

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Hat man nicht auch Gold beineben
Kann man nicht ganz glücklich sein.
Traurig schleppt sich fort das Leben,
Mancher Kummer stellt sich ein.
Doch wenn's in den Taschen fein klingelt und rollt,
Da hält man das Schicksal gefangen;
Und Macht, und Liebe, verschafft dir das Gold,
Und stillt das kühnste Verlangen.
Das Glück dient wie ein Knecht für Sold,
Es ist ein schönes, schönes Ding, das Gold!

If you don't have gold at hand
You can't be completely happy.
Life drags on sadly,
Many troubles intrude.
But when it jingles and rolls in your pocket,
The fates are at your command.
Gold brings you power and love
And satisfies the boldest desires.
Fortune serves you like a hired lackey.
Gold, it is a beautiful, beautiful thing!

—Beethoven, *Fidelio*

FEW would disagree with this admonition of Rocco the jailer to his new apprentice *Fidelio*. Beethoven considered the message sufficiently important that, after having removed Rocco's "Gold" aria from some performances of *Fidelio*, he restored it (with minor textual changes accepted here) in the 1814 version, where it remains for all eternity.¹ Even composers need money to be "completely happy"—or at least, some approximation thereto. The more difficult question is, how did composers, great and not so great, obtain their gold? And there scholars are not of one mind concerning the historical facts.

It is reasonably well accepted that at the outset of the eighteenth century, most musicians creative enough to be composers were employed either by the nobility or by the church. It seems clear too that by the middle of the nineteenth century, the situation had changed. The role of

the church and especially the noble courts as employers had diminished appreciably, replaced by opportunities for composers to work as freelance artists performing, teaching, and selling their creations through private market transactions. The change, it will be argued in this book, occurred largely because of economic and political developments that simultaneously strengthened the demand of middle-class citizens for music in all forms and weakened the feudal foundations of European noble courts and religious establishments.

Where consensus among scholars fades is on how and when composers made the transition from a court- and church-oriented system to a market-oriented system. Some, such as Wolfgang Hildesheimer, see Mozart as the first “free” composer in a sociological sense, who had to endure material poverty as a consequence of his freedom.² The sociologist Norbert Elias argues that:³

Mozart’s decision to set himself up as a freelance artist came at a time when the social structure actually offered no such place for outstanding musicians. The emergence of a music market and the corresponding institutions was only just beginning.

William J. Baumol and Hilda Baumol place Mozart within a broader trend, characterizing the second half of the eighteenth century as a time of transition “from the universal system of private patronage to the beginnings of a market mechanism under which the product of the composer and the performer became a commodity that could be bought and sold.”⁴ Howard Gardner similarly sees Mozart as “an important transitional figure in laying a foundation of independence and self-initiated creation.”⁵ Hansjörg Pohlmann, the leading student of intellectual property rights in music, views the trend toward freelance composition in a still broader time frame spanning the entire eighteenth century. In his schema Mozart occupies an intermediate role:⁶

Composers’ struggle for independent freelance status and their attempt to escape positions of dependence under employment relationships—an attempt that led to Mozart’s tragic failure—found in Beethoven its first climax. Beethoven is thus the culmination of a long developmental process.

Consistent with Pohlmann’s vision, a central argument of this book is that a transition from patronage-oriented to market-oriented freelance composition did occur, but that it was much more gradual and evolutionary than the focus on Mozart as a turning point implies. Antecedents can be found a century before the death of Mozart. And nearly a century after his death, remnants of the old system survived.

SOME EXAMPLES

The complexity of the evolution is suggested by comparing thumbnail biographies of three important composers, all born in the year 1685 — Johann Sebastian Bach, Domenico Scarlatti, and George Frideric Handel — with three born a century and a quarter later — Frédéric Chopin, Robert Schumann, and Franz Liszt.

Bach provides the archetype of how composers earned their living in the early eighteenth century.⁷ His entire adult life was spent as an employee — first as organist at churches in Arnstadt and Mühlhausen, then as organist and director of court music for the Duke of Weimar and prince of Köthen, and finally as cantor and director of music for the Thomasschule (School of St. Thomas) and four affiliated Leipzig churches. Like many employed composers of his time, he moonlighted in activities outside his main sphere of employment, dedicating compositions to hoped-for patrons, publishing (at his own expense) a few of his works, holding private lessons, inspecting new organs installed in other towns, and most importantly, between 1729 and 1741, directing an unofficial Leipzig orchestra, the Collegium Musicum, which charged admission for the concerts it regularly held in Zimmermann's coffee house during the winter and a coffee garden during the summer. Bach's Collegium Musicum association became important enough to lead Christoph Wolff (1991, p. 40) to conclude that "Toward the end of his life Bach came astonishingly close to the romantic ideal of the free-lance artist." But his compositions for and direction of the Collegium remained secondary to his salaried church and school duties.

