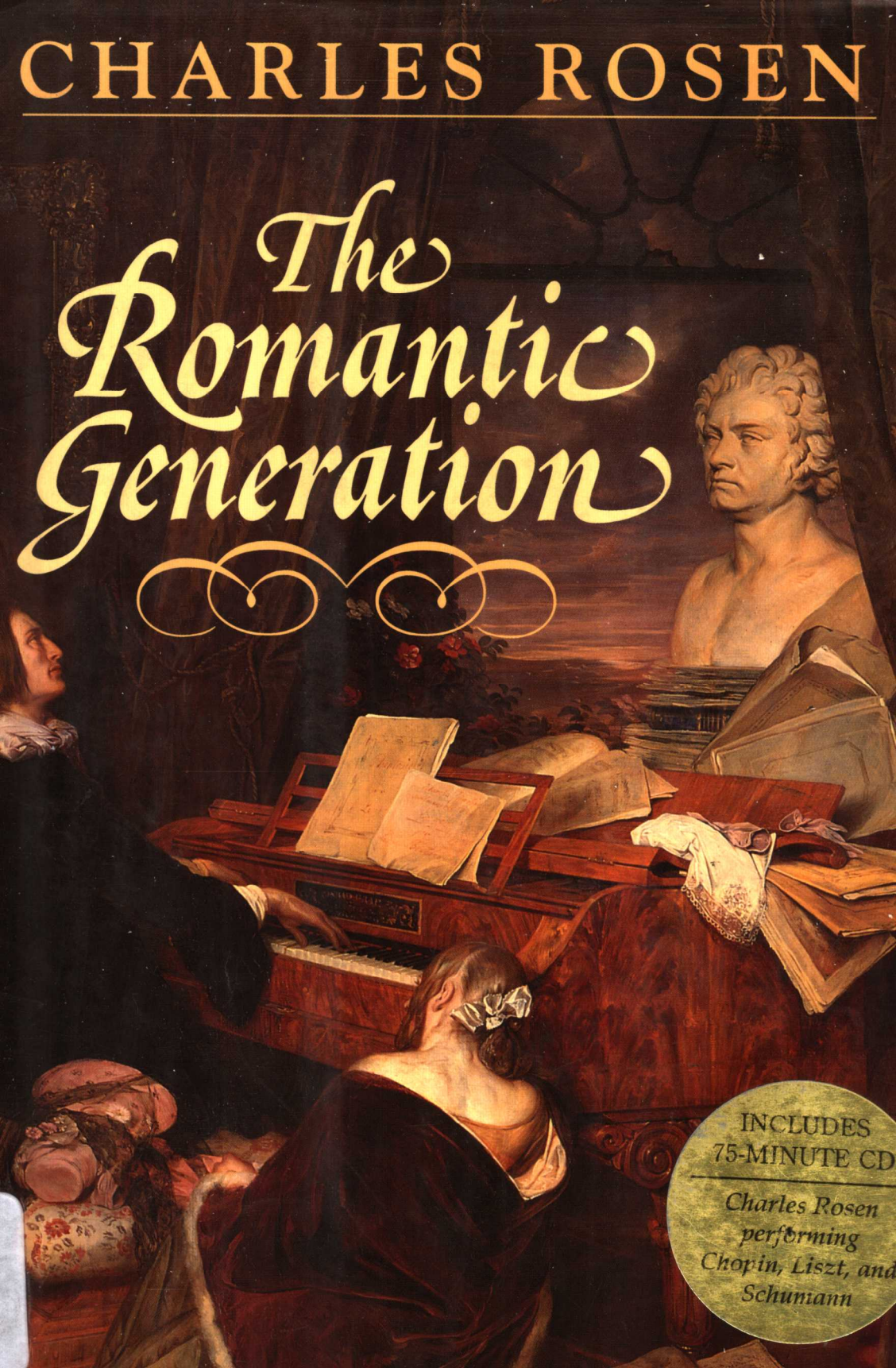
CHARLES ROSEN

The Romantic Generation



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The Romantic Generation

CHARLES
ROSEN

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Preface

> It is equally fatal to have a system and not to
> have a system. One must try to combine them.
> —Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum Fragments*

The death of Beethoven in 1827 must have given a sense of freedom to the composers born almost two decades earlier: Chopin and Schumann in 1810, Mendelssohn the year before, Liszt the year after. Perhaps only Chopin was not intimidated by the commanding figure of authority that Beethoven represented for generations to come. I think it is probable that Beethoven's death hastened the rapid development of new stylistic tendencies which had already made themselves felt and which, indeed, even influenced his own music.

