



# Musical Form in the Age of Beethoven

Selected Writings on Theory and Method

A. B. MARX

*edited and translated by*  
SCOTT BURNHAM

Selected Writings On T



CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN MUSIC THEORY AND ANALYSIS

MUSICAL FORM IN THE  
AGE OF BEETHOVEN

SELECTED WRITINGS ON  
THEORY AND METHOD

A. B. MARX

Edited and translated by  
SCOTT BURNHAM

*Princeton University*



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, United Kingdom  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1997

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1997

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Bembo

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data*

Marx, Adolf Bernhard, 1795–1866

[Selections. English]

Musical form in the age of Beethoven: selected writings on theory and method / A. B. Marx; edited and translated by Scott Burnham.

p. cm. – (Cambridge Studies in Music Theory and Analysis; 12)

Includes bibliographical references and index

ISBN 0 521 45274 0 (hardback)

1. Music—Theory—19th Century. 2. Music analysis.

I. Burnham, Scott G. II. Title. III. Series.

MT6.M313 1997

781'.09'034—dc20 96-49875 CIP MN

ISBN 0 521 45274 0 hardback

## FOREWORD BY IAN BENT

Theory and analysis are in one sense reciprocals: if analysis opens up a musical structure or style to inspection, inventorying its components, identifying its connective forces, providing a description adequate to some live experience, then theory generalizes from such data, predicting what the analyst will find in other cases within a given structural or stylistic orbit, devising systems by which other works – as yet unwritten – might be generated. Conversely, if theory intuits how musical systems operate, then analysis furnishes feedback to such imaginative intuitions, rendering them more insightful. In this sense, they are like two hemispheres that fit together to form a globe (or cerebrum!), functioning deductively as investigation and abstraction, inductively as hypothesis and verification, and in practice forming a chain of alternating activities.

Professionally, on the other hand, “theory” now denotes a whole sub-discipline of the general field of musicology. Analysis often appears to be a subordinate category within the larger activity of theory. After all, there is theory that does not require analysis. Theorists may engage in building systems or formulating strategies for use by composers; and these almost by definition have no use for analysis. Others may conduct experimental research into the sound-materials of music or the cognitive processes of the human mind, to which analysis may be wholly inappropriate. And on the other hand, historians habitually use analysis as a tool for understanding the classes of compositions – repertoires, “outputs,” “periods,” works, versions, sketches, and so forth – that they study. Professionally, then, our ideal image of twin hemispheres is replaced by an intersection: an area that exists in common between two subdisciplines. Seen from this viewpoint, analysis reciprocates in two directions: with certain kinds of theoretical inquiry, and with certain kinds of historical inquiry. In the former case, analysis has tended to be

used in rather orthodox modes, in the latter in a more eclectic fashion; but that does not mean that analysis in the service of theory is necessarily more exact, more “scientific,” than analysis in the service of history.

The above epistemological excursion is by no means irrelevant to the present series. Cambridge Studies in Music Theory and Analysis is intended to present the work of theorists and of analysts. It has been designed to include “pure” theory – that is, theoretical formulation with a minimum of analytical exemplification; “pure” analysis – that is, practical analysis with a minimum of theoretical underpinning; and writings that fall at points along the spectrum between the two extremes. In these capacities, it aims to illuminate music, as work and as process.

However, theory and analysis are not the exclusive preserves of the present day. As subjects in their own right, they are diachronic. The former is coeval with the very study of music itself, and extends far beyond the confines of Western culture; the latter, defined broadly, has several centuries of past practice. Moreover, they have been dynamic, not static, fields throughout their histories. Consequently, studying earlier music through the eyes of its own contemporary theory helps us to escape (when we need to, not that we should make a dogma out of it) from the preconceptions of our own age. Studying earlier analyses does this too, and in a particularly sharply focused way; at the same time it gives us the opportunity to re-evaluate past analytical methods for present purposes, such as is happening currently, for example, with the long-despised methods of hermeneutic analysis of the late nineteenth century. The series thus includes editions and translations of major works of past theory, and also studies in the history of theory.