What is known about Domenico Scarlatti's career shows fewer traces of freelance activity. He began as a composer of religious works and operas in the court of the King of Naples. After brief visits at other Italian courts, he spent four years in the free city of Venice. Virtually no historical record exists on that period. It would not be unreasonable to suppose that he engaged in freelance composition for one or more of the Venetian opera houses or for wealthy citizens, since there were no noble courts. His success in Venice must have been limited, however, since in 1709 he moved to Rome, where for a decade he was musician in the houses of local and visiting nobles and then presided over musical activities for a chapel associated with St. Peter's basilica. Around 1719 he migrated to Lisbon, becoming teacher and music master in the court of the King and Queen of Portugal, following them to Madrid in 1728 when marriage united the ruling families of Spain and Portugal. He remained a musician in the Madrid court throughout the remainder of his life.

George Frideric Handel learned the art of opera composing first in the free city of Hamburg, where the local opera was a private enterprise, and then in Rome, where he shared the hospitality of Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni with Domenico Scarlatti, Arcangelo Corelli, and other composers. Returning to Germany, he accepted a position as director of court music for the Elector of Hanover, but took a leave of absence to visit London and remained there, followed by his would-be Hanover patron, newly crowned as King George I of England. After residing for a while in the home of Richard, Earl of Burlington, Handel became musical director of a London opera company, The Royal Academy, which was a free-standing organization financed by wealthy Londoners who delegated operating responsibilities to an impresario. Handel worked first as salaried director of the opera company; then, when the original financial backers withdrew their support, as co-impresario; and finally as principal impresario for the public performance of his own works. In his impresario role, he lurched precariously between riches and ruin. His survival in lean years was facilitated by a generous annuity of £600 per year from the king's family. Thus, during much of his career, Handel was not only a freelance composer but also a risk-taking entrepreneur.⁸ His early eighteenth century freelance activities, however, were supplemented by subsidies from the royal court.

We advance now in time to the years 1810 and 1811, when three representative nineteenth-century composers were born.

Frédéric Chopin was a freelance artist throughout his career. After being provided an excellent musical education by his upper middle-class Warsaw family, he presented a series of freelance concert performances in Berlin, Dresden, Prague, Vienna, Munich, and Stuttgart between 1828 and 1831. Continuing on to Paris, he achieved only limited financial success performing his compositions at public concerts. But his introduction by a Warsaw acquaintance into the salons of wealthy Parisians provided a network of contacts, through which he became the most sought-after and best-paid independent piano teacher in Paris. His earnings were augmented through honoraria from music publishers. When his health deteriorated, he could no longer continue his strenuous teaching schedule. A concert trip to England failed to solve his financial problems, and he died in poverty at age thirty-nine.

After completing his university studies, Robert Schumann settled in Leipzig, where in 1833 he founded a journal reporting on contemporary music developments and was supported at first through the income from an inheritance. After his marriage to Clara Wieck, his receipts from the journal, the inheritance, and publication fees proved to be insufficient to support a rapidly growing family. (See the Appendix to Chapter 4.) They were supplemented through Clara Schumann's free-

lance piano performance tours throughout Europe. An appointment to the newly founded Leipzig Conservatory faculty proved to be unsuccessful and short-lived. In 1850, at the age of forty, he assumed his first salaried position, as music director of a mostly amateur orchestra and choral society in Düsseldorf. Supervision of the sponsoring Musikverein (musical society) was exercised by representatives appointed by the city council. Schumann's relationship with orchestra musicians and the governing body was conflict-ridden. In 1852 his duties and salary were reduced, and in 1853 he was required to resign. Soon thereafter he lapsed into insanity and died in an asylum in 1856.