The death of Chopin in 1849 was not so signal an event for the world of music, but it, too, marked the end of an age. Schumann was to die only a few years later, after entering an insane asylum; in the 1850s Liszt renounced much of his adventurous early manner, pruned his youthful works of their excesses, and developed new directions of style, many of which would be realized only after his death by musicians who took no account of his experiments. In 1850 the young Brahms arrived upon the scene, and it was clear that there was a new and more conservative musical philosophy in the air.

In these writings on music from the death of Beethoven to the death of Chopin, I have limited myself to those composers whose characteristic styles were defined in the late 1820s and early 1830s, a compact group in spite of widely differing musical ideals and the evident mutual hostility frequently met with among them. Slightly older than the composers born around 1810, Berlioz nevertheless belongs essentially with them. In addition, a consideration of Bellini and (more briefly) Meyerbeer is inescapable for an understanding of the period.

On the other hand, Verdi and Wagner are absent, as their stylistic individuality was fully shaped only in the 1840s; their greatest achievements belong

with the next generation. A minor figure like Alkan is omitted for the same reason; he became interesting essentially after 1850 by his extension of the Liszt tradition and the way he opened up piano music to the operatic effects of Meyerbeer. Hummel continued to write in the early 1830s, and Rossini for several decades beyond, but they were both, along with Beethoven, the immediate musical ancestors of the composers born around 1810.

This book originated as the Charles Eliot Norton lectures, given in 1980–81, and has been expanded at the request of Harvard University Press—although both the Press and I were somewhat taken aback at the magnitude of the expansion. I found it harder than I had expected to make some of the points both clear and convincing, and I apologize if I have tried the reader's patience. The position of Chopin, in particular, has been traditionally surrounded with prejudice and misunderstanding which are only beginning to be cleared up in our time. I do not try to provide a complete picture of the period from 1827 to 1850, but only of those aspects of the music that most interested me—or, rather, about which I thought I had something interesting to say—and the project was more complex than I had at first envisaged. It was not so much that, as William Empson has somewhere remarked, the boring thing about criticism is that you have to put in all the obvious things or people will think "He didn't even see *that*"; rather that the music of the 1830s was explicitly entangled with art, literature, politics, and personal life in ways that were less straightforward, more ambivalent than the music of the decades just preceding. The claim of artistic autonomy that was made for music, rightly or wrongly, by the late eighteenth century, was neither really upheld nor abandoned by the following generations: rather, an attempt was made to incorporate some of the artist's own life and experience into the claim of autonomy, to transform part of the artist's world into an independent aesthetic object.

In Chapters 2 and 3 I have tried to give an account of the place of music within two important literary traditions: the fragment as an artistic form, and the new feeling for Nature and landscape. The development of "characteristic" music and of the Romantic *Lied,* among the most remarkable creations of the period, are bound up with the poetry and the scientific literature of the time and of the immediately preceding age. I have presented what amounts to a selected anthology of texts to illustrate the discussion, and hope that they will be of more help for an understanding than any more extensive explanation—and more entertaining. It will be obvious that, even if the relevance of the texts to the subject was my main concern, I have above all chosen ones that I enjoyed, and of course I hope the reader will enjoy them as well.

In the fourth chapter, two of the most basic technical changes in the musical language of the time are discussed briefly but with enough illustrations to allow us to see how they functioned: the use of mediant relationships, and the four-bar phrase. Most of these illustrations, as well as those in the rest of the book, I enjoy playing, listening to, and thinking about. I am more concerned

here to explain the continued survival of some of the music of the time than to resurrect those works which can be performed today only as historical curiosities. If I have written nothing about figures like Stephen Heller, Sigismond Thalberg, Ignaz Moscheles, and others, that is not beause I do not sometimes enjoy hearing their works but because I have nothing to say about them that has not been better said by others. This is also true about more ponderable figures like Donizetti, Auber, and Marschner. Nevertheless, resurrection is an important aspect of historical criticism, and only works if the revival is a practical success. It should be obvious, however, that very little of Chopin is in urgent need of revival; and with Schumann, Liszt, and Berlioz, an esoteric concentration on the less frequently performed pieces is actually a disservice to them. There are, however, many little-known works for which I should like to be a passionate advocate: Liszt's *Die Lorelei,* Bellini's *Beatrice di Tenda,* and Schumann's Canons for Pedal Piano, to name only a few.

