# Music Theory in the Age of Romanticism

EDITED BY

Of Romanticism

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edited by

IAN BENT



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IAN BENT

At first sight, the title of this volume contains a paradox. Theory (shorn of its qualifier) seems an unlikely bedfellow to Romanticism: we associate it with well-regulated cultural phenomena – theory and an ordered society exist in a symbiotic relationship. Hence we link theoretic activity with periods such as classical antiquity, the Enlightenment, and the modern era. The Romantic era, on the other hand, strikes us as an age of letting-go, of casting off shackles, of non-regulation.

How much more so, then, the theory of *music* – that least rational of all the arts? We tend to associate music-theoretic activity with the later Middle Ages and Renaissance, the late Baroque and Classical era, and the modern period. Again, the nineteenth century strikes as counter-theoretical. Our late twentieth-century sense of the history of theory has tended to trace a lineage of theorists from Mattheson, Heinichen, and Rameau in the late Baroque, through Marpurg and Koch, to Kirnberger and Albrechtsberger at the end of the Classical period, and another from Riemann, Schoenberg, and Schenker in the early twentieth century, through Hindemith and Messiaen, to Boulez, Babbitt, Boretz, Forte, and Lewin post World War II.

Between these two lineages there appears a cleft. It is as if a major fault-line existed between Albrechtsberger and Riemann, a mighty rift separating Classical theory from modern theory, a rift the contents of which have been displaced sideways or lost in oblivion. That which has been displaced no longer belongs to its own century; it has been annexed (and I have been as guilty as any of doing so!) either to the preceding or to the ensuing period. The formal theories of Reicha, Czerny, and Marx have been attached to the eighteenth century, as a kind of delayed-action audit of Classical form, especially sonata form, while the Sechter writings have been appended to the fundamental-bass theories of Rameau and Kirnberger, as have the Bellermann writings to the contrapuntal theory of Fux. On the other hand, the rhythmic theories of Momigny, Reicha, Marx, and Lussy

have been construed as adumbrating Riemann's phrase-structure theory, the harmonic theories of Hauptmann and Von Oettingen as forerunners of Riemann's dualism, the melodic theories of Reicha and Marx as foreshadowing Schoenberg's motivic organicism, the modulation theories of Vogler and Weber as anticipating those of Schoenberg, and the reductionism of Vogler and Sechter as harbingers of Schenker's prolongation. Meanwhile, other theoretical ideas – perhaps in some cases because they resisted annexation – were lost sight of: until very recently we thought of Fétis only as a bibliographer and historian, Catel's and Lobe's extraordinarily interesting ideas remain neglected, while the work of others such as Cherubini, Dehn, Jadassohn, Prout, and E. F. Richter (not to mention Marx) is still spurned as *passé*.

What is needed is to look at these writers in their own terms, to see them within the culture of their age, and thus to reappropriate them to the time of which they have been robbed by twentieth-century perspective. The process has in fact been underway for some years. A picture of an autonomous nineteenth-century theory is slowly emerging, like a photographic print in the developing bath. The lead given by Robert Wason and Renate Groth in their studies of Viennese harmonic theory and French theory, and by Carl Dahlhaus, Martin Vogel, Peter Rummenhöller and others, has impelled a new appreciation of several things: that in such men as Georg Vogler, Gottfried Weber, Anton Reicha, François-Joseph Fétis, Adolph Bernhard Marx, Simon Sechter, and Moritz Hauptmann we have major theorists grappling with substantive issues, and in arguably lesser figures such as Carl Czerny, Johann Christian Lobe, Carl Friedrich Weitzmann, and Arthur von Oettingen we have no mere hack writers but men of serious theoretical intent; that nineteenth-century theory as a whole was working through the crucial issues of its day, the issues that occupied also philosophers and aestheticians, acousticians and psychologists, as well as musical practitioners and educationalists; that nineteenth-century theory had a profile all its own, which is not to be forced in procrustean fashion into the configurations of other centuries, but must be appreciated in its own right; hence that to exclude such writers as E. T. A. Hoffmann, Alexander Ulibishev, Wilhelm von Lenz, and Hermann Kretzschmar would be to distort that profile.

