

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Nineteenth Century as Past and Present

As a period in music history, the nineteenth century extends from Beethoven's late works, Rossini's operas, and Schubert's lieder to Schönberg's "emancipation of dissonance" and the complementary rejection of "modernism" brought about by Richard Strauss in *Der Rosenkavalier*. The fact that this period fits comfortably within the years 1814 and 1914—years whose significance derives in the main from political history—is neither a meaningless accident nor a correspondence that invites profound historiosophical conclusions. Heinrich Heine felt that Rossini's operas embodied the spirit of the Restoration, and it is a journalistic cliché that Schönberg's assault on musical tradition in his post-1908 atonal works prefigured the crumbling of sociopolitical traditions in our own age of world wars. We, however, can accept both of these claims and nevertheless maintain that it is methodologically questionable to make political and social history the main pillars of music historiography. "Relative autonomy"—which even Marxists concede a place in the "superstructure"—enables us to emphasize connections within music history itself. As a result, the problem we face when we write music history resides not in finding musical documents to illustrate social structures and processes, but rather in establishing a relation between the aesthetic and the historical substance of works of music. Nor need we enter the debate as to which arbiters are final or imperative when we link the history of composition with intellectual history on the one hand, and with social and economic history on the other. All we need to do is to sketch, without going back to first causes, the contextual system that joins the structures and processes of these three branches of history.

Accordingly, we should not belabor the point that "watershed years" in music history and political history seem to coincide. By the same token, however, music historians have obviously failed to reach a satisfactory consensus about the divisions within music history itself. Some, like Georg Knepler, feel that the "eighteenth century" ended in 1789 with the French Revolution, like a musical ancien régime. Others, such as Guido Adler, see a Viennese Classic period extending to 1812 as apart from a "nineteenth century" that may be termed an age of "romanticism." Still others, among them Thrasybulos Georgiades and Fried-

rich Blume, extend the Viennese Classic period far enough into the nineteenth century to encompass Beethoven's late works and Schubert's entire oeuvre, thereby postponing the "watershed year" to 1830 and Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, whose origins can then be linked to the July Revolution of that year in Paris. Yet all of these claims are equally suspect.

If the beginning of this age which, metaphorically if not chronologically, we call the "nineteenth century" is contested, so is its end. We might take 1889, the year of Strauss's *Don Juan* and Mahler's First Symphony, as a music-historical juncture coinciding with a similar break in political history whose significance has been underscored by the English historian Geoffrey Barraclough. Nor would it be farfetched to maintain that the "modernist period," as Hermann Bahr called the years following 1889, includes expressionism, and thus did not end until the outset of the "twenties"—or, more specifically, in 1924.

All the same, it need not be taken as a sign of desperation—a compulsion to draw some sort of boundary, even with a nagging conscience—when the author of a book on the "nineteenth century" in social, intellectual, and compositional history chooses to single out the years 1814 and 1914 as historical junctures. On the contrary, any historian interested in establishing connections will naturally gravitate toward the emergence and crystallization of the new rather than the demise and disintegration of the old, which always follows after a certain time lag. Nor can it be denied that Beethoven and Rossini—the musical duumvirate of 1814—cast their shadows over the "nineteenth century," just as Schönberg's *Erwartung* (1909) and Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps* (1913) mark the advent of the "twentieth century," when avant-gardism became the criterion for winnowing the essential from the inessential in music.

Justified as we may be in treating the "nineteenth century" as the period between the Viennese Classics and modern music, we fall into difficulties the moment we shift from the chronological to the stylistic aspect of this concept. Namely, it forces us to consign to the "nineteenth century" the late works of Strauss and Pfitzner, which were written during the age of modern music. It is not immediately apparent from works such as Pfitzner's C#-minor Quartet (1925) or Strauss's *Capriccio* (1942) that historical noncontemporaneity must necessarily betoken a divergent aesthetic. Nor, for the moment, is there any way of telling when the tradition undermined by Schönberg's emancipation of dissonance became irrevocably hollow and devoid of aesthetic meaning. To put it paradoxically, the end of the "nineteenth century" in music is impossible to date.

Any history of music that attempts to reconstruct part of the past as a structural, aesthetic, and social reality, rather than merely collecting major works in an imaginary museum, must deal not only with the history of composition but with the history of reception as well. Mahler's symphonies are no less a phenomenon of the turn of the century than of the 1960s and 1970s, and it would distort their place in music history if we neglected to analyze the overlap between post-serial music and the Mahler renaissance. However blurred the question of what caused what, there is no denying that the Mahler wave, the interest in collage

techniques, the discovery of Ives, and a parodistic bent toward the popular are all interlinked. The compositional currents of an age shed light on the way it interprets past music, and vice versa.