There is no attempt here to revive those few women composers whose work remained almost completely repressed during this time. To do so would be, I think, a distortion of the real tragedy of the creative female musician in the nineteenth century. It is misleading to emphasize the claim that there were women composers whose considerable achievements were pushed aside and went unrecognized; the fate of the greater talents—Clara Schumann, for example—was even more cruel: they were never, in fact, allowed to develop to the point where they could have taken a justified pride in work that was unheard, invisible—even that was denied them. They were harshly excluded from history, and attempting to bring them uncritically and naively back into it neither does them posthumous justice nor acknowledges the difficult reality of their lives.

The music of Schumann, Chopin, and Liszt is still the center of almost every pianist's activity, and a listing of all the books I have read on these composers and their world and all the conversations I have had about them would be impossible, and not very useful to anybody even if I could remember—although I should cite André Monglond's *Le Préromantisme* (Paris, 1930) as an important source for some of the literature discussed in Chapter 3. Some parts of these lectures date back many years: the one on the Romantic Fragment, for example, was given, in somewhat similar form, at Wesleyan University more than thirty years ago, and many of the ideas appeared in talks that I gave at the Gauss Seminars at Princeton, and in the Messenger Lectures at Cornell. I have not tried to incorporate any of the interesting research and criticism on the period that have come out since the lectures were given and to make this book even longer by further discussion. I hope to have paid my major debts by acknowledging help received, but I have preferred to avoid polemic and not always indicated whatever disagreements I might have had with other critics.

The manuscript of this book was substantially in its final form by February of 1991, and the only major revision has been to expand the section on Bellini

and to add a more decisive conclusion to the final chapter. In the past few years, however, Chopin scholarship has taken a turn for the better with Nicholas Temperley's article in *The New Grove* and the work of Jim Samson and Jeffrey Kallberg. The latter's essays on the genres of the Prelude and the Nocturne concerned what I had written so closely that I have been forced to add a few pages that take account of the important considerations that he raised, but I have not tried to bring my own text up-to-date in any other important respect. I should like, however, to mention here the excellent volume of 1992 edited by Jim Samson, in which Kallberg's essay appeared and in which the essay by Simon Finlow, "The Twenty-Seven Etudes and Their Antecedents," manages to give Chopin's originality its due while pointing out his debt to previous work; John Rink's essay, too, on tonal architecture in Chopin's early music gives the best study of an aspect of Chopin that needed consideration. In addition, in *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, edited by R. Larry Todd (New York, 1990), I have recently come across a brilliant discussion of Schumann's piano music with the most cogent account of the late period by Anthony Newcomb, which, to my regret, I read too late to use here. I am sure that I have been influenced by the admirable writings of Edward T. Cone on Berlioz and other composers, some of which I read many years ago, but I can no longer remember what I have taken from him and what I thought up on my own, just as it would be pointless to try and disentangle my own thinking from my debts to Hermann Abert, Donald Francis Tovey, and Heinrich Schenker. Any plagiarism has been inadvertent; in any case I have always been flattered on the rare occasions when someone has taken something from me without acknowledgment: plagiarism is the sincerest form of flattery.

I owe a great deal to the help of friends and colleagues. Philip Gossett's counsel on Italian opera was invaluable, and Jeffrey Kallberg saved me from several mistakes concerning Chopin; I am deeply grateful for their generosity in reading long parts of my manuscript. Kristina Muxfeldt and David Gable were also generous with aid on both general and specific problems. Richard Cohn was very helpful indeed with Chapter 4. Reinhold Brinkmann kindly made available some fascinating research on Schumann's *Lieder*. Joseph Kerman gave me excellent advice and encouragement many years ago at Oxford on the subject of the fragment as Romantic form. The idiosyncracy of Chopin's ornamentation in the early B Major Nocturne was shown to me some years ago by Pierre Boulez, and when I was sixteen years old Moriz Rosenthal pointed out that the first tonic chord in root position in the Schumann C Major Phantasie is found on the last page of the first movement just before the quotation from Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* (for this reason I have paid no attention to recent speculation that Hermann Abert was the first to notice the quotation, as Rosenthal learned of it from Liszt—it would have been astonishing if Liszt had not remarked on it).

