

CHAPTER ONE

Listening with Imagination: The Revolution in Aesthetics

HISTORICALLY INFORMED PERFORMANCE PRACTICE has become a commonplace in the concert world in recent decades. Orchestras routinely perform Beethoven's symphonies on period instruments, and even nonperiod orchestras play in a manner that reflects a heightened sensitivity to performance traditions of the composer's time. Historically informed listening, on the other hand, has been much slower to develop. It rests, after all, on the consumer rather than the producer and is in any case far more difficult to reconstruct, for the evidence of how people actually listened to specific works of music in any given time and place is scant and by its very nature notoriously subjective. In a celebrated passage in *Howards End* (1910), the novelist E. M. Forster neatly captures an entire spectrum of modes of listening among six characters in a concert hall, all listening to the same work of music with six decidedly different reactions:

It will be generally admitted that Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is the most sublime noise that has ever penetrated into the ear of man. All sorts and conditions are satisfied by it. Whether you are like Mrs. Munt, and tap surreptitiously when the tunes come—of course, not so as to disturb the others—; or like Helen, who can see heroes and shipwrecks in the music's flood; or like Margaret, who can only see the music; or like Tibby, who is profoundly versed in counterpoint, and holds the full score open on his knee; or like their cousin, Fräulein Mosebach, who remembers all the time that Beethoven is "echt Deutsch"; or like Fräulein Mosebach's young man, who can remember nothing but Fräulein Mosebach: in any case, the passion of your life becomes more vivid, and you are bound to admit that such a noise is cheap at two shillings.¹

The responses range from the visceral (Mrs. Munt) to the technical (Tibby), programmatic (Helen), formalist (Margaret), nationalistic (Fräulein Mosebach), and purely social (Fräulein Mosebach's young man). Listeners, as Forster reminds us, have their own methods and motivations, and there is no reason to think that the audiences of Beethoven's era were any different in this regard. Indeed, the available documentation strongly suggests that the typical concert audience of the early nineteenth century covered just as wide a spectrum as that described by Forster a hundred years later, ranging from those who listened with rapt attention to those

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who used the occasion primarily to socialize, giving only passing attention (if any at all) to the music being played.² Any attempt to reconstruct listening practices of the past must therefore confront the challenge of reconciling an inevitable variety of responses toward a common object. The challenge is further compounded by the reluctance of these listeners to commit to writing just what those responses might have been on any particular occasion.

Still, there is much to be gained from trying to understand how the more attentive listeners of a particular place and time might have approached the music they heard, at least in the most general terms. Fortunately, the documented discourse on the aesthetics of the symphony in German-speaking lands during Beethoven's lifetime is extensive enough to allow us to reconstruct these earlier modes of perception in its broad outlines, to recreate a horizon of expectations of what informed listeners thought that instrumental music could and could not do.

FROM KANT TO HOFFMANN

Attitudes toward instrumental music changed markedly during the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth. Many of the more sophisticated listeners of this time began to perceive it as equal if not superior to vocal music. This was a radically new perspective: at no previous point in the history of music had any prominent composer or critic argued for such a view. The power of instrumental music to move the passions had long been acknowledged, but without words, music's perceived ability to convey ideas had always remained suspect. Yet within the span of less than a generation, this new attitude toward instrumental music won increasing legitimacy, and its adherents would grow steadily in numbers throughout the nineteenth century.