Thus, the subsequent history of nineteenth-century works is part of music history. Conversely, it is no less true that our view of the past is conditioned by a present whose everyday concert and operatic life comprises, in part, an uneasy and largely unarguable selection and interpretation of nineteenth-century music. The only way the historian can discover the past—meaning the musical legacy from the period between the Viennese Classics and modern music—is through the mediation of the present in which it manifests itself. A historical trait may gradually disengage itself from the aesthetic presence of past music, but it cannot rudely brush that presence aside.

Music historiography is incapable of reconstructing the way things really were. But neither should it be content merely to retrace the dim outlines left on the present by the past. The former is impossible, the latter inadequate. If, undaunted by the realization that past and present merge, we were to attempt a straightforward reconstruction of the past, we would already find ourselves in a quandary when trying to select the works that “belong to history.” True, given sufficient data, we can objectively depict and analyze the reception history of works. However, the historical vantage point we select in order to draw our findings from the process of reception—that is, whether or not a work “belongs to history”—remains fundamentally arbitrary. No criterion has yet been discovered which would enable us to argue conclusively that the consensus of the German educated classes of 1830, rather than those of 1910 or 1960, is decisive for a historical assessment of Louis Spohr’s *Faust* (1816) or *Jessonda* (1823). Historians with antiquarian proclivities will inevitably tend to emphasize contemporary judgments without realizing that this is no less “metaphysical” than the common, if tacit, practice of deciding whether a work does or does not belong to history by seeing whether it has or has not survived in the present-day repertoire. Strictly speaking, all we can conclude “empirically” is that opinions, assessments, and repertoires have changed.

Indeed, rather than adopting principles and pursuing them to first causes and ultimate consequences, historians are almost always eclectic. They place stress variously on the prestige a work enjoyed among contemporary listeners, on the accumulation of later judgments that make up a “tradition,” on the influence it had on later works, its steadfastness in remaining in the repertoire, and finally its documentary value to the history of culture and its rating by the aesthetic and compositional standards that happen to apply today. Obviously, the eclectic approach is fraught with difficulties and contradictions; for the moment, however, it is all we have.

The history of nineteenth-century music presents itself as a panorama. If we proceed from today’s opera, concert, and recording repertoire, this panorama bears scant resemblance to the picture which a contemporary living in Paris, Vienna, or Leipzig might have formed around 1830 or 1870. Nor is there an

a priori way of determining whether the substance of the music has thereby been made recognizable or altered beyond recognition. At all events, reception history and aesthetic judgment inextricably intertwine. The French *opéra comique* of the Restoration period and the July Monarchy, the mainstay of the opera repertoire for over a century, has vanished in recent decades without so much as a raised eyebrow from critical observers, while the Italian opera seria of the same period, long presumed dead in every land but Italy, has witnessed an unexpected upsurge of popularity. These are among the caprices of reception history which clearly illustrate its tight-knit skein of aesthetic, compositional, and institutional factors. In today's opera system, singers are interchangeable across the globe; the repertoires of the stage and the recording industry interact with far-reaching consequences; and opera productions favor mammoth tableaux over fine-honed dialogue. This has removed the conditions of existence for *opéra comique*, which thrives on spoken dialogue, while opera seria, where singing counts for everything, has by grace of the system been given a hitherto unpredicted new lease on life.

However, these "extrinsic" motives bearing the imprint of our "technological age" are closely linked to alterations in aesthetic interests, which in turn harbor consequences for the writing of history. It would, of course, be absurd to measure *opéra comique* against opera seria, or vice versa. However, there is no need to stress that audiences both inside and outside Italy have rediscovered the art of broad cantabile melody as "great," rather than merely "agreeable," at the same time that their fondness for terse song forms, whether sentimental or trenchant, has receded. This fact is doubtless symptomatic of a change in musical consciousness which goes to the root of music historiography, all twisted comparisons of unlike genres aside. The restoration of cantabile as a "central" category rather than one associated with "peripheral," "middlebrow," or "lowbrow" music means that all histories that lopsidedly took their aesthetic and compositional starting point from the "ideal types" of symphonic development, the (varied) strophic lied, and musicodramatical dialogue—that is, from Beethoven, Schubert, and Wagner—will have to be adjusted accordingly. The Italian notion of melody, once derided by Schumann as the "battle cry of the dilettantes," must be restored its historical rights if we wish to comprehend the musical poetics of Chopin and Liszt, of Meyerbeer and Berlioz—poetics that are unthinkable without the influence of Bellini. In other words, it may have been coincidence that, for reasons partly technological and institutional, musical "fashion" has reclaimed early nineteenth-century opera seria. But this coincidence gives us an opportunity which we should seize upon to expand our knowledge and revitalize our views of a formerly semidefunct category that, though familiar in the abstract, was long incapable of being experienced at first hand.