Following music studies in Vienna and Paris, Franz Liszt had four distinguishable careers that epitomized the experiences of composers living during both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His first career was as a touring freelance piano performer. Initially his success was modest, but after he learned the art of spectacular performance by observing Niccolò Paganini, he became Europe's best-drawing concert pianist, performing both his own compositions and those of others (often transcribed) and amassing a substantial fortune. Then, in 1847, he ended his freelance touring and became director of music in the ducal court at Weimar, Germany—a position analogous to those held by the prototypical eighteenth-century composer. In 1858 he resigned his Weimar job and prepared for holy orders, becoming an abbé but not a priest, in Rome, which was his principal residence between 1861 and 1869. His desire to become music director at St. Peter's went unfulfilled. In 1869 he returned to a free residence provided by the Duke of Weimar without any official direction or performance obligations. From that time until his death in 1886, he traveled extensively, with principal bases in Weimar, Rome, and Budapest, teaching hundreds of students gratis and offering numerous public concerts, the proceeds of which were largely donated to charitable causes.

What we see from these six vignettes is a transition from court and church patronage to freelance activity, but the change was gradual, with elements of market-oriented efforts appearing early in the evolution and elements of the patronage and church systems remaining well into the nineteenth century. J. S. Bach and especially Handel exhibited early manifestations of market-oriented activity; Liszt reverted after success in the free market to noble and church support.

NUMBERS AND CREATIVE OUTPUT

Thus, the question, properly framed, is not whether composers earned their bread through patronage as compared to the polar alternative of

freelance activities, but the number of composers under one system vis-à-vis the other, or even more precisely, the extent to which composers divided their professional lives between the patronage and freelance alternatives.

Numbers matter. Some authors have suggested that the patronage system, at least as it existed in Germany, Austria, and Italy during the eighteenth century, provided an environment uniquely conducive to making music as a profession, and as a result, music composition experienced a kind of golden age.⁹ The essence of their argument is that the breakup of the Holy Roman Empire left central Europe divided into hundreds of individual principalities and dukedoms, many of which, for reasons to be elaborated in the next chapter and chapter 5, chose to support musical ensembles and hence provide employment for musicians and would-be composers. Given widespread employment opportunities, more individuals became professional musicians than would otherwise have been the case. And with more individuals employed as musicians, more turned to composition as part of their responsibilities, which in turn, it is argued, implies that more composers of superior creative talent would emerge.

This book is written by an economist who recognizes that economic analysis cannot predict the appearance of genius. True genius is an extremely rare phenomenon. Even if everything else could be held constant (the economist's standard *ceteris paribus* assumption), which can hardly be assured, an increase in the number of individuals pursuing musical composition as a profession implies at best in a very weak statistical sense that one or a few will be outstanding geniuses. A composer as great as Mozart might emerge next year, or, as Joseph Haydn speculated on learning of Mozart's death a year before Beethoven moved permanently to Vienna, "Posterity will not see such a talent again in 100 years!"¹⁰

Economic analysis can illuminate matters in another way. Economic incentives affect the specific challenges to which individuals, creative or not, allocate their time. A noble court might provide an ideal environment for the flourishing of creative talent. But the seignior might also have strong preferences as to what kind of music he prefers and insist that his hired composer hew to that line, suppressing compositions that stray from the preferred norm. Alternatively, the free market might provide maximum opportunity for the composer to pursue his most creative instincts,¹¹ or it might reward disproportionately the composition of unimaginative fluff appealing to some lowest common denominator. A priori, it is not possible to say which of these plausible alternative hypotheses comes closer to the truth. The question is an empirical one. We cannot pretend to answer it definitively, but we will address the evidence systematically and advance some new insights.

METHODOLOGY

To repeat, this book comes from an economist, not a musicologist. The methodological approach taken here is unorthodox by the standards of musicology and even to some extent by the standards of economics, as one might expect from a scholar who strays onto forbidden disciplinary turf.

One important difference is the systematic analysis of quantitative data. Although other qualitative and quantitative materials will be tapped as we proceed, the most unique new evidence comes from a sample of 646 composers born during the two centuries from 1650 to 1849—that is, a period during which the transition from court and church employment to freelance activity is believed to have occurred.¹² The starting point for the sample was the “Composers” section of the *Schwann Opus* reference guide to recorded classical music (Fall 1996). An attempt was made to identify every composer with extant recorded music born during that time span. The criterion implied by this selection approach was survival in the ears and minds of posterity. Meeting this survival test was a matter of some concern to Leopold Mozart, who advised in a 1778 letter to his son:¹³

Only your good sense and lifestyle will determine whether you will be a common musical artist forgotten by the entire world, or a famous Kapellmeister about whom posterity will read in books.

