to Siegmund on the eve of battle to tell him that Wotan had been compelled to decree his death. And in its original context the motif was followed by another that is traditionally associated with the death itself, as decreed by fate (Ex. 10-2e). It first reappears in *Götterdämmerung* to provide the shuddering accompaniment to the beginning of the Norns' colloquy, already quoted in Ex. 10-3b.

The fate motif, it could be (and has been) fairly argued along lines noted above, has a wider relevance in the unfolding of the *Ring* drama than its facile label would allow. In the very next scene in *Die Walküre*, for example, it is heard when Siegmund recalls the apparition of Brünnhilde and the *comfort* that she brought him. In the next act, it accompanies Brünnhilde's reminder to Wotan that her outward defiance of his will (in trying to save Siegmund's life) was in fact her *obedience* to his secret wish. In the third act of *Siegfried*, it accompanies Erda's rebuke, on being awakened by the importunate Wotan, that he has only himself and his perfidy to blame for his predicament—a fixing of responsibility and just deserts that suggests the very opposite (or so one could maintain) of blind fate as controller of destiny. Indeed, most of the leitmotives in the *Ring*, if subjected to a similarly detailed census, would need to be interpreted in light of similar contradictions and paradoxes—all of which, it should be emphasized, only increases the yield of meaning (the way detailed study always does).

But to argue from such evidence that the famous label should be revoked would be to ignore the motif's wider relevance in the unfolding drama of modern music history. It was as the Fate motif—a widely recognized musical symbol with a potential range of relevance that far outstrips its original context in the *Ring*, vast as that may be—that the Soviet Russian composer Dmitry Shostakovich cited it at the outset of the somber finale of his Symphony no. 15 (1971), his last major orchestral work, and (by giving it a sequential treatment that hooked it up with the ancient *passus duriusculus*, the chromatically descending bass line of lamentation) helped give it that wider relevance (Ex. 10-5).

ex. 10-5 Dmitri Shostakovich, Symphony no. 15, beginning of fourth movement

As it functions in Shostakovich's symphony, the motif relates only indirectly, if at all, to the events of *Die Walküre* or *Götterdämmerung*. Indeed it could be argued that in its new context its relevance to the *Ring* no longer matters. The only reference that counts is to the oft-despised conventional label that Wagner himself never attached to the phrase. Only through the label could the motif now reflect so poignantly on the life of the symphony's composer, thence on the lives of all who were fated to live and work in the turbulent middle of the twentieth century, in a place where that turbulence had been focused through a lens of totalitarianism.

That "universal" message was something Wagner never anticipated, but it is no less real for that. Meaning is the product of history—in the case of art works, of a "reception history"—that in the case of the Fate motif includes at least two appropriations: first Wolzogen's, through which the label was attached in the first place, then Shostakovich's, through which the label was given a new association, unrelated (except through collateral descent) to its original context. Neither Wagner nor Wolzogen—nor Shostakovich for that matter—finally owns the motif's meaning. Like all symbols (like words, to pick the most obvious example), it responds to new conditions and contexts with new significance.

To return now to the *Götterdämmerung* Prologue, and proceed to the Norns' narrative: the leitmotif that accompanies their reaction to the dawn, and their decision to take up their spinning, is the one associated ever since *Das Rheingold* with Loge, the god of fire and light (and by extension, of intelligence), who, acting in a sense as Wotan's lawyer, tricked Alberich out of his hoard and set in motion the catastrophic sequence of events the outcome of which the Norns are about to foresee (Ex. 10-2f). The rocking chord progression that accompanies the Second Norn's "Wollen wir spinnen und singen" and launches the ballad-narrative on its way (Ex. 10-2g) is the only theme that is new to this scene (and therefore, very strictly speaking, not a leitmotif, especially since it will recur in no later scene). It is very important, however, since it comes back to accompany (hence identify) the refrains, and also because its ending "half-diminished" chord (F–A♭–C♭–E♭), already foreshadowed in the wake of the Fate motif (Ex. 10-4, m. 21), assumes such an independent significance in the course of the Prologue that it might even be thought of as a "Leitharmonie" in its own right.