On the other hand, no historian who has adopted earlier views of *opéra comique* need feel daunted by its neglect in the current repertoire. If there is progress in historiography, it rests on the dual possibility of retaining former insights even after their inner affinity to their objects has faded, and of gaining new in-

sights that were closed to past generations from lack of an aesthetic relation to a period or genre. The self-aware historian is sustained by the—perhaps presumptuous—conviction that we can make use of the experiences of our own day without sharing its blind spots.

One of the far-reaching changes to which nineteenth-century music has been subjected by its reception in twentieth-century concert halls and opera houses is a shift in the system of genres considered representative: an era that seems in retrospect to have been an age of opera and instrumental music was, at the time when it was “the present,” dominated by nontheatrical vocal genres from the lied to the cantata to the oratorio. This displacement of emphasis has forced once enormously prolific traditions into the background, not only of the repertoire but also of our historical awareness. The causes for this are both institutional and, in conjunction with this institutional factor, aesthetic.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, nontheatrical vocal music was sustained largely by choral societies. These societies had by no means decreased in number by the end of the century—indeed, their number has probably increased in our own—but their significance and standing in present-day music culture has constantly declined. In the nineteenth century it was the bourgeois establishment that took the lead in this movement, whereas in recent decades choirs have been formed almost exclusively by students. Moreover, unlike the unforeseen spread of classical and romantic instrumental music in our century, the proportion of vocal music in our concert repertoire has declined so drastically that we might almost speak of a “collapse.” Finally, the literary element in music culture—without which nineteenth-century vocal music would be inconceivable—has continuously receded in importance. In a word, the nineteenth-century tendency to view instrumental works as vocal music by supplying them with an imaginary text has given way to an opposite inclination to listen to vocal music instrumentally and ignore the text. (One of the earliest documents evincing this change is Arnold Schönberg’s essay of 1911, “Das Verhältnis zum Text.”)

For the moment, the institution of the *lieder* recital seems to be fully intact. However, it has long lacked its former basis in domestic song. This basis made the lied more accessible, even if it may also have restricted the repertoire by creating a circle of mutual dependencies between amateur and professional music-making, with the former being patterned after the latter and the latter propped up by the former.

Neglect of the text is a key feature of music aesthetics as practiced in our century, but its impact has been less severe and devastating in opera than in nontheatrical vocal music. Originally, opera librettos were read during the performance; later they served as preparatory reading for a performance, a role ultimately taken over by the opera guide or a quick glance at a plot summary a few minutes before the curtain goes up. Today, productions focus on striking tableaux instead of dialogue, thereby compensating for our lack of familiarity with the text: the literary has been supplanted, if not totally, by the scenic. *Lieder* and

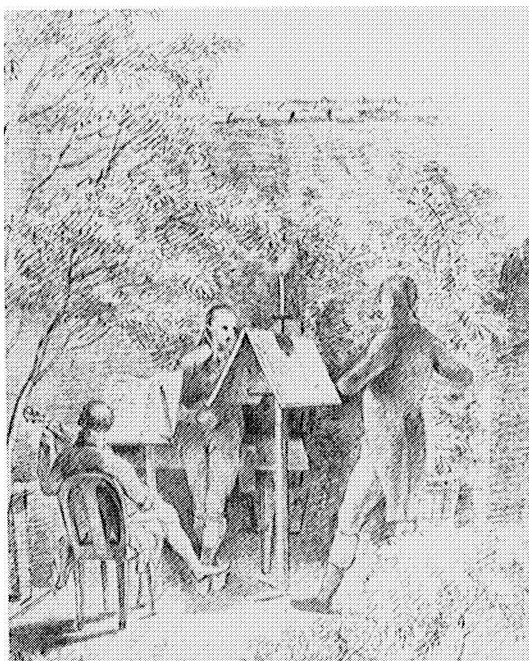


Fig. 1 Gustav Philipp Zwinger: *Abendmusik im Freien*, 1807. Here chamber music—a trio for flute, violin, and guitar—takes the form of a garden concert, thereby illustrating the divertimento character of the genre. This transplantation of domestic music-making to an outdoor setting is also linked with the fondness of the romantic-classical age for masking art works as creations of nature, and for seeking pictorial backdrops appropriate to its interpretation of art as “second nature.” (Nuremberg, Stadtbibliothek.)