The very look of A. B. Marx’s writings conveys the man himself. Just open his manual of composition: the bubbling energy, the drive, the vitality radiates off the page at you! For a start, there is no Gothic script in sight; it is all in a simple, modern-looking, purposeful Roman typeface. And there is the prose: robust, direct, forceful, with short, incisive paragraphs, bursting with emphases. Then there is the layout: sentences frequently broken by dashes to interject asides, the most important words and phrases set out at the center of the line, usually without punctuation, and tabulations summing up each stage of argument. Here he is, for example, at work on rondo forms:

This realization takes us on to the *fifth* rondo form.

Its *first characteristic* is that it strengthens the union of main and subsidiary subject, such that that union stands

*as one distinct part*

of the the total composition. This part closes with, or after, the subsidiary subject: how - we shall see that later on. Then comes the second subsidiary subject

*as second part,*

and the last repetition of the main and first subsidiary subject

*as third part,*

the whole having consequently the following form:

I	II	III
MS SS1	SS2	MS SS1

In addition, text flows into and out of music examples as if music itself had become an integral part of verbal syntax and notation a constituent of the alphabet. Scott Burnham, in his translation, has quite rightly toned down passages like the above by stripping away the rhetorical typography, but I wanted momentarily to reveal to the reader the original effect (of a passage, incidentally, that does not appear in his selection), while conceding, alas, that to our modern eyes these devices produce only a manic effect.

Marx is perhaps the most maligned – the most *unjustly* maligned – of all nineteenth-century writers on music. Far from being a dry theorist, he is a writer of burgeoning enthusiasm. Far from being a pedant, he floods his writings with a sense of the music that he describes. By no means the mechanical formalist he is made out to be, he in fact portrays a musical world of infinite variety governed by endlessly fluid organic processes. Far from being merely a pedagogue, he is a man of broad-ranging intellect, a thinker who seeks to penetrate to underlying causes. He is a man of many parts: not only a theorist, but also a critic, editor, composer, analyst, biographer, writer on diverse topics, innovative educationalist, polemicist, and progressive thinker, not to mention professor at one of the greater universities, and co-founder of a musical conservatory.

His role in the nineteenth century's understanding of Beethoven can-

not be overestimated. Marx was a lifelong advocate of that composer's music. A reviewer of early performances, he went on to treat Beethoven's music as a "universe" for his teaching, drawing constantly on the works to illustrate matters of harmony, construction, form, and expression. At the end of his life, he produced his two-volume musical biography of the composer, which sought to discover not technicalities but the *spirit* that infused Beethoven's music. In short, he did much to shape an image of Beethoven that has prevailed not only for the second half of the nineteenth, but also for much of the twentieth century.

His manual of composition, in four volumes, was probably the most influential work of its kind in the last century. It was a pioneering work, the father of all music textbooks, the first designed for classroom use as well as for private study – a new kind of teaching tool. It went through more editions than any comparable work, spanning 1837 to 1910, and its first volume was translated into English *twice*. Marx's analyses of the Beethoven sonatas (1863) were widely distributed not only in Germany but also on the English and American markets. But on the whole, he was not served well with translations. The later volumes of his composition manual have remained untranslated, as have many music criticisms, and his Beethoven study, to this day. The reader of the present book, beautifully translated and skilfully introduced by Scott Burnham, is in for many delights and pleasures as he or she explores the capacious and resourceful mind of this fascinating and quintessentially nineteenth-century writer.

## PREFACE

The musical thought of Adolph Bernhard Marx has long been one of the familiar themes of German musical scholarship, from Eduard Krüger's perennially shared view of Marx's work as Hegelian, through Hugo Riemann's frequently polemical engagement with Marx's method, to Carl Dahlhaus' ever renewable fascination with Marx and his *Formenlehre*. Until very recently, however, there has been precious little in English on Marx, and until this very volume, precious little Marx in English. In the nineteenth century, four of his works received English translations relatively quickly after their initial publication: *General Music Instruction*, *The Music of the Nineteenth Century*, *Introduction to the Interpretation of the Beethoven Piano Sonatas*, and the first volume of his composition treatise. Since then, there have been no further translations, despite a burgeoning interest on the part of Anglo-American musicologists in Marx's theory of form, and particularly his view of sonata form.

