

Zukunftsmusik and the “battle of the Romantics”

4/20/17

Hanslick, *On the Beautiful in Music* (1891)

- “The primordial element in music is *euphony*.”
- “What is to be expressed?” “Musical ideas.”
- “Of music it is impossible to form any but a musical conception.”
- ...but, “the intellectual element is most intimately connected with these sonoric forms.”
 - i.e. it's not purely a matter of aural (sensual) pleasure. There is an intellectual element in the perception of beauty.
- Thus, “form” is (somehow) important. “form” is not empty, but a “well, replete with the living creation.”
- “The logic in music, which produces in us a feeling of satisfaction, rests on **certain elementary laws of nature** which govern both the human organism and the phenomena of sound.” especially “the primordial law of harmonic progression.”
- “All musical elements are in **some occult manner** connected with each other by certain natural affinities... Though not demonstrable with scientific precision, these affinities are instinctively felt by every experienced ear.”
- Music expresses an **idea**, but one that “cannot be expressed in words and subsequently translated into sounds.”

Hanslick, continued

- There is no greater and more frequent error than to distinguish between “beautiful music”
 - 1) **with** and
 - 2) **without** a definite subject.
- The error is due to the extremely narrow conception of the beautiful in music, leading people to regard the
 - 1) artistically constructed form and
 - 2) the soul infused into it as
- two independent and unrelated existences. [[[TC: (which is wrong)]]]
- All compositions are accordingly [[[TC: (wrongly)]]] divided into full and empty “champagne bottles”; musical “champagne,” however, has the peculiarity of developing with the bottle. [[[TC: which is right, but which many people fail to see]]]
- Thus, as a logical consequence we arrive at the issue of the “program”:
 - Wherever musical beauty is wanting, no meaning, however profound, which sophistical subtlety may read into the work can ever compensate for it; and where it exists, the meaning is a matter of indifference.
- The listener may assign emotions to the music, and that’s fine, but the listener’s relation to the music is secondary, or “unnecessary, and it is only with necessary relations that science is concerned.”

Daniel Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (chap 28)

- Wagner coins “Absolute Music” – as a *pejorative*.
- In doing so he echoes Hegel, who also finds instrumental music abstract and empty and impotent.
- But he diverges from Hegel in aligning instrumental music with Christianity: “such life-sapping forms of religion had to go. The yearning subject must find an object in the real world. Wagner called for a revolution.” He demanded a “new religion,” grounded in nature, worked out in humanity, and shaped by an aesthetics modelled on the pagan drama of the Greek *polis*.”
- cf. Nietzsche and the death of God; Wagner’s artwork of the future is to be a new religion “that would overcome this catastrophe of post-Biblical proportions.”
- Beethoven’s error, for Wagner, was to employ instrumental music for political ends. The 9th symphony “breaks the bounds of the absolute,” something that Wagner only carries further in its ineluctable world-historical trajectory.
- Hanslick and Schopenhauer appropriate the term and valorize it, each in his own way, in ways that do not accord with Wagner’s intentions in coining it.

Chua, chap 29

- Hanslick locates music in the beautiful rather than the Kantian sublime. This means that it exhibits a “finality of form” (completeness unto itself, integrity, wholeness), which also means:
 - Substance and form are identical
 - There is nothing “outside” the work for critical leverage.
- History, therefore, contra Hegel, is simply not part of music. (Chua: “To write a history of absolute music is to write against it.”)
- Thus art is alienated from the realm of moral reason.
- Wagner/Nietzsche stridently reject this idea; art must activate the *Volk*.
- Wagner encounters Schopenhauer, who argues that music is the direct, unmediated expression of the Will. His perspective on the relationship of music to drama shifts in a subtle way; now, instead of needing an object, the absolute music *engenders* one.
 - Thus, the crucial question: Is Music Drama Absolute Music after all?
 - Nietzsche: YES, or at least a “representation” of it. It mediates the Absolute with words and actions, rendering it accessible to us. cf. The Death of Isolde, “drowns in the absolute music that rises out from Tristan’s soul.”
 - “Only as absolute music is individual extinction eternally glorified.”

Brendel

- Schumann less concerned than Mendelssohn with “what will be successful.” Schumann follows an “inner drive.”
 - Schumann is subjectivity “developed to the highest degree, only gradually fulfilling itself by means of the objective element.” Mendelssohn the opposite.
- If only Schumann had written for orchestra the way he had for piano!
 - “Would not such a free outpouring of the soul have corresponded to the ideal of the times, which lets technical treatment recede <and emphasizes> the the dramatically agitated life of the spirit?”
- Schumann’s piano works were the “necessary next step” after Beethoven. If the public didn’t appreciate them, no matter; they will receive more general recognition (in *die Zukunft*).
- The two are conceived of in Hegelian-Dialectic fashion, and, though neither shall serve as a model, each’s strengths derived from his relation to history, and **in particular his “susceptibility to other interests not necessarily of a musical nature.”**
- **Many composers, uneducated outside music, make the silly mistake of supposing that “we had acquired the content along with the form.” Yes, you can study old masters, but only to get skills with which to express a *new Spirit*. That’s why so many current works appear inadequate, or “insignificant when weighed against our contemporary public life.”**
- ***Thus, the main question when it comes to progress in music is “the significance of content in art.”*** [[[TC: not form]]]

Further reading

- Mark Evan Bonds, *Absolute Music*
- Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*
- Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (Jane reviews this one)
- *Music Semiotics*, ed. Sheinberg
- Kofi Agawu, *Music as discourse : semiotic adventures in romantic music*
- Anything with “music and language” in the title

Liszt, *Les Preludes* (1856)

- “symphonic poem” after Lamartine. Brendel: “The summit of thinking.”
 - Question (Introduction and Andante maestoso) (bars 1–46)
 - Love (bars 47–108)
 - Storm (bars 109–181)
 - Bucolic calm (bars 182–344)
 - Battle and victory (bars 345–420)
- Precedents exist, especially Mendelssohn; so why were these seen as so very radical?
 - Philosophical nature of the poetry, explicitness of the connotation.
- Originally conceived of as a setting of a different poet: Autran
 - Scholarly quarrel (STILL) over “true” relationship to text.
 - Raabe, Haraszti maintain that it's wholly artificial
 - Alexander Main disagrees. Andrew Bonner kinda disagrees with Main.
- 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 what is the fate where the first delights of happiness are 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 endeavour to rest his recollection in the calm serenity of life in the fields? 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 the combat full consciousness of himself and entire possession of his energy.

Thematic “transformation” in *Les Preludes*

- Full Taruskin analysis
- Usage of Beethoven, Op. 135

Liszt, Prometheus

- Along with three other symphonic poems that treat heroic or creative topics:
 - Tasso, Orpheus, Mazeppa
- Actually adapted from an overture to Liszt's choral setting of a poem about Prometheus (Herder's).

Genre: Concerto

- Mendelssohn, Violin Concert Op. 64 (3)
 - “The soloist and orchestra are forever deferring to one another, graciously concerned that each gets its share in the limelight.” (Taruskin)
- Liszt, Concerto No. 1
 - Structurally compressed
 - Structural unity via thematic “transformation”; “virtuoso composing”
 - Distinctive “types” (*topoi* or topics – see Leonard Ratner, Topic Theory)
- Berlioz, Harold en Italie
 - Different, looser? Treatment of “program” as compared with *Fantastique*.