Classic Music

Expression, Form, and Style

Leonard G. Ratner

CLASSIC MUSIC

Expression, Form, and Style

Leonard G. Ratner
Professor of Music
Stanford University

SCHIRMER BOOKS
A Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.
NEW YORK

COLLIER MACMILLAN PUBLISHERS
LONDON

Schirmer Books
A Division of Macmillan Inc.
866 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022

Collier Macmillan Canada, Ltd.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 76-57808

Schirmer Books Paperback Edition 1985

Printed in the United States of America

printing number hard cover

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

printing number paperback

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Ratner, Leonard G.
Classic music.

Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Music—History and criticism—18th century.
2. Classicism in music. I. Title.
ML195.R38 780'.903'3 76-57808
ISBN 0-02-872690-1

Abbreviations

AM	*Acta Musicologica*
AMW	*Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*
AMZ	*Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*
HAM	*Historical Anthology of Music*
JAMS	*Journal of the American Musicological Society*
JMT	*Journal of Music Theory*
MGG	*Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*
ML	*Music and Letters*
MMR	*The Monthly Musical Record*
MQ	*The Musical Quarterly*
MR	*Music Review*
NMA	W. A. Mozart, *Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke*
PAMS	*Papers, American Musicological Society*
RBM	*Revue belge de musicologie*
RISM	*Répertoire international des sources musicales (International Inventory of Musical Sources)*
SIM	*Sammelbände der internationalen Musikgesellschaft*
StM	*Studien zur Musikwissenschaft*

Preface

The music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven and their contemporaries has a familiar and friendly ring. It speaks to us clearly and directly. We are moved by the powerful eloquence of its masterpieces, and we delight in the trimness and fluency of its minor works.

Much has been written about this music and its makers. Library shelves are crowded with histories, biographies, surveys, bibliographies, and genre studies. Yet something eludes us among this extensive literature; that is, a full-scale explication of the stylistic premises of classic music, a guide to the principles according to which this music was composed.

This book undertakes to define these principles. It offers a set of criteria, drawn from musical analysis and theoretical treatises of the late 18th century, that can serve as guidelines for the investigation of classic music.

The music central to this study, circa 1770–1800, is vast in quantity. The *Breitkopf Thematic Catalogue*, 1762–1787, lists thematic incipits of close to 10,000 compositions; thousands of 18th-century composers are listed in the *RISM* catalogue. Scanning the thematic catalogues of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Gluck, the Bach sons, Boccherini, and Viotti will give some idea of the magnitude of production by a single composer.

The problems of recovery, authentication, and editing this enormous repertory are overwhelming. But its very size becomes an advantage for style analysis. Since most of this music had to be composed quickly, for immediate use, composers relied on familiar and universally accepted formulas for its organization and handling of detail. Wherever we sample this music, we find it runs true to type.

This consistency bespeaks a *language* understood throughout Europe and parts of the New World. Moreover, to speak of 18th-century music as a language is not simply to use a figure of speech. Structural parallels between music and oratory follow a clear path through music theory of the 17th and 18th centuries. Just as there were rules for organizing an oratorical discourse, so were there explicit prescriptions for building a musical progression. Both language and music had their vocabulary, syntax, and arrangement of formal structures, subsumed under the title *Rhetoric*. The skilled composer, the well-trained performer, the perceptive listener had command of musical rhetoric, much as a literate person today deals with the grammar of language. The expertise of the com-

poser was shown in his ability to manipulate his ideas flexibly and felicitously within the rhetorical system.

The exposition of 18th-century musical rhetoric is found in theoretical and critical treatises. These are compendia of the practice of the time, instructive for the student and amateur of that age; for us, they point to what was current *then*, illuminating our present view of the music. Coordinated with analysis of the music itself, the data gleaned from these writings make it possible to determine the basic criteria of expression, rhetoric, structure, performance, and style that govern classic music.

The term *classic* is used in this book principally for purposes of chronology, although it has a number of meanings. Any perfected style in art can be called classic in the harmonious relationship of its elements and the refinement of its techniques. Clarity, balance, focus, universality in its own time and thereafter, great works that stand as "classics": these meanings can be applied to the music of the last quarter of the 18th century. But, as we shall see, other meanings of *classic*—objectivity, austerity, noble simplicity, purity of style, lack of disturbing irregularities or mixtures—do not apply. If we were to rename this period according to late 18th-century views, it would be called the *galant* style, possibly qualified as *late Franco-Italian galant*. For 18th-century musicians, the term *galant* was applied to all music not directly associated with the strict church style or imitating it. For them, *galant* had a much broader meaning than our image of mid-18th-century music characterized by extensive local and superficial elaboration. Of all terms used to designate this period, *Viennese classic* is most limiting because it shortens our perspective. While Vienna became very important quite late in the century and remained so in the early 19th century, there is hardly a mention of Vienna throughout 18th-century comments on style. The music there drew upon elements of Italian, French, and German styles, and Vienna's most important role was to provide a locale for a magnificent synthesis of styles in the mature works of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. We can best savor the subtleties and the brilliance of this synthesis by seeing how it came about through *the fusion of elements* drawn from common 18th-century musical practice. This calls for a perspective that includes the entire range of expression, form, and style in 18th-century music.