oratorios, however, whose texts pass unnoticed or are even deliberately ignored, resemble a language whose meaning, at least in nineteenth-century terms, has largely fallen into obscurity. When we reduce vocal pieces to absolute music by listening to them “instrumentally”—thereby creating expectations regarding their thematic material, motivic elaboration, and formal articulation—we subject them to an aesthetic for which they were not intended and against which they most often fall short. Originally, in the nineteenth century, vocal music was in equal measure part of the literary and the musical culture of the educated classes, the “carrier strata” for culture; and these classes only gradually, under the influence of Beethoven’s symphonies and string quartets, accustomed themselves to the notion that music by itself, without an explanatory and justifying text, might exercise an educational and cultural function comparable to literature. (No one in the nineteenth century could have foreseen that classical music would increase its audience a hundredfold while the readership for classical literature constantly shrank. Indeed, this would have been viewed as a symptom of decline.) Music was more a vehicle for the text than vice versa; in any event, the text was not an “extramusical ingredient” so much as part of “music itself,” which, in accordance with the teachings of antiquity, was thought to consist not only of *harmonia* and *rhythmos* but also of *logos*, language. (The gradual establishment of the idea of absolute music in opposition to this view is one of the key historical processes in the music of the nineteenth century.)

Thus, not only does the historian of nineteenth-century music need to view his period as belonging to the past in the same or at least a similar way as the *trecento* or the Baroque, it is also impossible for him to ignore the presence of nineteenth-century music in today's concert and operatic repertoires. This strangely paradoxical relation forces him to intersperse his picture of past music with reflections from aesthetics and reception history, thereby turning some of the difficulties of writing history into topics in their own right. Unless we want to see works interpreted aesthetically as art or historically as documents, with no connection between the two, we must go beyond a simplistic dichotomy between past meaning and present meaning, as this would lead to exactly what we wish to avoid: a dichotomy between the artistic and the documentary value of works. Instead, we should bear in mind that historicity is just as much a factor in the way we hear music as aesthetic survival is part of belonging to history. A sharp cleavage between the history and the philosophy of art—that is, an art history which collapses works of music into documents or mere illustrations of a style, idea, or milieu, and an art philosophy that extracts artifacts from history in order to place them in an imaginary museum—gains the methodological advantage of clearly separating these disciplines, but only at the price of sweeping crucial problems of music historiography into the gap between history and aesthetics rather than solving them. A *history* of art which is not at the same time a history of *art*—that is, one that bypasses aesthetic interpretation in favor of documentary interpretation, or vice versa—falls wide of the goals of any music history with a claim to be more than a collage pieced together from composers' biographies, concert guides, and cultural-historical panoramas.

To divide a century by turning points coinciding with epoch-making events in political history is not to imply that music history merely reflects extramusical occurrences and chains of events. The question whether, and if so with what implications, we may speak of a connection between the July Revolution, the “demise of the age of art” proclaimed by Heine, the musical consequences of the deaths of Beethoven and Schubert, and the simultaneous and dramatic appearance of Chopin and Liszt, Berlioz and Meyerbeer, and Schumann and Mendelssohn, must remain open for the time being. However obscure this leaves the ultimate meaning of our concept of “watershed year,” that is, one with a striking density of events, we are nevertheless unable to dispel the impression that 1830 was a watershed year in the history of music.

If the elements constituting a watershed year seem at first to stand disjointly side by side, the same applied to the works, events, and institutions that make up our picture of a period bound, say, by the years 1814 and 1830. To claim that Beethoven's retreat to the esoteric following the Congress of Vienna, and Rossini's triumph through the whole of Europe, stand in a sort of “complementary” relation to each other is, at first, meaningless. Nor is it at all conceivable how both Beethoven's late works and Rossini's operas relate to the romantic aesthetic of music, which began at the same time to take hold as a mode of musical cognition and perception. If we nevertheless attempt to turn this apparently accidental

hodgepodge into a distinct configuration, we should do so not by trying to unearth a common root for these phenomena—this would be mere fabrication—but rather by outlining a nexus into which these at first disparate occurrences, under the pressure of “contemporaneity,” gradually coalesced. The debate whether Beethoven was a romantic composer will remain just as undecided as the controversy over the extent to which romanticism represents a spiritual effluvia permeating a large number of works, events, and trends in the period. What can be reconstructed, however, is the process whereby Beethoven’s formal principles, Rossini’s notion of melody, and the romantic aesthetic of music intertwined in a way that, however obscure and distorted at times, nevertheless left an imprint on the entire century.

The Twin Styles

Raphael Georg Kiesewetter, a connoisseur of early music whom one could scarcely accuse of being brainlessly susceptible to the “Rossini craze,” referred in his *Geschichte der europäisch-abendländischen oder unserer heutigen Musik* of 1834 to his own age as the “era of Beethoven and Rossini.” As jarring as this combination may at first seem, we could find worse criteria for judging any music history that attempts to reconstruct the past in its own terms than to see whether it was able to find a vantage point that illuminates the reasons for Kiesewetter’s claim.