Or as Giuseppe Verdi wrote to a friend a century later, “History will tell us which epoch was good, and which bad.”¹⁴

Altogether, 742 composers were identified in this way. Biographical information on each was sought in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music & Musicians* (Sadie, 1980). For 76 composers no entry was found in the *New Grove*. Compared to record listings in *Schwann Opus* averaging 25 centimeters (10 inches) in length for composers on whom information was found in the *New Grove* (with a *Schwann* range of from 1.8 to 1656 centimeters), only 4 of the 76 no-entry composers had record listings exceeding 3 centimeters. For 20 other composers listed in *Schwann*, the biographical information in the *New Grove* was too sparse to support coding of career patterns and locations. Excluding these 96 composers left a usable sample of 646. The sample is incomplete, omitting the explicitly excluded composers and also any others who failed to have recorded music memorialized by the *Schwann Opus*.¹⁵ Among 91 composers of Italian operas born between 1650 and 1849 on whom information was tabulated by Elvidio Surian,¹⁶ only 42 made it into the sample. Not surprisingly, the composers omitted from Surian’s list wrote operas that are seldom, if ever, performed in modern times.

All of the 44 composers born in the 1650–1849 time span whose operas are reviewed in the *New Grove Book of Operas* (Sadie, 1996) were included in the sample. All but 17 of the sampled composers were born in Europe; the exceptions were born in North or South America. Fourteen of the 646 composers were female, motivating the use of “he” or “his” when a gender-dependent pronoun or adjective must be used without further information.

Among the data collected were birth and death years. From them, each composer’s life span could be computed. The average age at death was 64.5, the median age 66. The oldest composer in the sample, Giacobbe Cervetto (1682–1783), died in London at the probable age of 101 (his exact birth date is uncertain). The youngest, Juan Arriaga (1806–1826), a student at the Paris Conservatoire, died a few days before reaching the age of 20. Nine composers lived for 90 years or more. There are two explanations for the remarkable longevity of our sample members, so contrary to accepted notions of high mortality in those days of bloodletting and other barbaric medical practices. First, a major reason for low life expectancies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was high infant mortality. Those who lived long enough to become a composer of note had passed through some of the most perilous years and probably (as Mozart did with smallpox) developed resistance to many potentially lethal diseases. Second, there may be a selection bias in our sample. Composers who lived relatively long had more time to get their affairs in order and ensure that their musical manuscripts were preserved for posterity.

To estimate the relative creative output or “productivity” of sample members, the length in centimeters of the recorded music listings in the *Schwann Opus* catalogue was measured. This variable is analogous to the citations indexes widely used to measure the productivity of scholars and the value of invention patents.¹⁷ The more music of enduring quality a composer wrote, the more items were likely to survive in recorded form, and hence the longer the *Schwann* listing. The better any given work was, the more likely it was to be recorded by multiple artists and groups, and so again, the longer the *Schwann* listing. To rub an old wound by way of illustration, there were 32 different full recordings of Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute). Antonio Salieri’s opera *La locandiera* (The Innkeeper) had two recordings; the only other recorded survivor among his 40 operas, *Azur, Re d’Ormus* (Azur, king of Ormus), which was performed 28 times in Vienna during the 1788 season, had one.¹⁸ *Gloria transit*.

Figure 1.1 arrays the citations data for the 646 composers, letting each *Schwann* observation be located at the year of the composer’s birth. Not surprisingly, a few composers tower over all the others. Wolf-