Piero Weiss and Bruno Lassuto have generously made available their copies

of original editions of Schumann, and Marta Grabòcz helped me to obtain a photograph of the manuscript of Schumann's Phantasie from the library at Budapest. (It contains the original ending of the last movement discovered by Alan Walker.) Walter Frisch made it possible for me get a photograph of the London edition of Chopin's Sonata in B flat Minor, and discussing the subject of this book with him was very helpful; I am grateful to the library of Columbia University for the possibility of reproducing some pages of this edition. The staff of the rare book room at the Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago was wonderfully helpful in allowing me to use their superb collection of Chopin first editions, and I have reproduced many pages here for the illustrations. I want to thank Richard Blocker for preparing the example of the opening of the love music from Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette*. I should like to be able to give a more detailed account of all the help I have received from many friends and colleagues over the years, and the conversations and advice that have contributed to this book. Finally, I must express my appreciation of the kindness and patience of Kate Schmit and Margaretta Fulton of Harvard University Press.

Note on the musical illustrations

For Chopin and Schumann, I have used with few exceptions the editions published during their lifetimes (I have not been able to find reproducible copies of the original editions of Chopin's second scherzo and of two or three of the mazurkas, and have reproduced a few pages from the Breitkopf & Härtel nineteenth-century critical edition). The original editions are not entirely accurate, of course, but at least the mistakes are due to the inadvertence and incompetence of the engravers and the carelessness of the proofreaders (including the composers) rather than to the systematic interference of editors.

For many composers—Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms—satisfactory editions are available for modern performers. For Schumann and Chopin, however, almost all twentieth-century editions are badly flawed. Chopin had most of his works published simultaneously in Paris, Leipzig, and London; in some cases slightly different versions were sent to each publishing house. The principle that the last decision of the composer is the definitive one is not helpful here: the variations of phrasing, pedal indications, dynamics, and even notes show that the text was something much more fluid for Chopin than for Beethoven. The old nineteenth-century critical edition has some volumes well edited by Brahms (the Sonatas, Mazurkas, and Ballades), largely representing the text printed in Leipzig and the manuscripts sent to Germany. The various editions of Chopin's students, like Mikuli, however, may be an invaluable testimony to contemporary interpretation, but they deliberately introduce articulations of phrasing that Chopin went to great pains to eliminate, leave out accents and other dynamic indications that the editors felt to be troublesome, and freely

alter pedal indications and even the pitches. In the twentieth century, the most important publication was the so-called Paderewski edition, and its deficiencies and inaccuracies were an international scandal: it also contained a good deal of textual information in the bibliographical notes, not all of it trustworthy. A new and much better edition was started in Poland under the direction of Jan Ekier, but very few volumes have so far been issued: a promise of a translation of the textual notes was made, but so far these have appeared only in Polish. The volumes published by Henle are still governed by the illusion that there is a definitive version of a work by Chopin and that all the variants can be consigned to the textual notes. Perhaps impatient with the slowness of his new Polish critical edition, Ekier has published a few excellent volumes for Universal, above all the Nocturnes. Relations among the various editions published by Chopin himself are very complex and are rendered even more difficult by the annotations that Chopin made for his pupils, many of these representing important and valuable changes. I do not myself command any great understanding of the full details of these relations, and have chosen my illustrations for their readability and availability, confident only that the original copies would supply a relative degree of authenticity. (I have given indications of provenance only when these were pertinent to my argument. I do not claim that the illustrations are absolutely authoritative, and providing all the bibliographical information would have been interesting only to a very few scholars: I apologize to them, but they will have to go back to the original copies anyway for any further study.)

The editing of Schumann, particularly the piano music, is both better and worse: most of it was written before the composer was twenty-nine, and he himself revised several of the early works twelve or more years later, when he was clearly out of sympathy with his youthful audacity. The superiority of the earlier versions is often at least tacitly acknowledged: the first phrase of the *Davidsbündlertänze,* for example, is so much worse in the second edition that I have never heard any pianist except Walter Gieseking play it in that form. Clara Schumann edited the first complete edition of her husband's works and sometimes printed successive versions separately. Unfortunately, in many cases she did not follow the advice given her by Johannes Brahms and reproduce the original versions with no change; in the second piece of the *Kreisleriana,* for example, she printed the second version with the dynamic indications of the first. Nevertheless, her edition is still the best one generally available, and her changes are an important witness to contemporary performance and have, naturally, a certain authority as well. The selection of the piano music edited by Wolfgang Boetticher for Henle gives important information and corrects many minor points but is one of the worst editions: Boetticher systematically prefers the later and inferior versions and incompletely and inaccurately gives the variants of the early ones (there is no point, for example, in telling pianists that there is a ritenuto in one bar with no further precision when there are