When the first Norn begins to recount the tale of the World-Ash, the mother of all leitmotives is sounded, the "natural" horn signal that portrays the primeval Rhine at the very start of the cycle (Ex. 10-2h)—sometimes, in an

aptly biblical figure, called the Genesis motif. Her ballad-narrative proceeds to its own theme as long as events preceding the beginning of *Das Rheingold* are its subject. But at the mention of Wotan, the motif associated with his fortress lodge Valhalla (Ex. 10-2i), the trophy of his greed and the cause of his fateful breach of contract, is sounded. And it is immediately followed, in a conjunction that goes all the way back to *Das Rheingold*, with the leitmotif associated with the broken treaty, or rather with the reminder Wotan receives from his wife Fricka "that contracts must be kept" (Ex. 10-2j). The consequences are hinted when the Norn recalls the death of the Ash: the motif that accompanies Erda's dire prediction, near the end of *Das Rheingold*, that Wotan's greed will bring about "a day of doom" is heard (Ex. 10-2k). Now usually (and somewhat confusingly) called the Götterdämmerung motif, it is obviously derived by inversion (and "crab"—reverse—motion) from the Genesis motif, as if undoing all that had in primeval times been wrought. Its mysterious Lydian character (with a sort of "raised fourth degree") arises from its invariable occurrence on a flat-sixth or Neapolitan harmony, the tonal remoteness of which cannily enhances its aura of uncanniness.

The cause of it all—the object of Wotan's greed and of Erda's warning, from which the whole colossal cycle takes its name—is finally adumbrated when the First Norn refers to the dark sadness of her song: the Ring motif (Ex. 10-2l), which consists always of a downward+upward arpeggio (sometimes outlining a triad, sometimes, as on its first appearance, a mere concatenation of thirds) that never manages to rise all the way back to its starting point. The end of the ballad refrain, which marks the transition to the Second Norn's narrative, is once again forebodingly accompanied by the Death motif.

To the skein of leitmotives already woven by the First Norn, the Second adds only one new item: the pompously dotted motif originally associated in the first act of *Siegfried* with Wotan's proud reference to the power of his spear, on which the laws of the world are engraved (Ex. 10-2m; compare Ex. 10-2j). It is usually called the Authority motif, and accompanies the Second Norn's reference to the sacred runes that, once transgressed, could no longer ward off Siegfried's conquest of Brünnhilde.

The Third Norn, again taking up the rope to the ominous strains of the Death motif, weaves the longest and densest motivic skein by far, full of ingenious juxtapositions in both the melodic ("horizontal") and harmonic or contrapuntal ("vertical") dimensions. So, for example, when she foretells the disastrous end of the drama, when flames shall in predestined retribution engulf Valhalla and consume the once-eternal gods, the orchestra sounds the Treaty, Valhalla, Götterdämmerung, and Fate themes in close succession, their progress punctuated by a timpani tattoo (Ex. 10-2n) of which the rhythm, ever since the entr'acte following the first scene of *Das Rheingold*, had played the role of a bad omen (Ex. 10-6). Among the grisly events it had helped accompany or foretell were Fafner's murder of his brother Fasolt in fulfillment of Alberich's curse on the Ring (in *Das Rheingold*), Siegmund's death on the battlefield (in *Die Walküre*), and Siegfried's slaying of Mime, his Nibelung stepfather (in *Siegfried*). Later in *Götterdämmerung* it will bear witness to the murder of Siegfried himself.

ex. 10-6 Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung* in vocal score, leitmotives labeled as in Ex. 10-2, mm. 175–83

When she resumes her prophecies after some anxious discussion with her sisters, the Third Norn invokes a few more motivic recollections, putting the future in direct contact with the musicalized past and giving it the kind of musical reality that will ensure its accomplishment. Most balefully, the chord progression first associated in the third act of *Die Walküre* with Brünnhilde's entrancement (*Zauberschlafe* or "Magic sleep" according to Wolzogen) and associated thereafter with oblivion (Ex. 10-20) follows the news that the logs from the World-Ash are piled up around Valhalla, and is itself followed by the Fate motif. A wonderful example of Wagner's "art of transition" is the interpolation of the Oblivion motif between the strains of the final ballad refrain (Ex. 10-7): their common element, the falling semitone, is of course an ancient symbol of grief. As such it had actually been commandeered by Wagner to symbolize Alberich's grief (thence grief in general) in the first scene of *Das Rheingold* (Ex. 10-2p), which adds another resonance both to the Norns' refrain and to the Oblivion motif. Ultimately, as is becoming clear, hard and fast distinctions between Wagner's "particles" inevitably break down. All interpenetrates all, which is precisely the point.