Thus when Ian Bent invited me to contribute a volume on A. B. Marx to his Cambridge Studies in Music Theory and Analysis, my first thought was to do a translation. But which work of Marx's would be most useful to English-speaking historians of theory? At four volumes, his treatise on composition is impracticably long, whereas his *General Music Instruction*, although compact, does not present his thought at its most developed. And the polemical monograph, *The Old School of Music in Conflict with our Times*, while presenting a fascinating view of nineteenth-century music theory and pedagogy, does not touch on Marx's theory of musical form. My solution has been to translate broad excerpts from several of these works and others, in order to present aspects of Marx's theoretical thought that are of continuing interest today: his progressively designed pedagogical method, his theory of musical form



(and particularly sonata form), and his analytical work on the music of Beethoven.

My work on this volume was enhanced by several very special people. First among these is Ian Bent, who, in his wisdom, patience, and generosity, both fostered this project and helped ensure the ideal conditions for its completion. He will always serve as a model to me for how one may best counsel and encourage the work of younger colleagues. Brian Mohr was a great help in the early stages of this project, collating and comparing various editions of Marx's works. Juliet Palmer did a wonderful job copying the music examples. And many thanks to Irene McElroy for her eleventh-hour heroics in helping me produce the manuscript. It was a great pleasure to experience and benefit from the resourceful energy of Penny Souster and the genial professionalism of Kathryn Puffett at Cambridge University Press. As always, the indulgence and support of my wife Dawna Lemaire has never flagged, despite its all too infrequent acknowledgement.

Finally, I will always associate A. B. Marx with the atmosphere and circumstances of a graduate seminar on the history of nineteenth-century theory which took place in the spring of 1983 at Brandeis University. There, in the expansive company of fellow graduate students David Cohen and Michael Schiano, I first met Marx, his *Idee*, and his theory of forms. It is in mind of that happy season of friendship and intellectual stimulation that I dedicate this volume to the person who directed that seminar and without whom I never would have been introduced to the headier challenges of the history of music theory, much less to A. B. Marx.

# CONTENTS

<i>Foreword by Ian Bent</i>	<i>page</i> xi
<i>Preface</i>	xv
Introduction: Music and Spirit	1
PART I MUSIC THEORY AS EDUCATION OF THE SPIRIT	15
1 <i>The Old School of Music in Conflict with our Times:</i>	
selected excerpts	17
Foreword	18
Immediate consequences of the old school	20
Mandate and importance of the compositional method	22
Compositional method and the composer	27
2 <i>A Practical and Theoretical Method of Musical Composition, vol. I:</i>	
selected excerpts	35
Introduction	35
Elementary compositional method	37
PART II MARX'S FORMENLEHRE IN THEORY AND APPLICATION	53
3 "Form in music"	55
4 <i>A Practical and Theoretical Method of Musical Composition, vol. III:</i>	
selected excerpts	91
Sonata form	92
A closer discussion of Sonata form	101

PART III HERMENEUTIC ANALYSIS AND THE <i>IDEE</i>	155
5 <i>Ludwig van Beethoven: Life and Works</i> : selected excerpts	157
The consecration of the hero	158
The “Eroica” Symphony and ideal music	174
The future before the tribunal of the past	179
<i>Select bibliography</i>	189
<i>Index</i>	192