eight slow beats to the bar and the ritenuto is on the seventh beat). For these reasons, the original editions, even with the occasional misprint, remain the most satisfactory sources. When I have not been able to find a good copy, I have used Clara Schumann's edition, particularly for the Impromptus on her own theme, where she has edited the early and late versions separately.

The most important piano works of Franz Liszt were edited with great fidelity to the original notation early in this century by the so-called Liszt-Stiftung edition, supervised by Ferruccio Busoni and printed by Breitkopf & Härtel. Although incomplete, this edition reproduces Liszt's text with less interference than the new critical edition now being produced in Budapest. Unfortunately, the Liszt-Stiftung ceased publication before the opera fantasies and Liszt's arrangements of songs by Schubert, Chopin, and himself appeared, and I have had to use other sources for the illustrations of these works. The *Réminiscences de Don Juan* was scrupulously edited by Busoni, who placed his considerably rewritten version in larger print underneath Liszt's original (I compared it with the two autograph manuscripts at the New York Public Library, and found it accurate).

Quotations from the "Scéne d'amour" in Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* come from the piano score authorized by the composer.

Preparatory versions of some of the following pages were printed in *Nineteenth-Century Music* (Summer, 1990); in *The Piano,* edited by Dominic Gill (Oxford, 1983); and in book reviews in *The New York Review of Books* (12 August, 1983; 12 April, 1984; 26 April, 1984; 6 November, 1986; and 28 May, 1987). All have been considerably altered and revised.

Contents

CHAPTER ONE

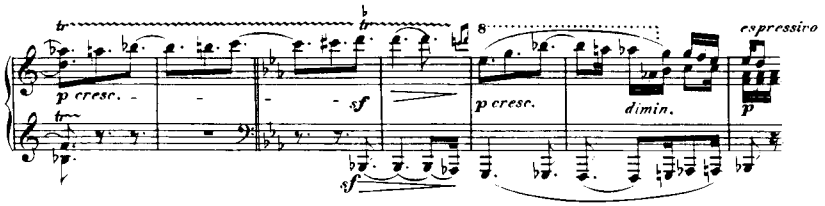
Music and Sound

Imagining the sound

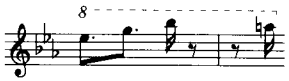
Inaudible music may seem an odd notion, even a foolishly Romantic one—although it is partly the Romantic prejudice in favor of sensuous experience that makes it seem odd. Still, there are details of music which cannot be heard but only imagined, and even certain aspects of musical form which cannot be realized in sound even by the imagination.

We put our aural imagination to work as a matter of course every time we listen to music. We purify the music by subtracting what is irrelevant from the undigested mass of sound that reaches our ears—the creaking chairs of the concert hall, the occasional cough, the traffic noise from outside; we instinctively correct the tuning, substitute the right pitches for the wrong ones, and erase from our musical perception the scratchy sound of the violin bow; we learn in just a few minutes to filter out some of the obtrusive resonance of the cathedral which interferes with the clarity of the voice leading. Listening to music, like understanding language, is not a passive state but an everyday act of creative imagination so commonplace that its mechanism is taken for granted. We separate the music from the sound.

We also add to the sound whatever is necessary for musical significance. During every performance we continually delude ourselves into thinking we have heard things which cannot have reached our ears. At the climax of the final movement of the Sonata in C Minor, op. 111, by Beethoven, most pianists take (correctly, I think) so slow a tempo that the culminating B♭ has died away long before it is resolved, but that makes no difference—we all hear the B♭ as continuing to sound and take no note of its actual disappearance:



On one of Beethoven's pianos the B♭ decays very quickly, and even on a modern concert grand it has diminished to inaudibility before its resolution to an A♮. There are, in fact, no dampers on a piano for notes in so high a register, and holding the key down will not allow the sound to last any longer. It would make no difference on either an early nineteenth-century piano or a modern one if the B♭ were written and played as a short sixteenth note with rests instead of the tied long notes that Beethoven wrote:



but this notation, which corresponds to the physical and acoustical facts, would make no musical sense. We hear the B♭ as lasting for two reasons: it is the end of a series of long notes, most of them sustained by trills—the third beat of each bar, indeed, sustained twice as long as the others; more important, the F in the bass turns the B♭ into a dissonance which requires the resolution into the A♮, and we (not the instrument) make the link between the notes and sustain the B♭ until the release of tension. We create the necessary continuity that does not actually take place—or, rather, the expressive force of the music causes us to imagine as actually existing what is only implied.