ex. 10-7 Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung* in vocal score, leitmotives labeled as in Ex. 10-2, mm. 255–72

The interpenetration of Grief and Oblivion with the final Norns' refrain is almost too dramaturgically apt, for it is precisely here, at the end of Ex. 10-7, that the First Norn chimes in, aghast, with the news that the rope of destiny is fraying. Impending ruin puts the First Norn dimly in mind of Alberich's curse, as we are warned by a quick fourfold concatenation of motives. First there is the Ring itself. Next there is the motif somewhat cryptically but evocatively christened *Liebe-Tragik* ("Tragedy of love") by Wolzogen (Ex. 10-2q; he claimed that this one label actually stemmed from Wagner himself), which first appears in *Das Rheingold* when the ugly Alberich is rebuffed by the Rhine maidens. Next to be alluded to is the Rhine gold that Alberich then stole (Ex. 10-2r), a motif first associated in *Das Rheingold*, by specific indication, with a lighting effect that transfixes Alberich and inspires his deed. And finally, in ironic commentary, there is the motif first associated with the Rhine Maidens' joy in possessing the gold, and then with Alberich's at stealing it (Ex. 10-2s). In effect we have been given a wordless four-measure précis of the whole first scene of *Das Rheingold*.

When the Second Norn notices that Brünnhilde's rock, on which the rope is hung, is cutting through its threads, the leitmotives begin associating Siegfried, the unwitting avenger of Wotan's ancient misdeed, with the invincible power of the gold. As the Norn watches her rope unravel, the orchestra combines a motif (*Goldherrschaft* or "Gold's dominion" according to Wolzogen; Ex. 10-2t) first heard in the third scene of *Das Rheingold* as Alberich commands his enslaved fellow-Nibelungs, with that of Siegfried's sword, his legacy from his father Siegmund, with which he had

shattered Wotan's spear (Ex. 10-2u). As the Third Norn misguidedly pulls on the rope to tighten its weave, Siegfried's horn call, the accompaniment to all his heroic deeds in the preceding opera, is heard with fell irony (Ex. 10-2v).

The sword motif, it is worth noting, has had an especially telling interpretive history. Associated with the sword beginning with the first act of *Die Walküre*, it had actually been heard originally near the end of *Das Rheingold*, as Wotan joyfully contemplated Valhalla. It has been left to exegetes to reconcile these contradictory associations through a sort of Christianizing commentary, which though now an integral part of the *Ring* tradition (as the nonbiblical Talmud, a commentary on the Torah, is now an integral part of the tradition of Jewish law) nevertheless did not originate with Wagner. As one commentator, Rudolph Sabor, explains, the first occurrence of the Sword motif establishes the moment "when Wotan resolves to create a free hero: someone who is not tainted by the god's pragmatic dealings and who therefore carries neither guilt nor responsibility. To him will Wotan bequeath a conquering sword. This hero shall, of his own accord, right Wotan's wrongs."[38] (Wotan's resolve is Sabor's contribution to *Ring* lore, not Wagner's.) Finally, to the searing strains of the title character's curse, the most dissonant motif in all of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (Ex. 10-2w), the rope of destiny snaps, to the Norns' ineffable horror. They sink into the earth to join their mother Erda to a concatenation of Curse, Oblivion, Fate, and, of course, Götterdämmerung motives.

Notes:

(34) Wagner to King Ludwig II of Bavaria, 5 May 1870, quoted in Richard Wagner, *Götterdämmerung*, translation and commentary by Rudolph Sabor (London: Phaidon, 1997), p. 23.

(35) *Ibid*.

(36) Adapted from the synopsis of *Götterdämmerung* by Peggy Cochrane in booklet accompanying the London/Decca recording under Georg Solti (1965).

(37) See Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 419–23.

(38) Richard Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, translation and commentary by Rudolph Sabor (London: Phaidon, 1997), p. 169.