Perhaps, then, the paradox of our title is more apparent than real. The present volume certainly contends that coherent music-theoretic activity was engaged in during the Romantic era, and that this activity was serious and substantial enough to deserve our attention now. It therefore represents the new appreciation of nineteenth-century music theory just outlined. Its authors – the editor excepted – are members of a new, young, and extraordinarily intelligent generation of American and British historians of music theory. There is no conformity to their training, as the brief biographies above attest. As a generalization, one could say that all are conversant with the positivistic (as Joseph Kerman has taught us to say) methods of music theory and history. Yet they are familiar, too, with many recent intellectual currents. In particular, readers will detect the stamp of Michel

Foucault's earlier thinking overtly in several of the chapters; they will find the influence of Saussurian semiology, of Derrida and de Man, of the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur, of narratology, of rhetorical theory, and of recent philosophical thinking; they will find some of the chapters informed by new developments in music cognition, and others by the insights of gender criticism. I might add that at least three authors bring extra perspective to their topics by virtue of themselves being composers. This is a diverse group of authors, widely read, comfortable with new thinking and old, and judicious in their use of both.

The volume is structured in three broad sections. Part I, "Cultural and philosophical frameworks," examines ways in which contemporary philosophical and intellectual ideas informed and conditioned the work of music theorists. Leslie David Blasius takes as his field of exploration an object that most writers today shun - the piano exercise, neither accepted into the canon of music theory nor regarded as having intrinsic artistic worth. His article takes a broad temporal view of Romanticism, reaching from Louis Adam in 1805 through Hummel in 1828 to Karl Tausig around 1870, "grounding" the volume as a whole by tracing the roots of nineteenth-century thought deep into the eighteenth century. The chapters by Ian Biddle, Thomas Christensen, and Sanna Pederson form a coherent unit that investigates how German idealist and metaphysical philosophy underwrote thinking about music. Biddle looks at Schelling's ontology and its relation to theories of musical rhythm, phrase, and form; Christensen at Hegel's concept of history and its impact on Fétis's portrayal of the evolution of tonality; Pederson at Hegel's ambivalent aesthetic of music and the rise of an anti-Romantic polemical backlash. As a group, these three chapters chart musical Romanticism in its most prescribed chronology as spanning a half-century from 1800 to around the revolutionary year of 1848.

Pederson's concern with criticism provides a natural link to Part II, "Hermeneutics, analysis, criticism," the three chapters of which have in common a desire to get early nineteenth-century music criticism "out from behind" twentieth-century criticism, which it superficially resembles, and see it in the light of its own contexts, to rediscover its individuality. Brian Hyer takes an anonymous review of the Eroica Symphony dating from 1807 and examines it for its awareness (exemplified by Herder) of the cognitive processes of the listener's mind and its concern (exemplified by Schleiermacher) with the composer's intentions, and develops a theory of musical significance (drawing on Lewin and instancing Gottfried Weber) that resides in the listener's subjective experience over time; Ian Bent exemplifies Friedrich Schleiermacher's hermeneutic method through the latter's introductions to the dialogues of Plato, and searches for their influence upon E. T. A. Hoffmann's review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony; and Fred Everett Maus conducts a close reading of Schumann's review of the Berlioz Fantastic Symphony, separating out its different "voices," highlighting the oppositions of intersubjectivity and analysis, life and death, and suggesting several contexts within which this extraordinarily complex critique needs to be read.

Part III, "Rhetoric, metaphor, musical perception," contains three essays that look back to prototypes that illuminate the ideas of three theorists, and one final essay that rounds the volume out by suggesting an isomorphism between an early nineteenth-century and a mid-twentieth-century concept. Peter A. Hoyt's chapter shares with the essays of Part II the common endeavor of "getting behind" an accretion of later ideas and revealing something in its own context - in this case Reicha's presentation of large binary form and neoclassical dramatic theory. Here is one of those instances alluded to earlier in this Preface, in which nineteenthcentury theory has been plundered for antecedents to later formulations - in this case Reicha's diagrams and terminology, forced into the mold of sonata form. The clarified result offers the pristine pleasure of a painting cleaned of varnish and later brushwork. In the next chapter we encounter an authentic description of sonata form, that of A. B. Marx, whose gendered discourse of first and second subject receives a close reading from Scott Burnham, is shown to be a metaphor - a highly charged one, true - for a uniquely complex thematic relationship, and is placed in the context of dualistic notions in contemporary German thought. Thomas Grey's initial search for the source of Leitmotif turns into an intricate disentangling of terminological strands involving metaphors of the maze, the labyrinth, the thread, guiding, and leading - all with evident roots in the Ariadne-Theseus myth - and others of weaving and spinning, fabric design and color, textile, and texture. The chapter culminates with the construction of a cognitive model of motivic listening, which links it to the final chapter, by Janna K. Saslaw and James P. Walsh. Here again metaphors play a large role, this time metaphors such as container, force, and source-path-goal. Contending that "Multiple Meaning" in the theories of Georg Vogler and Gottfried Weber constituted a paradigm shift in the abstracting of pitch relations around 1800, the authors use logic and cognitive science to propose an identity between that concept and aspects of invariance in post-World-War-II music theory.