## INTRODUCTION: MUSIC AND SPIRIT

We are only now beginning to perceive the full extent of Adolph Bernhard Marx's presence in nineteenth-century musical thought. A novelist seeking to bring that age and its thought to life would be hard pressed to invent a more appropriately fascinating figure. Although not destined to realize his early dreams of becoming a great composer, Marx was all things else: brilliant conversationalist, fierce polemicist, provocative critic and editor, active participant in a newly galvanized intellectual and cultural milieu (Berlin, shortly after the founding of the University of Berlin), advocate of Beethoven and the first theorist to address the challenge of that composer's music in a comprehensive fashion, systematic yet poetic thinker and writer, progressive pedagogue involved in Prussian educational reform, and the author of books on Gluck, Beethoven, composition, pedagogy, cultural criticism, music history, tone painting, and even vocal technique. What made this range of enterprises possible was a world view that entailed, above all, a single-minded sense of mission. For Marx drew energy and focus from his self-imposed calling, which was nothing less than helping to usher in a new age of music and musical understanding, and then working to preserve its glory. His writing is replete with the heady bombast and brimming high-mindedness that such a task so often invites and perhaps even requires.

Any calculated selection of writings from an author as prolific and many faceted as Marx is bound to represent a degree of tendentiousness. The present volume will necessarily neglect several greatly important strands of Marx's enterprise as a musical thinker in the nineteenth century. These include many of his views on opera, music criticism, and music history. The broader strokes of some of these views will of course be inferable from the material selected for this volume, for Marx's system of thought is such that any one facet implies and reflects all the others.

Marx is certainly best known – and has been since the mid-nineteenth century – as the theorist who named and codified sonata form. This reputation alone might justify the extent to which this volume devotes itself to his theory of form, though few would argue for this particular claim to our attention today without immediate qualification, now that the contributions to formal theory of Koch, Czerny, Reicha, Birnbach, and others have been well charted. More important are the broader issues that the writings in this volume confront, issues that have haunted mainstream theory and analysis for the last two centuries: the relation of form and content, the analysis of instrumental music, the role of pedagogy in music theory, the nature of musical understanding, and, not least, the attempt to understand the music of Beethoven. This last aspect of Marx's agenda surely touches at the root of our own theoretical concerns. For in choosing to base the most important elements of his conception of music on a composer whose works are still regarded as models of organic coherence, Marx defined the nature of musical unity and continuity in terms that remain influential today. But there exists an interpretative motivation for concentrating on Marx's theory of form and compositional method as well, for it is here that he fulfills most explicitly the aesthetic and moral compact that marks him as a member of the Idealist generation; it is here that he sees himself engaged in the great project of elucidating and promoting the union of music and spirit.

The writings in this volume present Marx as a music theorist who deals unflinchingly with two imposing features of the early nineteenth-century cultural landscape in Germany: the metaphysical attitude toward art of the post-Kantian generation of philosophers and literary artists, and the music of Beethoven. Marx's belief in the inwardly spiritual nature of artistic education and expression informs the entire range of his work, from his early essays and reviews in the *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, undertaken in the first fine blaze of Idealism's star, to the bitter ruminations in his last work, *Das Ideal und die Gegenwart* (1867), when that star was no longer the only fire in the sky.<sup>1</sup> And the music of Beethoven is never far away from this central preoccupation; indeed, this music served Marx throughout his career as the first best demonstration of his aesthetic idealism.

For Marx, the ascendancy of art into the realm of the spirit carried with it a moral imperative. This found expression in his renewed em-

<sup>1</sup> Published posthumously by Marx's wife, Therese.

phasis on *Bildung*, on the value of a sound education for the cultural well-being of the individual and of the German nation. The seat of this particularly Prussian view of art as an agent of the moral force of the state was the city of Berlin.