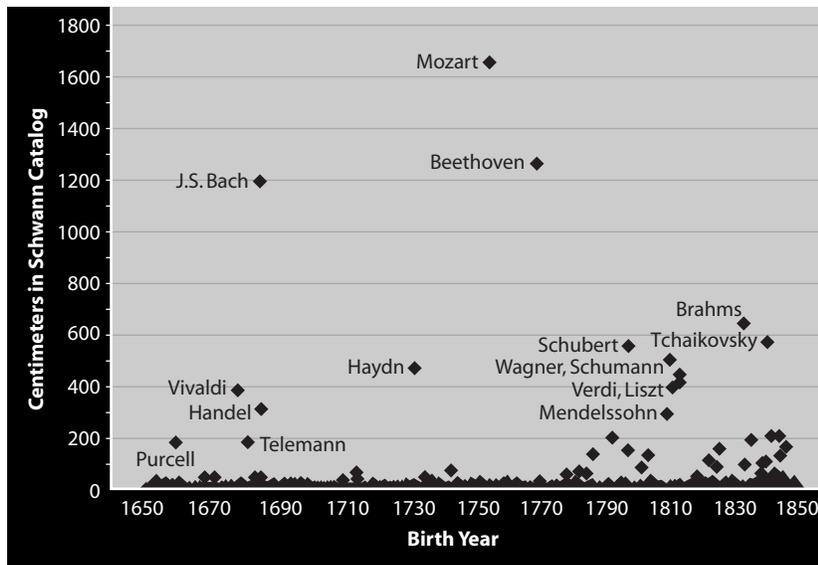


FIGURE 1.1 Recorded Music for the 646 Composers by Birth Year

gang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Johann Sebastian Bach are the leaders, trailed by the usual suspects. The distribution of observations is what statisticians call “skew,” with many low-value observations (indeed, so many that it is impossible to distinguish individuals among those clustered along the horizontal axis) and a few with large outlying values. Statistical tests reveal the distribution to be less skew than the so-called Pareto distribution and more skew than the log normal distribution.¹⁹ The top 65 composers, comprising 10 percent of the total number of composers, accounted for 86.4 percent of total *Schwann* catalogue lineage; the top 10 composers were responsible for 49.4 percent. This concentration of values is a bit lower than the concentration of economic valuations for German invention patents that were renewed to their full term, and somewhat higher than the distribution of stock market values resulting from equal investments in U.S. high-technology startup enterprises held from 9 to 13 years.²⁰ Thus, it lies within the observed distributional range of outcomes from highly creative activity.

A large sample such as the sample of 646 can illuminate broad trends and patterns, but it cannot yield much insight into how individual composers perceived their career opportunities and outcomes, or what strategies they pursued to advance their careers. To achieve depth of qualitative analysis along with quantitative breadth, a smaller sample of 50

composers was selected.²¹ For each composer in this group, which will be called “the select sample” in subsequent references, at least one book-length biography was read and annotated, and for the more important composers, several biographies and correspondence collections were scrutinized. Altogether, 80 such biographical references along with numerous collateral works were consulted.

The composers included in the select sample are arrayed in order of birth dates in table 1.1. Also presented is the index that measures, in linear centimeters, the length of recorded music listings in the *Schwann* catalogue. The select sample included all composers ranked 1 through 26 in length of *Schwann* catalogue listings, along with 24 other composers, with the lowest *Schwann* ranking of 137, selected to provide representative coverage of time periods and geographic locations. There is a seeming coverage bias in terms of time periods. Among all composers in the large sample of 646, the select sample includes 7.1 percent of those born between 1650 and 1699, 6.1 percent of those born in 1700–1749, 6.5 percent of those born in 1750–1799, but 10.6 percent of the 1800–1849 birth cohort. This bias is only secondarily attributable to the existence of more adequate biographical material on composers born more recently. The main reason for the more extensive sampling of composers born during the nineteenth century is that 14 of the 20 in the nineteenth-century cohort were among the top 26 composers in terms of *Schwann* catalog listing length.

As perusal of table 1.1 reveals, some convention had to be adopted for the spelling of names. Two centuries ago spelling was under any circumstances a haphazard thing. Transliteration from the Slavic languages poses special difficulties. Many composers lived at diverse career phases in several different nations, where their names often came to be adapted to the local custom. Handel’s given name in Germany, for example, was Georg Friedrich Händel. Most Englishmen were unable to cope with his umlaut, so he was frequently called Hendel. But when he acquired English citizenship in 1727, he registered himself with the spelling of table 1.1. The spellings adopted in table 1.1 and throughout this book are those found in the revised edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of Music* (Kennedy, 1994), except in a few cases where the *Oxford* is at odds with generally accepted practice.