The scope and speed of this change can be illustrated through two very different yet widely read sources of the time: Immanuel Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (*Critique of Judgment*), first published in 1790, and E.T.A. Hoffmann's review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, first published in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of Leipzig in 1810. Both stand as landmarks in the history of aesthetics. Kant's treatise set off an intense debate about the relationship between art and philosophy that would dominate aesthetic debate through Hegel and beyond. One could disagree with Kant (and many did), but no one could ignore him. And it is scarcely an exaggeration to call E.T.A. Hoffmann's review of Beethoven's Fifth the most influential piece of music criticism ever written. It established a new standard for written discourse about music by integrating emotional response and technical analysis in unprecedented detail. Critics of subse-

quent generations would turn to it repeatedly as a model, and Hoffmann's images and method have continued to resonate to the present day. Particularly in its abridged form (1813), Hoffmann's comments gained a readership well beyond that of the journal in which it had originally appeared.³ Had Hoffmann had been a solitary critic—if, in other words, his account had not resonated among his contemporaries—his review would have been swallowed up among the countless other notices of the day, filed away and forgotten. But his ideas were soon taken up by others, and the premises of listening he articulates in this review would soon be assimilated into the most basic assumptions of how to listen to music.

In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant declared instrumental music to be “more pleasure than culture” (*mehr Genuß als Kultur*), for without a text, music could appeal only to the senses and not to reason. Kant marveled at instrumental music's potential to move listeners, but because it contained no ideas and was a purely temporal art, it remained merely transitory in its effect: once the sound of the notes had died, there was nothing left for the listener to contemplate. In his hierarchy of the arts, Kant classified instrumental music among those that were “agreeable” or “pleasing” (*angenehm*) but incapable of transmitting concepts. Like wallpaper, instrumental music was an abstract art that gave pleasure through its form but lacked content and was therefore inferior to vocal music.⁴

Kant's view of instrumental music, published when Beethoven was just nineteen, was thoroughly typical of its time. French aestheticians had been wrestling with the issue of instrumental music's “meaning” for decades and had concluded, almost unanimously, that without a verbal text, music alone could convey little of any significance. No one denied music's power or even its close affinity to language: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his *Essay on the Origins of Languages*, maintained that music and language shared a common origin and that the language of music, although “inarticulate,” was “vivid, ardent, passionate” and had “a hundred times more energy than speech itself.”⁵ But the inability of music to express ideas remained a stumbling block. “To understand what all the tumult of sonatas might mean,” Rousseau wrote in his *Dictionary of Music* (1768), “we would have to follow the lead of the coarse artist who was obliged to write underneath that which he had drawn such statements as ‘This is a tree,’ or ‘This is a man,’ or ‘This is a horse.’ I shall never forget the exclamation of the celebrated Fontenelle, who, finding himself exhausted by these eternal symphonies, cried out in a fit of impatience: ‘Sonata, what do you want of me?’” Fontenelle's *bon mot* would be retold with relish by countless writers over subsequent decades: it became a kind of shorthand dismissal of the art of instrumental music on the grounds of vagueness and imprecision.⁶

Kant's German compatriots were equally unwilling to hear instrumental music as a vehicle of ideas. Johann Georg Sulzer, in his widely read encyclopedia of the fine arts published in the early 1770s, called instrumental music *unterhaltend* ("entertaining"), the same word that provides the basis for the modern-day German term *Unterhaltungsmusik*—that is, music meant to be enjoyed rather than contemplated, or as we might say more colloquially nowadays, "easy listening." Sulzer characterized "concertos, symphonies, sonatas, and solos" as "a not disagreeable sound, even a pleasant and entertaining chatter, but nothing that would engage the heart."⁷

By the time Beethoven was thirty-nine, Kant's hierarchy of the arts had been turned on its head. In his 1810 review of Beethoven's Fifth, E.T.A. Hoffmann declared instrumental music to be the highest of all art forms, for it opened up to listeners the realm of the infinite, "a world that has nothing in common with the external world of the senses." Precisely *because* of its independence from words, music could express that which lay beyond the grasp of conventional language. And Hoffmann was merely the most articulate in a series of prominent writers who had been arguing along much the same lines for more than a decade.