Many features of the classic style originated in the early 18th century and formed a stream of continuity that maintained its flow long after the classic era had become history. Just as these features were already present in the early part of the century, so were elements of the older style, the baroque, very much alive in classic music. The division between the two styles has been considered marked and decisive, but it tends to be overstressed. The change in stylistic emphasis was due to an overlap of two streams of stylistic continuity rather than a sharp change of direction. Baroque and classic music were based upon the same criteria, a common

set of premises, despite their obvious differences; they used one language, and their differences represented sublanguages of a universal 18th-century musical speech.

This book allows the student to approach the music and musical precepts of the 18th century in much the same way a listener of that time would have done. The first attraction to the music would be to its melodic materials, the topics of the musical discourse, its vocabulary. They are examined in detail in Part I, "Expression." Each of the following sections probes deeper into the core of the music: its syntax is examined in Part II, "Rhetoric"; its formal structure in Part III, "Form"; and its overall style in Part IV, "Stylistic Perspectives." The rhetorical principles discussed here have been used by the author in his teaching of music literature and theory at Stanford University. The volume is addressed to students, performers, and listeners, whose appreciation of the scope of classic music can be increased by insights into how it was put together.

Acknowledgments

My gratitude and appreciation go to the many students, colleagues, and friends who gave strong and positive response to the ideas incorporated in this book. Their encouragement, their many comments and criticisms during its writing were most helpful. My thanks go also to the staff members of the music sections in the following libraries for making available eighteenth-century sources, materials which give this book its special perspective: The Stanford University Libraries, The University of California Library, The Frank V. De Bellis Collection of the San Francisco State University, The Newberry Library, Chicago, The New York Public Library, The Library of Congress, Washington, The British Library, London, The Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, The Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, The Staatsbibliothek, Munich, The Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, The Library of the Gesellschaft für Musikfreunde, Vienna, The Royal Library, Copenhagen.

Contents

I Expression

Expression was an ever-present concern in 18th-century musical thought and practice. In its most general sense, expression referred to ways in which the listener's feelings could be stirred. The term covered a wide range of concepts and procedures, from frank pictorialism to subtle evocation of mood. Critical and theoretical writings of the 18th century contain much material on musical expression. Some comments are subjective, as those of Rousseau, 1768;[1] others, as Kirnberger's, 1771-1779,[2] aim for objective pinpointing of expressive content. This latter approach bespeaks the rationalism of the time; it reflects the encyclopedic view that endeavored to bring all observable phenomena into a hierarchical order, thus making them understandable and manageable. Apart from individual interpretations, 18th-century preoccupation with expression indicates the strong presence projected by this aspect of the musical art. Expression, however defined or regarded, was an essential quality; without it no piece was fit to be heard.

Composers' own comments tell of their concern with expression; even more important is the weight of evidence in their music as it ranges from pictorial imagery to metaphor and affective states. Therefore, the first two chapters deal specifically with ideas of expression and how they were embodied by various musical procedures in the 18th century. Chapter 1 examines general ideas of expression in 18th-century music and their significance for musical communication. Chapter 2 surveys materials which composers, performers, and listeners at that time associated with various moods, attitudes, and images; these constituted the *topics* upon which a persuasive musical discourse could be built.

NOTES

1. Rousseau, *Dictionnaire*, article on "Expression", pp. 207-213.
2. Kirnberger, *Kunst*, on intervals, Part II, pp. 103-104; on meters, Part II, pp. 118-136.

1 Ideas of Expression

> These concertos are a happy medium between what is too easy and too difficult; they are very brilliant, pleasing to the ear, and natural, without being too vapid. There are passages here and there from which connoisseurs alone can derive satisfaction; but these passages are written in such a way that the less learned cannot fail to be pleased, though not knowing why.[1]

With these words, from a letter to his father, Mozart characterized the piano concertos in F major, K. 413, A major, K. 414, and C major, K. 415, that he wrote in 1782 and 1783 for performance in Vienna. Thanks to the musical language of the times—clear, simple, flexible, spoken everywhere in Europe—Mozart could reach everyone in his audience, connoisseur and amateur.

But the message involved more than the music itself. All artistic expression, including music, was dedicated to *stirring the feelings*; this was a constant theme in critical writings. Dies, 1810, an early biographer of Haydn, says that the master's ultimate aim was to "touch the heart in various ways."[2] Heinrich Christoph Koch, whose *Lexikon*, 1802, is the most complete and authoritative source of musical information of its time, says "the principal object of music is to stir the feelings."[3] Daniel Gottlob Türk, in his *Klavierschule*, 1789, the most important treatise on late 18th-century performance practice, says that "the expression of the ruling sentiment" is "the highest goal of music."[4]

The address to the feelings could take many forms. Feelings could be stirred in a general way by a sensitive or fiery performance. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a champion of Italian music, was strongly drawn to frank and open sentiment and to its bold expression. He says in his *Dictionnaire*, 1768:

> It amounts to little simply to read the notes exactly; it is necessary to enter into all the ideas of the composer, to feel and render the fire of his expression. . . .[5]

Koch, 1802, refers to nuances of performance that bring the expressive qualities of the music to life:

> Every sentiment is distinguished by its characteristic modifications of tones, and this distinction is what gives meaning and life to a series of tones in performance, and without which it is nothing but an insignificant bustle of tones.[6]

More specifically, feelings were suggested or symbolized by musical figures linked to poetry or pantomime. Music took its cues from the vocal music of church and theater, which had distinct advantages over instrumental chamber