No one denies that Italian opera of the nineteenth century represents a musical culture in its own aesthetic right and should not be measured against a concept of music drawn from Beethoven’s symphonies or Wagner’s music dramas. Still, this simple fact is seldom respected or pursued to ultimate conclusions. Apart from Italians, those who concede that Rossini’s music is a product of genius “in its fashion” almost always add the caveat that the “fashion” it represents merits an inferior rung in the musical hierarchy. In the final analysis, as a whole if not in detail, we measure Rossini with the wrong yardstick. And when we then speak of an “era of Beethoven and Rossini” we are referring more to their role in cultural history than to their importance in the history of music.

The difference between these “twin musical cultures” which Beethoven and Rossini stand for in Kiesewetter’s thoroughly representative portrayal points to nothing less than a far-reaching rift in the concept of music, a rift that constitutes one of the fundamental musical facts of the nineteenth century. This distinction between opera and instrumental music—characteristically condensed by Verdi into a distinction between Italian opera and German instrumental music—was a major, if not the decisive, factor in the resultant duality of styles. The virtuosity of Paganini and Liszt was nourished on Rossini’s notion of music, Wagner’s music dramas on the aesthetic premises of Beethoven; and in order to underscore the significance and the historical import of this aesthetic dichotomy, we might speak of the former as an instrumental variant of operatic virtuosity and the

ception, like a set of variations without a theme.) Thus, Rossini's docile attitude toward his singers was not evidence of aesthetic spinelessness, of a willingness to sacrifice the "authenticity" of his "text" to the "effect" of a performance, but rather a direct consequence of the view that the reality of music resides in its performance.

Anyone who adopts the premises of modern communication theory—the notion that music manifests itself in the interplay of written score, interpretation, and reception—will doubtless consider Rossini's concept of music "realistic." (That there were power struggles and attempts at subjugation among composers, singers, and audiences does not alter the presupposition that the sole point of reference among all these efforts was not an abstract idea of hegemony so much as the concrete, and hence ever-changing, circumstances of the individual performance.) Conversely, the categories that gradually took hold in the nineteenth-century reception of Beethoven seem symptomatic and indicative of a claim so unusual as to be almost defiant: however complete their domination of later music historiography, these categories more or less suspend the general rule in music history. That a composer who did not care a whit about Ignaz Schuppanzigh's "wretched fiddle," as Beethoven called it, could successfully demand that performances be a function of the text, rather than vice versa, can only have astonished early-nineteenth-century contemporaries; and even though this view is now taken for granted among the artistically well educated, historians ought to receive it in its original spirit. The new insight that Beethoven thrust upon the aesthetic consciousness of his age was that a musical text, like a literary or a philosophical text, harbors a meaning which is made manifest but not entirely subsumed in its acoustic presentation—that a musical creation can exist as an "art work of ideas" transcending its various interpretations.

One of the oddest facts in the early reception of Beethoven is a type of failure that was apparently new to the history of music. To say of one of the post-Op. 59 string quartets that, like some Rossini operas, its first performance was a "fiasco" would be a wrongheaded and inappropriate choice of terms, one that conceals the element of innovation that Beethoven introduced as a potential musical effect. Audiences were astonished, believing themselves at times to be victims of a weird or raucous joke, and at all events feeling that they understood little or nothing of what happened in Beethoven's work, even though they were supposed to understand it all. But even those who were disappointed felt basically that the acoustic phenomenon whose sense they were unable to grasp nevertheless harbored a meaning which, with sufficient effort, could be made intelligible. And the extent to which Beethoven's music was comprehended by his contemporaries was at least as essential to music history as the degree to which listeners realized in the first place that his music was capable of being "understood" like a work of literature or philosophy. The thought that music can be destined to be "understood" had probably arisen a few decades earlier, around 1800; but only in connection with the reception of Beethoven did it have a signi-

ficant impact on music history—a significance which then grew steadily throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There was nothing to “understand” about the magic that emanated from Rossini’s music; the emotions that Beethoven’s works engendered, however, were mingled with a challenge to decipher, in patient exertion, the meaning of what had taken place in the music.

The interpretation of Beethoven kindled a dispute between the “formalists,” who sought to understand his music primarily by means of structural analysis, inching forward to the indwelling formal principle of a work, and the “content aestheticians,” who attempted the same thing by discovering a “hidden program.” Unlike most controversies, these views at least have an underlying premise in common—namely, that Beethoven’s music conceals an “idea” which must be grasped in order to do the work aesthetic justice. (A structural analysis of Rossini’s music which likewise searched for an underlying formal idea would be no less superfluous and doomed to failure than a content analysis which sought footholds outside broadly defined dramatic actions or effects.) To unearth a constellation of a few notes from which all the structures in a movement by Beethoven supposedly derive, and to search for a subject or “poetic idea” whose depiction or expression imparts sense and coherence to a piece of instrumental music: both are consequences of the belief that before one can come to grips aesthetically with a work by Beethoven one must penetrate to a “second level” of the music. Analysis and hermeneutics—or rather the “analytic principle” and the “hermeneutic principle”—arose in music history (or at least attained historical significance) simultaneously as opposite ways of unraveling the difficulties posed by the reception of Beethoven. It is no coincidence that virtually all analytic methods of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from Adolf Bernhard Marx’s to Hugo Riemann’s, from Heinrich Schenker’s to Rudolf Réti’s, took their examples primarily from Beethoven. By the same token, the hermeneutics of music—meaning the attempt to supply a unified context (in extreme cases a narrative) for elements thought to depict emotions, characters, or subjects in a piece of music—have again and again, from Schumann and Wagner to Hermann Kretzschmar and Arnold Schering, taken as their starting point the interpretation of Beethoven.