A book about the economics of music composition can hardly be written without monetary measures. In Europe over the time span covered by this work, countless different currencies were in circulation. To make sense of the data, some common denominator is needed. We have chosen to use the English pound sterling, one of the most stable European currencies, as the benchmark. The appendix to this chapter provides tables of exchange rates among some of the more important cur-

TABLE 1.1
Composers Included in the Select Sample, by Year of Birth

<i>Composer</i>	<i>Birth Year</i>	<i>Death Year</i>	<i>Schwann cm.</i>
Johann Pachelbel	1653	1706	26.2
Arcangelo Corelli	1653	1713	33.9
Henry Purcell	1659	1695	178.1
Tomaso Albinoni	1671	1750	43.4
Antonio Vivaldi	1678	1741	378.2
Georg Philipp Telemann	1681	1767	179.8
Jean-Philippe Rameau	1683	1764	41.6
Johann Sebastian Bach	1685	1750	1190.2
Domenico Scarlatti	1685	1757	40.4
George Frideric Handel	1685	1759	306.5
Christoph W. Gluck	1714	1787	36.3
C.P.E. Bach	1714	1788	62.5
Leopold Mozart	1719	1787	17.3
Franz Joseph Haydn	1732	1809	460.5
Johann Christian Bach	1735	1783	44.0
Johann Michael Haydn	1737	1806	29.0
Johann Vanhal	1739	1813	10.5
Luigi Boccherini	1743	1805	72.8
Karl Stamitz	1745	1801	21.9
Antonio Salieri	1750	1825	11.6
Muzio Clementi	1752	1832	24.7
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	1756	1791	1655.8
Ludwig van Beethoven	1770	1827	1262.4
Johann Nepomuk Hummel	1778	1837	56.5
Niccolò Paganini	1782	1840	66.2
Carl Maria von Weber	1786	1826	135.4
Carl Czerny	1791	1857	8.4
Gioachino Rossini	1792	1868	197.7
Franz Schubert	1797	1828	552.5
Gaetano Donizetti	1797	1848	150.4
Vincenzo Bellini	1801	1835	84.2
Hector Berlioz	1803	1869	129.5
Johann Strauss Sr.	1804	1849	15.4
Felix Mendelssohn	1809	1847	290.6
Frédéric Chopin	1810	1849	497.4
Robert Schumann	1810	1856	414.9
Franz Liszt	1811	1886	398.2
Giuseppe Verdi	1813	1901	408.4
Richard Wagner	1813	1883	433.7
Clara Wieck Schumann	1819	1896	20.4
César Franck	1822	1890	104.7
Bedřich Smetana	1824	1884	88.2

TABLE 1.1 *Continued*

<i>Composer</i>	<i>Birth Year</i>	<i>Death Year</i>	<i>Schwann cm.</i>
Johann Strauss Jr.	1825	1899	153.8
Johannes Brahms	1833	1897	643.9
Camille Saint-Saëns	1835	1921	191.1
Modest Mussorgsky	1839	1881	104.0
Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky	1840	1893	567.9
Antonin Dvořák	1841	1904	209.2
Edvard Grieg	1843	1907	197.0
Gabriel Fauré	1845	1924	159.0

rencies and explains how the conversions were made. Additional information is presented on annual earnings in a standardized job category (notably, for a building craftsman in southern England) and the purchasing power of those earnings.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

Chapter 2 begins by laying historical foundations for the analyses that follow. It traces the political, philosophical, and economic revolutions during the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries that transformed the markets in which composers sold their services. It shows how increasing prosperity raised the demand for musical performances, education, and instruments (with further changes during the 1920s as radio and electrical phonographs permitted passive enjoyment of music at home). It also reveals how musical performance audiences and venues changed in response to these developments. Chapter 3 explores further the diverse means of earning a living open to composers and uses the sample of 646 composers to discern how composers' occupational choices evolved over a period of two centuries. Chapter 4 collects insights from a host of qualitative materials on the family and educational backgrounds of composers, the role economic considerations played in their occupational choices, the risks of alternative choices, the strategies pursued to deal with those risks, and (for a limited sample of composers) the extent to which composers achieved economic success, measured in terms of net worth at the time of their death. Chapters 5 and 6 investigate the geography of composers' nativity and their choices of work locations. Among other things, chapter 5 tests the hypothesis that the fragmentation of the Holy Roman Empire into hundreds of more or less independent principalities and dukedoms created especially attractive employment opportunities for composers during the eighteenth cen-

ture. Chapter 6 investigates how radical improvements in transportation media, occurring mostly during the first half of the nineteenth century, affected composers' geographic mobility. Chapter 7 analyzes the alternative means by which composers' work could be disseminated (often without permission), the emergence of copyright systems, the impact of copyright or its absence on composers' publication strategies, and how market opportunities shaped publishers' preferences for diverse composition forms. Chapter 8 concludes.