How can we account for this remarkable transformation of attitudes within such a short span of time, between Kant in 1790 and Hoffmann in 1810? At the simplest level, there are three variables to consider: (1) the instrumental music composed during this time, (2) the way in which this music was performed, and (3) the way in which it was heard. All three are closely connected, yet it is the first of these—the music itself—that has always been regarded as the primary force behind this new aesthetic. And on the surface, at least, the priority of the music in driving this change seems not only plausible but inescapable. Can it be entirely coincidental, after all, that the status of instrumental music rose so markedly during precisely the period in which Mozart's late symphonies were being discovered by a wider public, Haydn was composing his twelve symphonies for London (1791–95), and Beethoven was writing and publishing his first six symphonies (1800–1806)? Hoffmann himself appealed to the centrality of this repertory in having elevated instrumental music "to its current height" by tracing a steady progression of growing intensity among these three composers: Haydn's symphonies, according to Hoffmann, "lead us into vast green meadows, into a merry, bright throng of happy people." Mozart, in turn, "leads us into the depths of the spirit realm." But it is left to Beethoven's instrumental music to "open up to us the realm of the monstrous and immeasurable." It "sets in motion the lever of horror, fear, revulsion, pain, and it awakens that infinite longing which is the essence of Romanticism."⁸

Hoffmann also gives credit, in passing, to the steady improvement of performances, ascribing this to technical advances in instruments and to the increasing competence of players. The available evidence confirms these trends: contemporary accounts of early performances of the *Eroica* make us wince, but orchestras clearly warmed to the task over time. Rehearsals, once a rarity, were becoming more common, and there can be no question that the standards of performance were rising steadily as a result.

But Hoffmann has nothing good to say about listeners, and by the time he revised portions of his commentary on the Fifth Symphony in 1813, he had moved from indifference to contempt. Those listeners “oppressed by Beethoven’s powerful genius” suffer because their “weak perceptions” cannot grasp “the deep internal coherence of every composition by Beethoven.” Such deprecatory comments reinforce the largely erroneous but seeming ineradicable notion that Beethoven’s music was not appreciated during the composer’s lifetime. (Judging from contemporary reviews, critics did in fact find the music challenging at times but rarely oppressive, and already by the second decade of the nineteenth century, Beethoven was consistently acknowledged as the greatest living composer of instrumental music.) In any event, Hoffmann was not prepared to grant listeners any kind of positive role in instrumental music’s newly elevated status. This new music, he claimed, demanded a more strenuous kind of listening, and audiences would have to elevate themselves to new heights of comprehension if they were to assimilate these works.

In this respect, Hoffmann’s review created a paradigm that would be applied by virtually all subsequent commentators: Beethoven’s music created a new aesthetic, one in which listeners were compelled to rise to the level of the composer. This basic model has persisted from Hoffmann down to the present. Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, in the most comprehensive of all studies dealing with the reception of the composer’s oeuvre, argues that a “language of reception never heard before appears spontaneously soon after 1800 in connection with Beethoven’s music,” while Scott Burnham, in his compelling account of how listeners have interpreted many of the composer’s most important works, speaks of a “change of critical perspective engendered by Beethoven’s heroic style.”⁹

Yet this new kind of listening had already been a matter of intense discussion for well over a decade before Hoffmann’s review. The unprecedented prestige of instrumental music was driven not by any composer or any particular repertory, but rather by a profound shift in aesthetics extending to the very act of listening itself. Ironically, the debate had been unleashed by Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, the same work that had dismissed instrumental music as something less than a fine art. Even while downplaying the status of music without words, Kant had provided the

philosophical basis for the creative role of the beholder in all the arts, including music. The aesthetic revolution that took place during Beethoven's lifetime, then, focused not so much on any particular artist, composer, or repertory, but rather on the act of perception itself. For Kant, this meant a striving toward the reconciliation of the perceiving subject and the perceiving object; Johann Gottlieb Fichte conceived of the problem as the search for a means by which to integrate the "I" and the "Not-I"; Hegel sought to synthesize what he called the "identity of nonidentity" in a point of "nondifference" (*Indifferenz*). None of these writers was particularly sympathetic toward music. But others more sensitive to the art—Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich Schelling, Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, Ludwig Tieck, Novalis, Jean Paul, Friedrich Schlegel, and eventually E.T.A. Hoffmann—would take up the implications of this new way of thinking about the act of perception as it applied to music.