If there is any one issue with which this entire volume is occupied, it is surely the question as to how the Romantic listener in the early nineteenth century *heard* music – what *went on in his head* as the music flowed by, what she *made of* such pieces as the *Eroica*, the Fifth Symphony, the *Fantastic Symphony*, and Schubert's haunting song *Der Doppelgänger*, how the nineteenth-century ear perceived relationships of pitch, rhythm, harmony, and melody. Our brilliant young group of writers has tackled this ramified question, directly or obliquely, bringing to bear the methods of history, philosophy, and theory, illuminating it with insights from politics, gender, metaphor, rhetoric, critical theory, narratology, intersubjectivity, cognition, and other methodologies.

## Acknowledgments

Six of the chapters in this volume have roots in the International Conference on Nineteenth-century Music held at Surrey University, Guildford (England), on July 14-17, 1994. Those by Ian Bent, Ian Biddle, Scott Burnham, and Fred Everett Maus are revisions of papers delivered on that occasion, whereas that by Peter A. Hoyt is an expansion of the first part of a paper entitled "Anton Reicha's Accounts of the *grande coupe binaire* in Light of Neo-Classical Dramatic Theory," the second part of which will be published in revised form elsewhere. These five papers made up a session entitled "Analytical Thought in the Nineteenth Century," which was chaired by Robert Pascall and took place on the morning of Sunday July 17. Meanwhile, in another hall, a session entitled "Opera Post-1850" was going on simultaneously. Thomas Grey's chapter is an offshoot of a paper delivered to that session under the title "Leading Motives and Narrative Threads: the Leitfaden Metaphor and the Critical Pre-History of the Wagnerian *Leitmotiv*," which will appear in the proceedings of the International Congress of the Gesellschaft für Musikforschung, "Musik als Text."

The Surrey Conference was an occasion of a very high order, and its participants will remember with pleasure its sessions, recitals and many other events. Thanks go to the Department of Music of Surrey University and the many conference workers; tribute must be paid particularly to John Rink, who exhibited not only supreme organizational skills but also fine scholarship, and masterly performance at the forte piano. Thanks go also to the journal *Music Analysis* and to the Society for Music Analysis for generously sponsoring the analytical session.

Ian Bent's paper was committed to the *Indiana Theory Review* before the present volume was conceived. It was therefore first published in a double issue of that journal, volume 16 (Spring/Fall 1995), and is reproduced here with kind permission of the Editor.

Thanks are due to all the contributing authors, especially those who wrote new articles for the occasion, for meeting a tight schedule and submitting good-

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Part I

Cultural and philosophical frameworks

### Chapter One

# The mechanics of sensation and the construction of the Romantic musical experience

#### LESLIE DAVID BLASIUS

It comes as no surprise to find a clear statement of the intellectual disposition of the early nineteenth century in a contemporary work of fiction. Consider the following excerpts from a well-known Romantic thriller:

The untaught peasant beheld the elements around him and was acquainted with their practical uses. The most learned philosopher knew little more. He had partially unveiled the face of Nature, but her immortal lineaments were still a wonder and a mystery. He might dissect, anatomize, and give names; but, not to speak of a final cause, causes in their secondary and tertiary grades were utterly unknown to him. . .

By one of those caprices of the mind which we are perhaps most subject to in early youth, I at once gave up my former occupations, set down natural history and all its progeny as a deformed and abortive creation, and entertained the greatest disdain for a would-be science which could never even step within the threshold of real knowledge...

"The modern masters promise very little; they know that metals cannot be transmuted and that the elixir of life is a chimera. But these philosophers, whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pore over the microscope or crucible, have indeed performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses of Nature and show how she works in her hiding places. They ascend into the heavens; they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows."

Such were the professor's words – rather let me say such the words of the fate – enounced to destroy me. As he went on I felt as if my soul were grappling with a palpable enemy; one by one the various keys were touched which formed the mechanism of my being; chord after chord was sounded, and soon my mind was filled with one thought, one conception, one purpose. So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein – more, far more, will I achieve; treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Mary Shelley, Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus, 3 vols. (London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor, and Jones, 1818; New York: Bantam, 1991), pp. 25, 27, 33.

Mary Shelley's protagonist, in these few passages, historically situates the new sciences of the Romantics. The first and second excerpts frame these sciences against the various natural philosophies of the eighteenth century, with their endless namings and orderings, their endless tabulations and taxonomies. The third excerpt speaks of a new science at once more empirical than that of the eighteenth-century empiricist and more systematic than that of the rationalist, a science of opaque surfaces and reconstructible depths, and most importantly one given the ability both to put its discoveries into play in the world and to establish itself concretely in a technology, and at the same time to conceive itself in terms of a deep and mystical bond with the arts.