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THE SEA OF HARMONY

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Deeds of Music Made Visible (Class of 1813, I)
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Impressively detailed though it may seem, this account of the musical texture of the Norns' scene, far from complete, has not even begun to broach what for Wagner was the main issue. Simply as a medley of twenty-three themes the scene would not even begin to be, in Wagnerian terms, "dramatic." For it would engage only the listener/spectator's cognitive faculties—that is, the faculties of mind that perform the task of recognizing symbols, which is to say the part of the dramatic impression that depends on representation. The purely (or merely) cognitive aspect of Wagner's tissue has often lent itself to satire or outright ridicule. The Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, for example, writing almost a decade after Wagner's death, tried to discredit what he considered the tiresome hypercomplexity of Wagner's "polyphonic fabric" as a "colossal abuse of symbolism":

> The listener cannot derive any immediate impression from all these leitmotives as they steal in and out of the contrapuntal web. And in point of fact, if character A, finding himself in a certain mood, were to speak with character B about character C, and if in the accompanying music we hear the contrapuntally interwoven motives A, B and C, perhaps with the addition of a fourth denoting their mood, can one then clearly distinguish such a situation from the reverse: i.e., where C speaks to A about B, or B and C discuss A?[39]

Rimsky-Korsakov also mocked Wagner's avoidance of set pieces in favor of *unendliche Melodie* (infinite melody)—the seamless, ceaselessly thematic or "developmental" orchestral continuity that swept through entire acts—by comparing the structure of a *Ring* opera to that of an enormous edifice "consisting entirely of a staircase leading from the entrance to the exit."[40]

Such dogged literalism, common in the anti-Wagnerian criticism of the time, can be read as a defense against the aspect of Wagner's music that works not through simple, easily parodied mechanisms of representation, but, far more potently, through direct presentation, bypassing the cognitive and addressing itself directly to the elemental life-driving appetites. That part is the part played by harmonic and tonal progressions—Wagner's "sea of harmony." For a preliminary excursion on the Wagnerian sea we can go briefly back over the Norns' scene, trace its tonal design, and proceed from there into a tonal/thematic overview of the rest of the *Götterdämmerung* Prologue. Putting ourselves in the position of one who has heard no more recent music—in the position, that is, of Wagner's original audience—we will be struck, above all, by the unprecedented range (or "freedom") of modulation, and on occasion by its blinding rapidity. (We will notice long stretches of unaccountably static, "becalmed" harmony as well.) We will be struck by the extreme rarity of full authentic cadences, which occur only at the most decisive moments (in theory, only once per scene); and by the reverse of that coin, the extraordinary abundance and variety of deceptive cadences, some of them prepared by really insistent dominant pedals. And we will be struck by the way these tonal and harmonic effects are geared to the scenic action.

That articulation of the drama through harmony is of course another aspect of the same interpenetration of the musical and the scenic that gave rise to the leitmotif technique. We might be inclined to call the music, in both of these dimensions, the metaphorical parallel to the unfolding drama, a substratum of sound that enriches or intensifies the emotional and cognitive effect of what is seen. Wagner, influenced by the philosophy of Schopenhauer, actually put it just the other way around. In an essay of 1872, "On the Term 'Music Drama,'" he defined this most central concept as consisting of "deeds of music made visible."[41] The *primary* bearer of meaning is the music, and it is the plot or dramatic action that provides the metaphorical parallel, giving cognitive specificity to what is heard. How Wagner could justify such a seemingly paradoxical view will become clearer as we investigate his harmonic procedures and their effects.

The reliance Wagner placed on harmony as the primary shaper of the drama should alert us that however limber and impulsive the modulatory plan may seem in its moment-by-moment ("local") vagaries, it is always under firm "global" control. That tandem of unpredictable flexibility at the short range and unerring long-range direction is perhaps the most impressive evidence of Wagner the harmonist's navigational skills.

The *Götterdämmerung* Prologue provides one of the best examples. The opening pair of chords—E♭ and C♭, derived from the leitmotif of Brünnhilde's awakening—function in tandem not only as a local succession, but also as a bipolar opposition that gives shape to the whole Norns' scene (or more pertinently, that delineates its entropy, its degeneration into chaos). At a higher level yet, the tonalities of which the two chords are the tonics—conceived, like Schubert's tonalities (see chapter 2), as freely encompassing the parallel major and minor—serve to close the Prologue (in E♭ major) and to open the dark scene of plotting that follows (in B [=C♭] minor; see Ex. 10-8). In between stretches the lengthy orchestral entr'acte known as *Siegfrieds Rheinfahrt* ("Siegfried's Rhine journey") when it is performed as a concert piece. The character's navigation of the great waterway here serves quite explicitly as the conceptual metaphor for a musical process.

fig. 10-10 Alois Burgstaller (1871–1945) as Siegfried at Bayreuth, 1900.

ex. 10-8a Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung* in vocal score, leitmotives labeled as in Ex. 10-2, mm. 635–39

The three great strophes of the Norns' ballad-narrative enact in harmony the fatal entropy that Wotan's sin has brought upon the world. The first strophe, sung by the First Norn, begins in a firmly established E♭ major/minor, and ends quite "classically" in the same key. In between, C♭, cadentially established and then enharmonically transformed to B, provides (again "classically") a contrasting middle section that meanders back via an enharmonic reversal involving the transformation of E major (next after B on the circle of fifths) to F♭, coinciding with the Götterdämmerung leitmotif (Ex. 10-2k), which always expresses the Neapolitan ♭II.