Home of E. T. A. Hoffmann, Bettina von Arnim, Clemens Brentano, and a newly founded university, Berlin was a city in cultural ferment, flush with the recent triumphs of German culture and full of future. The founding of the University in 1810 symbolized the union between state and culture. This merger of state and cultural mission – of aesthetic theory and politics – forms perhaps the defining chapter in the construction of the German “spiritual nation.” And music’s privileged role in this vision of national unity cannot be overestimated, particularly the music of Beethoven and his immediate predecessors. The subsequent reception of Beethoven might well have been different had it not been for two influential documents that, interestingly enough, also stem from Berlin in 1810. I refer to E. T. A. Hoffmann’s famous review of the Fifth Symphony, and Bettina von Arnim’s infamous letter to Goethe about Beethoven (later published in her book *Briefwechsel mit einem Kind*). Both these documents characterize Beethoven as the epitome of Romantic creativity: Hoffmann seeks and finds in the music the same kind of deep continuity and Romantic vision that literary critics were celebrating in the works of Shakespeare and Goethe, and von Arnim factitiously records a conversation with Beethoven in which the composer expresses himself in accordance with her vision of the Romantic artist. These writings represent some of the first, and best known, steps in a process of literary lionization of the composer while he was still alive.<sup>2</sup> Thus the city of Berlin, as one of the last bastions of German Romanticism, and the home of both Hegelian Idealism and Prussian nationalism, was already in the process of transforming the southern currency of the Viennese musical masters into a more fiercely northern intellectual and political capital. A. B. Marx would play a crucial and abiding role in this enterprise.

Marx arrived in Berlin sometime before 1822. He had come to Berlin to further a career in jurisprudence while seeking a base for his ambitions as a composer and musical thinker. Thus it was no surprise that his path soon crossed that of E. T. A. Hoffmann, then a high-ranking coun-

<sup>2</sup> For an engaging account of this process see Charles Rosen, *The Frontiers of Meaning: Three Informal Lectures on Music* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), chap. 2 (“How to become immortal”).

cillor in the Berlin legal establishment, as well as a composer, music critic, conductor, and – last but far from least – writer of popular stories and novels. Sadly enough, they had little personal contact before Hoffmann's death in 1822. Marx's first substantial publication was an appreciation of Hoffmann's role as a composer and musical thinker, an essay which he wrote in 1823 as an appendix to Julius Hitzig's posthumous biography of Hoffmann. Marx's laudatory discussion of Hoffmann establishes some of the most vital themes of his own work, which was soon to get underway.

In the following year, 1824, the Berlin music publisher Adolph Schlesinger appointed the approximately thirty-year-old Marx as head editor of a new music periodical, the *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, a weekly newspaper which Schlesinger hoped would compete with the ever popular *Leipzig allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. Given Marx's lack of journalistic experience, Schlesinger's choice was something of a gamble, and the young man's inexperience did in fact manifest itself in an ongoing inflexibility concerning just who was entitled to practice criticism. Marx thought that only composers were fit to pronounce upon music; his stubbornness on this account dried up some of the usual sources of information vital to a periodical of this sort, a situation which gradually worsened and eventually helped bring about the demise of the paper after a seven-year run.

And yet Marx's inexperience held a signal advantage that far outweighed any drawbacks: by not coming from an established journalistic tradition, Marx could more easily create a new ideal for the musical journal. Rather than concentrating on the detailed reporting of musical events, Marx's paper would provide a forum for higher-minded issues – it would treat music as a vital part of cultural and intellectual *Bildung*. Most importantly, the *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* would prepare the public for a new age in musical art. According to Marx's inaugural editorial, while the Leipzig paper simply confirms existing public attitudes, the Berlin paper must first awaken and then strengthen the insights necessary for understanding the new age and anticipating the future. It is no coincidence that such a note should be sounded in Berlin at this time.

Marx's writings and ideas found ample resonance in Berlin's intellectual community. During his years as editor of the music journal Marx became an habitu   of the Haus Mendelssohn, through which he cultivated the acquaintance of many of the city's most distinguished intellec-

tuals and artists. His skill as a conversationalist kept the teenaged Felix entranced, and the two were great friends for a number of years – until they shared critiques of each other's oratorios, at which point the younger composer could no longer disguise his opinion of Marx's compositional mediocrity.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the greatest monument of their short-lived but intense friendship was the famous rediscovery and performance of the Bach St. Matthew Passion in 1829. Mendelssohn resurrected the work and conducted the performance, while Marx's professional enthusiasm for the work was instrumental in convincing Adolph Schlesinger to publish it.