For the esoteric but historically influential listeners who took their notion of music from Beethoven’s oeuvre, any music such as Rossini’s, which calls neither for formal analysis nor for an interpretation of contents where these methods could find a foothold, was suspected of being empty and meaningless, nothing more than a momentary diversion. Even German criticism of Verdi in the latter half of the century, whether laudatory or pejorative, had a deprecatory undertone for the “hurdy-gurdy man” regardless of the opinion of the work in question. Indeed, the arrogance encountered by Verdi as late as the 1920s was, at root, worse than the sometimes spiteful polemics heaped on Wagner. (Like analysis and hermeneutics, music criticism—meaning specifically “higher criticism” rather than mere reviews and grade-point assignments—was likewise one of the

ways of confronting music which found more congenial objects in Beethoven or Wagner than in Rossini or Verdi.)

Categories such as “overriding formal concept,” theme, and thematic-motivic manipulation, on the one hand, and “stage emotion,” melody, and melodic continuation, on the other, represent initial halting attempts to grasp, in grossly simplified form, the differences between these twin “cultures of music” in aesthetic and compositional terms which do not harbor built-in terminological prejudices. The categories must be defined narrowly enough to seem capable of illuminating the specific qualities in the musical thought of these two opposing nineteenth-century “factions.” If Schumann could speak of melody as the “battle cry of the dilettantes,” our primary task in discussing stylistic dualism is to obtain a firm grasp precisely of the rough, colloquial notion of melody as experienced by the audiences, not the sophisticated notion given by music theory.

The G \flat -major Cavatina from Act 4 of Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots* (1836) is one of those musical ideas in which audiences favoring the Franco-Italian opera of the nineteenth century saw their inborn dream of “melody” fulfilled (Ex. 1). Despite its brevity, a quality it shares with Beethoven’s themes, it is thoroughly appropriate to call Meyerbeer’s idea a theme: the four measures into which the musical substance has been compressed are self-sufficient, neither requiring a continuation nor even compelling development. The only expectation aroused by this idea is that it be repeated.



Example 1

The melody stands out in the duet as an isolated, self-contained entity. In this respect, as in its urge toward repetition, it likewise reflects the situation on stage. Amidst the tragic and horrifying proceedings whose machinery has now been set relentlessly in motion, Raoul and Valentine confess a love that is granted them only for a single instant—the instant compassed in music by the G \flat -major Cavatina. The Cavatina’s melodic gesture maintains its urgent eloquence without once overstepping the bounds of beautiful cantabile—beauty as expressible in song. But if the melodic idea expresses an isolated moment, its almost obsessive repetition and imitation convey an urge to cling against all odds to an instant destined to pass. (That Meyerbeer has made convincing dramaturgical use of a melodic technique shared by popular-song writers—the technique of focusing on a single idea and repeating it ad infinitum—is one of the factors that contribute to the aesthetic distinction of the G \flat -major Cavatina.)

The idea is couched in a da capo form ($A^1 B A^2$), with the A^1 section being divided into $a^1 a^2 b a^1$. This form functions as an arrangement that imparts meaning to the ceaseless recurrence of the principal idea and vindicates it with inter-

polations that serve the purposes of interruption and preparation. The idea itself is the quintessence of *bel canto*, its cantabile being expressive and its expression being captured in song. Thus, the six measures of the *b* phrase form not only a declamatory foil but also an urgent transition to the return of the principal idea. The eighteen measures of section *B*—a diluted, less expressive, less cantabile variant of the principal idea in rapt, stammering declamation—merely form the backdrop for a recapitulation that seems to unleash a flood of repressed emotion. The meaning of the form, then, resides not in the development of theme but in the presentation of melody. Unlike thematic ideas, the aim of a melodic idea does not lie in the consequences to be drawn from it, thereby revealing its potential; instead, the interpolations that interrupt the actual melody merely function as vehicles to present that melody in a new light. With regard to the Cavatina's dramaturgical function, one might also use Stockhausen's term and speak of a musical *Momentform*: the isolated moment does not point to a larger context through which it receives its meaning; instead, the proceedings are, in a manner of speaking, compacted into the moment, which in its isolation represents the actual musical event. This is not to say that the context is irrelevant or a mere prop, as in a potpourri; but it is not a unified whole into which the particular slips into place so much as a backdrop from which the particular stands out.