The Second Norn begins her strophe with a cadence to C minor, preparing the perfectly conventional key of the relative minor. The harmonic motion is brusquely interrupted to illustrate Siegfried's destruction of Wotan's spear, but again the Götterdämmerung leitmotif appears as a Neapolitan to guide the strophe back to a conventional close.

It is the Third Norn, who sees the future, who plays havoc with harmonic closure, opening up the sluices and letting in the sea. With her the Götterdämmerung leitmotif serves not to guide the harmony back but to lead it astray, for its D♭ tonality functions this time not as ♭II but as I, and the C-minor cadence that it prepares is trumped by the baleful half-diminished F–A♭–C♭–E♭ harmony that had previously closed the Norns' refrain. That harmony, of course, can function as II$_7$ in E♭ minor, and so it might seem to promise return to the ballad narrative's original key.

ex. 10-8b Richard Wagner, *Götterdämmerung*, Act I, scene 1, mm. 1–11

Instead, however, it is put through a threefold sequence by ascending minor thirds (compare mm. 161, 163, and 165 in Ex. 10-9), that lands it a tritone away from its starting point, on a B that no longer functions as a stable substitute for C♭ but points ahead (as II₇) to an A minor that never comes, even though its dominant is prominently displayed in m. 175. Instead, the expected A minor is preempted by a magniloquent cadential gesture toward C♯ (m. 177, coinciding with the Valhalla leitmotif), which is itself preempted in the next measure by a Neapolitan (the Götterdämmerung motif once more), which is likewise preempted in m. 180 by the Omen tattoo on B♭, functioning here (or so it seems) as a deceptive cadence in D minor. All of these progressions may be traced by analyzing Ex. 10-9, which then hooks up with Ex. 10-6.

ex. 10-9 Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung* in vocal score, leitmotives labeled as in Ex. 10-2, mm. 158–175

Now B♭, the key that is reached at the end of Ex. 10-6, is of course the dominant of E♭, and it might seem that we are close to home after all. (Schubert would surely not have missed the opportunity of resolving it to everyone's delighted surprise!) But after all these feints the thread (to put it as the Norns might) is broken. There will be no return to E♭, at least not while the Norns are onstage, despite some very elaborate preparations. Where Wotan's last resolute act (the casting of Brünnhilde into flame-encircled sleep) is described, for example, a cadential gives way to V in a way that promises E♭ with virtual certainty; but over a continuing B♭ pedal in the timpani, the Oblivion motif liquidates the impending cadence with a circle of minor thirds, so that when E♭ finally appears as a root (m. 252), it has been drained of its stability, the more so as the chord above it has the character of a dominant seventh that seeks (in vain!) a resolution of its own (Ex. 10-10).

ex. 10-10 Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung* in vocal score, leitmotives labeled (on first occurrence only) as in Ex. 10-2, mm. 245–54

Or again, the appearance of the Rhine Gold motif near the end of Ex. 10-7 strongly expresses the dominant of E♭ (the key, incidentally, that witnessed the birth of the Rhine itself at the very beginning of the cycle); but again delaying measures (involving other leitmotives) rob the cadence of its urgency, and by the time E♭ arrives in the bass, the chord it supports has the character of a dominant, not a tonic. The one succession that could be read as containing immediate progression of dominant to tonic in E♭ (see the fifth measure of Ex. 10-7) happens in the middle of a harmonic sequence, again involving the Oblivion motif, in which E♭ is only an incident in a continuing circle of descending major thirds (G–E♭–C♭).