By 1830 Marx was enough a part of the cultural mission of the city that he was offered a chair in music at the recently founded University of Berlin (he had also just received a doctorate from the University of Marburg). True, the post had been offered initially to the twenty-one-year-old Mendelssohn, who turned it down and recommended Marx;<sup>4</sup> even so, the offer stands as powerful testimony to the level of esteem Marx had managed to engender in such a short time. For Berlin took its university very seriously indeed. The university came to represent nothing less than the Prussian institutionalization of German Romanticism and Idealism. If the original charter of the university was drawn up by Wilhelm von Humboldt in accordance with the Romantic spirit of Jena (the Jena of Tieck, Novalis, and the Schlegel brothers), others soon envisioned the school as "an institution by, of, and for the state."<sup>5</sup> In its inaugural year, the university boasted a spectacular faculty, including the philosopher Fichte, the theologian Schleiermacher, and the philologist F.A. Wolf. G.W.F. Hegel began teaching there in 1818.

Hegel's lectures were very well attended, and his influence soon became enormously pervasive. Michael Ermarth, in his book on Wilhelm Dilthey, quotes a witness of the period:

For many of us today, the memory is still fresh of a time when all learning lived off the rich table of Hegelian wisdom, when all the other academic faculties waited in the antechamber of the philosophical faculty in hopes of appropriat-

<sup>3</sup> The resultant falling out included the melodramatic scene of Marx's tossing the fragments of Mendelssohn's letters into the lake in the Tiergarten. See George R. Marek, *Gentle Genius: The Story of Felix Mendelssohn* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1972), 109. Marek also documents Zelter's jealousy of Marx's friendship with Mendelssohn (see 112–13).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>5</sup> Theodore Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 299.



ing something from the inspection of the Absolute and from the infinitely supple Dialectic – a time when one was either a Hegelian or a barbarian and an idiot . . . when, in the eyes of the Prussian educational and cultural ministry, it was almost a crime not to be a Hegelian.<sup>6</sup>

The much-noted Hegelian cast of Marx's musical thought is thus hardly a surprise.

Marx flourished at the University, lecturing on various topics in music history and repertoire and teaching composition privately. In 1833 he was named to the post of university Music Director (which had been held most recently by Zelter).<sup>7</sup> Marx's successful experiences as a teacher of composition encouraged him to publish what would become his best-known work, *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition, praktisch-theoretisch* [*A Practical and Theoretical Guide to Music Composition*]. This four-volume compositional method went into many editions; an English translation of the first volume appeared in 1852.

Marx's method is very much in line with the pedagogical mandate of the University of Berlin, as expressed in writings by Fichte, Schleiermacher, and others. This mandate and its application are made clear in the excerpts comprising Part I of the present volume, entitled "Music Theory as Education of the Spirit." In the excerpts from his 1841 polemical tract *Die alte Musiklehre im Streit mit unserer Zeit* [*The Old School of Music in Conflict with our Times*], Marx portentously defines his age in terms of an apocalyptic struggle between spirituality and materiality. And by means of his compositional method, he proposes to show how music can project spirit through its very materiality. His project is thus a kind of empirical idealism: through experience to spirit. By dint of this emphasis, especially in light of its Prussian context, Marx's compositional method becomes a culturalizing and moralizing force. As the excerpted passages will show, Marx himself unabashedly associates his work as a music pedagogue with the highest moral aims of the age, proclaiming the ascension of music instruction from the realm of training to that of cultural education, of *Bildung* in its most exalted sense.

At the heart of Marx's pedagogical method is a respect for the integrity of the student and the integrity of the artwork. He thus refrains from the artificial separation of musical elements in his treatise, since such separation is not a condition of actual artworks. And because the

<sup>6</sup> Michael Ermarth, *Wilhelm Dilthey: The Critique of Historical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 51.

<sup>7</sup> Marx, *Erinnerungen: Aus meinem Leben*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Otto Janke, 1865), vol. 2, 187.