Yet the G \flat -major Cavatina, if its effect is to be comprehensible, must be related to the overall proceedings within the duet. In a formal-functional sense, it is, to use the Italian terminology, the cantabile to a cabaletta, that is, to a concluding section in quick tempo motivated dramaturgically by an intervening event, the tolling of the alarm bell on St. Bartholomew's Eve. Further, the Cavatina is preceded by an Allegro Maestoso and an Allegretto Moderato, and the contrasting rhythmic patterns of the duet's four sections produce a sense of logical succession, undergirding the form in the same manner as the combination of movements in a sonata. Finally, the duet as a whole falls under the shadow of the "Benediction of the Swords"—the gloomy, grandiose ensemble that immediately precedes it.

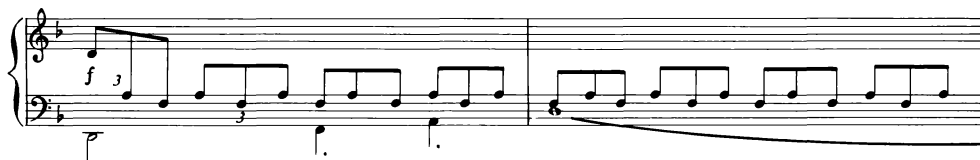
Thus, we have a dichotomy between a music culture which saw the essence of music in opera—more specifically in Italo-French opera—and the German classical tradition which, Mozart notwithstanding, stood for instrumental music in the European consciousness. This dichotomy extended to the very roots of the nineteenth-century concept of music, far transcending differences of genre or national style. And however fruitless it would be to compare Meyerbeer's G \flat -major Cavatina with a sonata movement by Beethoven, it is crucial to get to the bottom of their dissimilarity if we wish to reveal the depth of the chasm separating these "twin cultures of music."

The D-minor Sonata, Op. 31, No. 2 (1801–2)—which Beethoven, in a cryptic comment to Anton Schindler, linked with Shakespeare's *The Tempest*—is one of the works in which the composer, around 1802, struck out on what he called a "new path." It is no coincidence that its first movement has been the object of

countless analyses and has always been considered a paradigm of Beethoven's concept of form, a creation whose very irregularities illuminate the central problems of an art that is by nature "problematical." The movement opens in the manner of an improvised prelude (Ex. 2): neither the broken sixth chord in slow tempo nor the "reptilian" allegro figure—as Hugo Riemann called it—are thematic in character. The underlying musical gesture is that of an introduction. Yet, not even when the broken triad crystallizes into the terse theme of measures 21 to 41 are we justified in classifying it by the letter of the theory of musical form as an exposition of the theme, since the passage, instead of remaining in a single tonality, modulates to the second theme and thereby takes on the appearance of an episode, a developing variation of the pattern in measures 21 to 24 (Ex. 3). This rough sketch of the problem to be tackled by formal analysis is enough to illustrate the dichotomy between sonata technique as revealed by Beethoven on his "new path" and the categories that underlie French or Italian opera. By the criteria of Italo-French music, Beethoven's D-minor Sonata does not have the slightest claim to a musical idea worthy of the name. What his work is based on is not a thematic—much less melodic—"inspiration" so much as a formal concept: the arpeggiated triad, at first vague and inconspicuous, gains its significance by creating a functional context between the opening of the movement and its crystallization in measure 21—a context that thwarts and negates the received categories of sonata form. The opening, seemingly an introduction, can be viewed in retrospect as an exposition, since it is set in a single key and constitutes an initial, if rudimentary, instance of the thematic substance. Conversely, when the arpeggiated chord coalesces into a terse theme with the character of an exposition, it eventually proves to be a transitional modulatory passage. However, even after this second interpretation of the formal design has, in a manner of speaking, been superimposed on the first, it by no means becomes the "correct" one. The formal concept resides, not in a trick which the listener sees through, but rather in an ambiguity which he must bear in mind as an aesthetic principle in its own right: the contradiction between gesture and tonality in the



Example 2



Example 3

exposition shows not that the work lacks form but what that form means. In other words, musical form as manifest in Beethoven's Op. 31, No. 2, is reflective: in order to be comprehensible, it presupposes an awareness of the pattern from which it deviates, and through this deviation draws attention to a change in the central category of instrumental music—the concept of theme. The “theme” is both an improvisatory introduction and a transitional pattern; instead of being presented in a standard exposition, it dissolves into an *ante quem* and a *post quem*: measure 1 is “not yet” and measure 21 is “no longer” the “actual” exposition, which in Op. 31, No. 2, does not exist. Nowhere does the thematic material take on a basic form; instead, it manifests itself in changing guises according to its location in the formal process, like variations without an explicit theme.