To a certain extent, this hearing of the inaudible is a part of the more general phenomenon of listening to the piano: we ignore the decay of sound except when it is exploited by the composer. On the piano a note decays immediately after the impact of the hammer on the string, reaches a lower plateau of sound, and then starts a second and slower decay. No true legato is therefore possible on a piano, but this is not a fact of any importance in eighteenth- or nineteenth-century music: the playing of a melody on the piano aspires to the condition of a perfect vocal legato, and the audience accepts the ideal as a reality when it is approached closely enough by the performer. The decibel needle on a recording machine may jump quickly to the right and then back at once to the left as each successive note is struck on the piano, but our perception of the music knows nothing of that. We are, indeed, aware of both the initial and secondary decays of sound in a work like Boulez's *Constellation* because they provide the basic rhythmic structure of the piece, but Beethoven

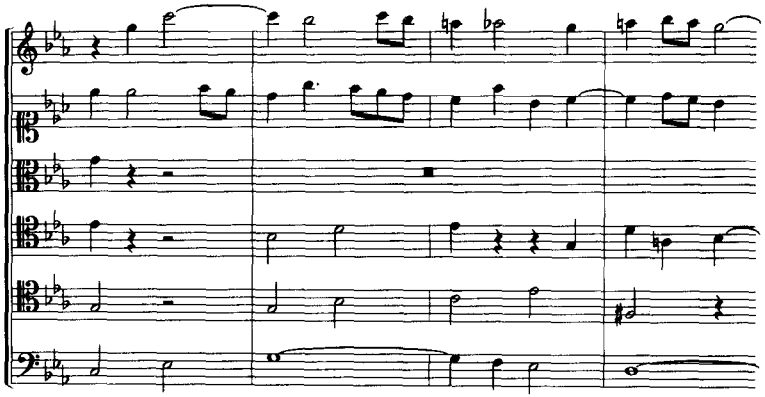
never exploits the decay structurally—although he sometimes does so atmospherically—and we hear the sounds in a Beethoven piano sonata as if they were sustained by string instruments or voices.[1]

Nevertheless, this climactic moment of opus 111 is exceptional in that the listener not only disregards the diminishing of sonority characteristic of the instrument, but supplies in his imagination a sound which has actually ceased to exist. At the point of greatest intensity, Beethoven opposes the most distant registers of the keyboard—the weakest and the strongest—and implies from each register an equal power which no instrument is capable of giving and which must therefore be created by the listener. More than any composer before him, Beethoven understood the pathos of the gap between idea and realization, and the sense of strain put on the listener's imagination is essential here. The best argument for using the pianos of Beethoven's time in place of the modern grand piano is not the aptness of the old instruments but their greater inadequacy for realizing such an effect, and consequently the more dramatic effort required of the listener. The modern piano, however, is sufficiently inadequate to convey Beethoven's intentions.

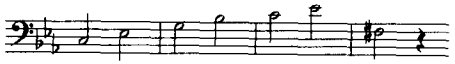
As I have said, a passage like this is not isolated in music: in less extreme ways, the listener must constantly alter, purify, and supplement what he hears in the interests of musical intelligibility and expressiveness, taking his cue from what is implied by the performer. That is why the choreographic gyrations of the virtuoso conductor are so important to the audience's comprehension, if not to the orchestra's: an accent accompanied by an outflung arm seems literally to become louder and more intense. This aspect of music is inaudible only in the physical sense: it is heard in the imagination, very much as the composer hears as he writes, or the musician as he silently reads a score.