The next long pedal—the F♯ that so dissonantly accompanies the Curse motif when the rope of fate comes undone —turns out (most unexpectedly or even incoherently in the short run, most logically in the long) to be the effective dominant. It picks up the full dominant-seventh harmony at the very moment of the Norns' disappearance (Dawn) and it is resumed at the end of Siegfried's Rhine Journey, where it is finally resolved, at the beginning of the first scene of act I proper (Ex. 10-8b), to the B minor that has been so long and so threateningly prefigured—so threateningly as to rupture the Norns' skein of destiny! Thus the F♯ of Alberich's curse, in the form of a functional dominant pedal, encloses the Prologue's entire second scene, which depicts the awakening of Siegfried and Brünnhilde after their night of bliss, and their ardent farewells as Siegfried embarks on his ill-fated quest "Zu neuen Thaten" ("On to new deeds!"), to quote Brünnhilde's famous first line. The whole ecstatic scene is played against the curse-pedal's implicitly continuous rumble—a constant baneful subtext to the outwardly ebullient action.

To introduce that ebullient action the pedal is temporarily liquidated by reinterpreting its harmony as an augmented (German) sixth chord—signaled or symbolized in the notation by respelling it as a G♭ (m. 318)—and resolved downward to the dominant of B♭s major, in which key one of the most important leitmotives in *Götterdämmerung* makes its first appearance (m. 327): a mellow but mighty brass chorale, first given out by a choir of eight horns, obviously derived from the tune of the young Siegfried's horn call (Ex. 10-2v), which now denotes Siegfried the Hero, or (per Wolzogen) "Siegfried, transformed by love." It is answered immediately by a pair of clarinets (one a gorgeously throaty bass clarinet), sounding the leitmotif denoting Brünnhilde, similarly transformed (Ex. 10-11). A surging orchestral crescendo, carried by a rising sequence of Brünnhilde motifs, and accompanying a light show that

depicts the sunrise, leads to a great blaze of a seemingly recovered E♭ major to greet the lovers' appearance onstage.

ex. 10-11 Richard Wagner, Prologue to *Götterdämmerung* in vocal score, mm. 315–34

This, of course, is the key the Norns "lost" in the Prologue's first scene. Its restitution takes place, however, in a harmonic environment that has been fatally compromised by feints and deceptions of all kinds. In Wagner's ripest style, any dominant seventh can resolve as an augmented sixth (and vice versa); any major triad in first inversion can resolve as a Neapolitan, and chords prepared as Neapolitans can resolve as primary functions. Any tone can act as a common tone to create instant—if illusory, temporary—links between chords that are remotely placed along the circle of fifths, the traditional arbiter of harmonic relatedness.

A strategically placed chord or a tremulous pedal can cause a key to heave up before the contemplating ear like an iceberg in the path of the Titanic; and the key so drastically prefigured can be "liquidated" (to use a term Arnold Schoenberg invented for the process a generation later) before any of its primary functions have been asserted. Indeed, there is a whole category of leitmotives (Fate and Oblivion, to recall two) that seem to have no other purpose than the securing of these effects—effects that resonate insidiously with their dramatic import.

So by now, a great flare-up of a long-awaited tonality like the present E♭ can be accepted as no more than provisionally decisive or conclusive. We can no longer trust harmonic functions to deliver, as once in Beethoven's time they did, on their *promesse du bonheur*, the "promise of happiness" that the French novelist Stendhal named as the most essential aspect of artistic beauty and the reason why art is cherished.[42] We feel ourselves buffeted by that loss of certainty more deeply than a theory of representation can ever explain, for here we come to the nub of what makes the Wagnerian "sea of harmony" so much more than a metaphor or a representation.

Not that Wagnerian harmonies no longer have representational or symbolic value. They have that, too, as we have certainly seen. Not only chords and chord progressions but actual keys can be symbols: witness all-important E♭ itself, the key of the river Rhine, and by extension the harbinger of the bliss of primeval nature whence all has sprung and whither all is fated to return. Its dissolution (through modulatory progressions) in the Norns' scene is obviously a representation of entropy's onset. The half-diminished F–A♭–C♭–E♭ harmony (the single most potent modulatory agent) is emblematic of destruction. And so on. But there is more.

Notes:

(39) Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, "Wagner: Sovokupnoye proizvedeniye dvukh iskusstv; ili, Muzïkal'naya drama," *Polnoye sobraniy sochineniy Literaturnïye proizvedeniya i perepiska* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1963), p. 54.

(40) *Ibid*., p. 57.

(41) *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, Vol. V, trans. W. Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1896), p. 303.

(42) Marie Henri Beyle (pseudo. Stendhal), "De l'amour" (1822), Bk. I, Chap. 23.

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