A second character in the novel speaks likewise of learning and of knowledge, but with a very different voice. (I choose the passages that are musically relevant.)

It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original era of my being; all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct. A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses . . .

No distinct ideas occupied my mind; all was confused. I felt light, and hunger, and thirst, and darkness; innumerable sounds rang in my ears, and on all sides various scents saluted me; the only object that I could distinguish was the bright moon, and I fixed my eyes on that with pleasure...

Several changes of day and night passed, and the orb of night had greatly lessened, when I began to distinguish my sensations from each other ... I was delighted when I first discovered that a pleasant sound, which often saluted my ears, proceeded from the throats of the little winged animals who had often intercepted the light from my eyes... Sometimes I tried to imitate the pleasant songs of the birds but was unable. Sometimes I wished to express my sensations in my own mode, but the uncouth and inarticulate sounds which broke from me frightened me into silence again...

My sensations had by this time become distinct, and my mind received every day additional ideas. My eyes became accustomed to the light and to perceive objects in their right forms; I distinguished the insect from the herb, and by degrees, one herb from another. I found that the sparrow uttered none but harsh notes, whilst those of the blackbird and thrush were sweet and enticing...

The young girl was occupied in arranging the cottage; but presently she took something out of a drawer, which employed her hands, and she sat down beside the old man, who, taking up an instrument, began to play and to produce sounds sweeter than the voice of the thrush or the nightingale ... He played a sweet mournful air which I perceived drew tears from the eyes of his amiable companion, of which the old man took no notice, until she sobbed audibly; he then pronounced a few sounds, and the fair creature, leaving her work, knelt at his feet ... I felt sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature; they were a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as I had never before experienced, either from hunger or cold, warmth or food; and I withdrew from the window, unable to bear these emotions. . .

... the youth began, not to play, but to utter sounds that were monotonous, and neither resembling the harmony of the old man's instrument nor the songs of the birds; I since

found that he read aloud, but at that time I knew no notion of the science of words or of letters.<sup>2</sup>

Frankenstein's creation speaks (for a good part of the novel) coolly and rationally, with a slight admixture of sentimentality. Unlike his creator, he is never transported or overpowered by his emotions. In fact, the tone of his voice alerts us that there is something hidden here, and it is with a sense of pleasurable irony that we realize that this creature, a product (within the story) of the early nineteenth-century technology and (without the story) of the Romantic ideology, is in truth far older than the tale claims him to be.

Mary Shelley's monster is, in fact, around seventy years old at the time when she pens her tale. He first comes to life in the Traité des sensations of the French philosopher Étienne Bonnot de Condillac.3 In this work, Condillac expands upon the theory (derived from the epistemology of John Locke) that all knowledge and thought is constituted of transformed sensation and association which he had put forward in the slightly earlier Essai sur l'origine des connoissances humaines.<sup>4</sup> The Essai first treats the origin of knowledge in simple sensation, extrapolating the means through which sensation gives rise to perception, consciousness, attention, memory, imagination, reflection, abstraction, comparison, composition, analysis, judgment, reason, and ideas (both simple and complex). It then most famously demonstrates this analysis through an extended hypothetical account of the origins of language, music, the arts, and society. The Traité redemonstrates this thesis by hypothesizing a marble statue, having the mental potentials of a human, which is gifted with the least important of the five senses, the sense of smell. From this single source of sensation, the statue develops (successively) a capacity for attention, an ability to feel pleasure and pain, a memory, a capacity for comparison and judgment, an imagination, feelings, ideas, and personality. Condillac then awards his statue (in order) hearing, taste, and sight, recording all the while an ever richer process of association and ideation.

While Mary Shelley's creature is Condillac's statue given literary flesh, and the passages we read in *Frankenstein* take on a certain charge when we read them as the statue's own report of the account in the *Traité*, the observations contained therein about sound and music reflect the analysis of a later sensationalist. The opening essay in Archibald Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790) locates aesthetic perception in the way in which received sensations put the imagination into play, forming trains of thought in which ideas arise by analogy and association with the characters of objects or events perceived.<sup>5</sup> Aesthetic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 87, 88-89, 92-93, 94.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, Traité des sensations (Paris: de Buré l'aîné, 1754).

<sup>4</sup> Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, Essai sur l'origine des connoissances humaines, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Pierre Mortier, 1746).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Archibald Alison, Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: J. J. G. and G. Robinson, 1790; 5th edn Edinburgh: A. Constable, 1817), Essay I "Of the Nature of the Emotions of Sublimity and Beauty," pp. 1–174.