Inaudible music has a more radical form, however: the musical concept unrealizable as sound, even in the imagination. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach had remarked that not everything in music can be heard (the idea is probably much older), and we take an example of the absolutely inaudible—as opposed to the practically inaudible—from the work of his father: the six-voice ricercar of the *Musical Offering*. At one point of this masterly fugue, there is a false entrance in the bass followed by a real entrance in the baritone—that is, an incomplete statement of the theme (only the first three notes here) followed by a full statement:

1. It is the pianist, rather than the composer, who reckons with the decay of sound in order to achieve clarity and to give the impression of continuity. (We may dismiss here as absurd the recent contention that the indication *fp* in Beethoven—at the opening of the Sonata Pathétique, for example—calls for the fast decay of the instruments of his time. If the decay was inevitable, there was no point in asking for it. In piano music, as in every other kind, *fp* meant a loud accent in an otherwise soft passage.)

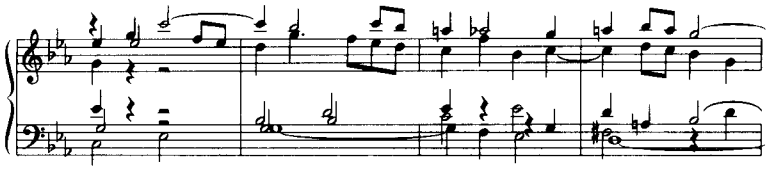


The last note of the false statement and the first of the real are the same note, and the overlap makes it impossible to hear that there are two different voices and two different successive statements, partial and full. What one hears is:



After the fact, one can perceive that there are two voices, as the last note of the false statement is prolonged into the full statement. The passage, however, is preceded by a sequence of similarly overlapping false statements, in which the passing of one voice into another is in no way perceptible. Only if the two voices were played on different instruments could we distinguish one from the other, and, in spite of its being engraved and published in score, the six-voice ricercar is a work for keyboard. The beautiful exchange from voice to voice is, therefore, perceptible only through the eye and not even potentially audible in performance: it exists in the mind of the performer.

There has been some misunderstanding about this fugue, due partly to the original publication in full score, which gave rise in the twentieth century to the erroneous belief that it was for some unspecified combination of instruments. Nevertheless, the ricercar is for keyboard alone. Both Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (who was with his father when King Frederick the Great gave him the theme for the fugue) and Forkel, the first biographer of Bach, are decisive on this point: the six-voice ricercar is "for two hands without pedal" (that is, without the pedal keyboard found on organs and on several harpsichords and clavichords of the time). The manuscript is on two staves, and the passage I have quoted was originally notated:



The gap between the notation and the effect for the ear is the point of this passage: to make a single voice out of two, and to form one long continuous line out of two separate statements, one false and one real. The publication in full score was not simply for clarity: it also demonstrated the independence of the voices, elucidated the contrapuntal movement, and set into relief those aspects of the music that cannot be realized for the ear.

The art of Johann Sebastian Bach at its most learned—as in this ricercar—is based on a relation between the audible and the inaudible. The independence of the voices in a fugue of this kind is absolute, but it can only be partially heard. The junction of two voices in a unison, wonderfully employed in the six-voice ricercar but a frequent effect in all contrapuntal writing, marks an extreme: the independence of the voices here passes over from the intermittently perceptible to the absolutely inaudible. The highest art of the composer is to make the counterpoint blend together into a continuum out of which the individual voices rise and are set into relief. The purpose of Baroque counterpoint is not the opposition of different voices but the creation of harmonic unity out of independent parts. Bach's way of setting one part after another in relief on the surface of the mass of sound was crucial to the Romantics, Chopin and Schumann in particular.

A constant aural perception of six individual parts is neither a reasonable nor a desirable goal. An understanding of the achievement of this fugue and of the fugue in "antique style" in general—one of the limit points of Baroque style—depends on the knowledge that behind what one hears—the mass of sound and the intermittent prominence of the individual voices—lies a perfect musical structure of six voices, each beautiful in isolation as well as in combination, a structure that can never be completely realized in sound. An awareness of the relation between sound and structure can be experienced with full intensity by the performer alone, who not only sees the score (as a friend looking over his shoulder might also do), but also senses the total independence of the voices through his fingers while he hears the way they blend into a mass. The absolute independence and the combination of voices is revealed by the score, but it is not, properly speaking, visual; neither can it be fully grasped aurally. The harmonic movement of the mass of sound, which proceeds as if guided by a figured bass, is a witness to the complex harmonic relationships among the voices; the intermittent isolation of individual voices is a witness to