Seen in this light, the formal concept behind the D-minor Sonata, which is thoroughly typical of its kind, has two “levels.” In the “surface structure,” an improvisatory opening is offset by a modulating episode containing thematic material. This in turn is sustained by a “deep structure” where, on close hearing, the broken triads of measure 1 and measures 21 and 22 are seen to interlink. This interconnection is indispensable, since without it we could not notice that the traditional concept of theme has been split into its tonal and gestural components—a split which in turn is essential if we are to understand the movement as a variant of sonata form, and hence to perceive its form at all.

Furthermore, the form of the music is, in the strong sense of the word, “processual”: the theme is not so much the object of a musical discourse as a mere substrate of a process which imparts meaning to the music by providing that substrate with formal functions. In contrast, the formal design of a work such as Meyerbeer's G♭-major Cavatina is simply a showcase for the musical idea, whose meaning is self-contained. In a word, one musical culture which sees the essence of music in melody—the “inspiration”—confronts another dominated by the role of function—the idea that the crucial aesthetic factor is not the initial substrate but rather its subsequent development. This is not to say that for melodic substance to be a means to an end—the form—it must be as unassuming as it is in Beethoven's Op. 31, No. 2. But it does mean that the melody may be spare and inchoate without necessarily dulling the rigor of the musical process, the realization of a formal idea. If one extreme of music is the melodic “inspiration,” limited to a few measures and with the form functioning merely as an arrangement, the other would seem to be the almost disembodied formal process emerging from a void.

Music and Romanticism

In everyday language—the language that matters most for the history of ideas—the concept of romantic music or musical romanticism is connected with a stereotype notion which, misleading as it may be, we cannot simply ignore, since it is so deeply ingrained as to be virtually ineradicable. According to this notion, musical

romanticism, meaning a self-contained era extending from the Classic period to the modern music of our century, is distinguished from classicism by a tendency toward formal disintegration, and from modern music by its direct expressivity, which then turned abstract in expressionism. “Romanticism” is a term used to denote an entire era, a portmanteau word covering all important composers from Schubert to Mahler, and the unimportant ones as well. This is a bad blunder: a category taken from the history of ideas but lacking sufficient focus to be useful for historiography has been hewn into a rough-and-ready label simply because our underdeveloped historical awareness balks at the thought that the nineteenth century, like most other periods, was inwardly divided, and hence the search for a single valid name for it is doomed to failure. Neither Verdi nor Bizet nor Mussorgsky were romantics; and while we are justified in calling Bellini and Donizetti romantics, this tells us little about them.

If romanticism in nineteenth-century music is a mere subcurrent used to characterize the age in its entirety, referring to romantic music as “emotional art” is a clichéd half-truth which, however valid from the standpoint of reception history, is vague as far as compositional technique is concerned. That romantic music, like that of *Empfindsamkeit* and the *Sturm und Drang*, presupposes a mode of perception once described by Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder as “utter submersion of the spirit in the surging torrent of feelings” is a fundamental fact for the reception history of the era, one which an aesthetic rationale based on the logic of musical forms is almost powerless to oppose. Yet ever since the writing of Goethe’s *Werther* became a paradigm for the production of art, no one has seriously denied that exaltation requires detachment, analysis, and calculation before it can bring forth a work of art. Edgar Allan Poe’s *Philosophy of Composition* (1846) is not only a foretaste of modernism but also a document of the romantic age; and Diderot’s phrase “Ce n’est pas son [the artist’s] coeur, c’est sa tête qui fait tout” may contradict the exoteric aesthetic which romantics offered to their audiences, but it is thoroughly compatible with the esoteric poetics they in fact followed. Thus, it seems as though the varying emphasis placed on “rationality” or on “emotionality” (with creation being rational and response emotional) was grounded less in inherent contrasts between the periods than in a “tactical” distinction as to whether the “public” aesthetic centered primarily on the production or on the reception of art—a distinction which in turn requires a sociohistorical explanation of its own.

The difficulties we face when we try to formulate a valid, nonstereotyped definition of musical romanticism stem, it seems, from a paradox: although the musical notion of romanticism derives from literature, there are no literary parallels for some of the basic traits that distinguish nineteenth-century music culture from that of the eighteenth century—above all for the profound changes in its relation to past music. (The concept of classicism, though new to music, was a millennia-old legacy in literature.) Rigorous champions of the separation of disciplines may demand for music an autonomous concept of romanticism, but this is merely an abstract methodological axiom which would ride roughshod over