The Cult of Genius and the Musical Museum

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Section Time: Tuesday 8:00-8:50 Bridget

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Date: Oct.15th 2017

Majestic public concerts, in which thousands of educated middle class citizens listened to, immersed in, and were worshipping the master and inherited symphonic masterpieces from Beethoven; above were giant vault along with delicate pillars and chandeliers; in the front hundreds of instrumentalists present the great symphony—In 19th century, the consuming class of classical music drastically shift to the middle class, who deems true musical value and seek for education. It was an era of drastic shift in the taste of the musical majority, an era in which composers altered their music so radically and so often(??? Burkholder 2), an era which the idea of musical museum and “musical cannon” emerged.

The emergence of musical cannon was an inevitable result of collective contribution from the bloom of professional orchestras, rise of appreciation attitude from audience, and uttermost, influential figures such as Beethoven and Haydn, who eventually led to liberation of musicians as individuals.

Middle class, the product of Industrial Revolution as history progress in the first half of 18th century, was the cause of thriving public concert culture. It gradually replaced arbitrary needs from aristocracy class and became the primary consumer of music. (174???) Nonetheless, the contrast can be enormous when comparing to the attitude of audience in pre-1800 in London. “Concerts were no longer meant primarily as social occasions interrupted by occasional listening, but as educational , and even quasi-religious” (Frisch 175) Works are composed to convey the notion of “craftmanship” and enlighten the innermost part of individual audience; The audience, on the other hand, were historicists looking forward to understanding, insights and perceptional resonance from new compositions both by contemporary composers’ emulation or reinterpretation from classical works. Therefore, the pieces of music possessing lasting value, according to Burkholder, “not only formed the core of the unbroken tradition of public concerts, from Handel's Messiah through the operas of Wagner, but also music which was from one to three centuries old but unfamiliar and therefore "new“ .(Burkholder 5) Historical background also suggest another rather significant factor-- rise in social status of musicians; especially composers, were liberated from cage of “high-class servant” for patrons, royal families, as well as many aristocracy classes who had been monopolizing instrumental music consuming in Europe. The autonomous art of music was focused. Moral figures such as Mozart and Haydn, marked a transitionary phase while Beethoven, optimized a paradigm of “future composers who “were coming to be seen as independent masters and creators of their art.” ”(207 Frisech ). The perspective on music, used to be artistic expression for motley entertainment, then dwells on to a purpose such that the musical production itself as a unique task in inspiring people. – as according to Goehr, “They marked a transition in a practice, away from seeing music as a means to seeing it as and end.”(Goehr 206)

To enter the hall of fame in later 19th century, new generations of composers devoted themselves continuously to accomplishing past musical glories and seeking for future transformation and to developing a unique personal style. – This is also known as progressivism. The “passing-on mode” from one generation to another while refining appreciative essence promotes composers to develop works of lasting value. Their creation also evolved to convey impressive personality, speaking to the audience with an individual voice, “which rewarded study, and which became loved as they become more familiar”. (Burkholder 6) To achieve resonance towards audience many great symphonies were usually weaved in a way such that emulates the their greatest predecessors; furthermore, each composer emulating their individual paradigm reinforce a distinctive musical personality. Composers could not afford to be too different, as Frisch remarked: “You have no idea how it feels to one of us when he continually hears behind him such a giant [Beethoven]’— However, Brahms were one of most successful progressivist—his Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 98: IV. Allegro energico e passionato inherited potent rigidness from Beethoven (Symphony No. 9 in D Minor, Op. 125, "Choral": IV. Finale: Presto) while possessing mellow characteristics from a romanticism. A strong character, in the perspective of Brahms, could proceed with dint force or dramatically slow movements.