IDEALISM AND THE CHANGING PERCEPTION OF PERCEPTION

The story of instrumental music's sudden emergence as one of the highest, if not the highest, of all the arts at the end of the eighteenth century is most commonly told from the perspective of Romanticism, that slightly later and notoriously slippery phenomenon whose chief characteristic, at least according to the conventional telling of this tale, is its tendency to favor emotion over reason. Whereas Enlightenment rationalists had almost universally dismissed instrumental music for its inability to incorporate and convey ideas, their Romantic successors, particularly in Germany, were quick to embrace music without words precisely because of its ability to function outside the strictures of language. Writers such as Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, Ludwig Tieck, Novalis, Jean Paul, Friedrich Schlegel, and E.T.A. Hoffmann all praised instrumental music for its ability to transcend that which could be expressed in words. Instrumental music's lack of precision, long regarded as a liability, was now perceived as an asset.

More often than not, this new perspective has been viewed by later generations with deep suspicion, as an irrational and thus unsatisfactory basis on which to build any systematic aesthetic. From about the middle of the nineteenth century onward, a growing chorus of critics would dismiss the rapturous language used by the Romantics to describe the powers of instrumental music on the grounds that such accounts defy rational scrutiny. Many later commentators have responded to early Romantic aesthetics with thinly veiled scorn, beginning with Eduard Hanslick in his influential *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (*On the Musically Beautiful*) in 1854.¹⁰ The noted philosopher and historian of aesthetics Francis Spar-

shott, writing in 1980, blamed Wackenroder's "rhapsodizing style" for having "permanently lowered the acceptable tone for serious writing on music. For the first time, cultivated men . . . conceived an unfocussed rapture to be a proper aesthetic response, thinking of musical techniques not as rational means of construction and expression but as occult mysteries." By this account, "Wackenroder's hysterically mystical view of music eventually invaded the writings of musicians themselves." Even Carl Dahlhaus, the one recent scholar who has done more than any other to illuminate the growing aesthetic prestige of instrumental music at the turn of the nineteenth century, refers dismissively to the "metaphysical excesses" of Tieck, Wackenroder, and Hoffmann.¹¹

Equally troubling for many later critics is the apparent discrepancy between the early Romantics' claims for the power of instrumental music and the actual repertory they described—or rather, did *not* describe. Wackenroder, Tieck, Novalis, and Jean Paul rarely named specific works or composers, and in those few writings in which they did, their choices are all the more puzzling. Tieck, for example, in his important essay of 1799 on the symphony, discussed only a single work, an overture by Johann Friedrich Reichardt. This failure to address specific musical works has led several generations of scholars to advance the remarkable position that the aesthetics of the late 1790s anticipated a body of music yet to be composed and that the repeated references to "infinity" and "endless longing" in the works of Wackenroder, Tieck, and others are more nearly congruous with the music of Beethoven's "late" style than with the works of Haydn, Mozart, or the early Beethoven.¹² Particularly adamant on this point, Dahlhaus argued that the Romantic aesthetic preceded Romantic music and that Tieck's view of instrumental music "did not find an adequate object until E.T.A. Hoffmann borrowed Tieck's language in order to do justice to Beethoven." This new aesthetic, Dahlhaus maintained, "predicated the existence of instrumental music to which one could attach a poetically inspired metaphysics without embarrassing oneself with inappropriate dithyrambs."¹³

In point of fact, the early Romantics were working through a series of philosophical issues that had been under intense discussion since the early 1790s, and their "rhapsodizing style" played a central role in their approach not only toward instrumental music but toward the arts and philosophy in general. Their general failure to discuss specific works of music in any degree of detail reflects the origins of their thought within the traditions of philosophy rather than criticism. (Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, the seminal aesthetic treatise of the age, mentions very few specific works of art and dwells on none of them.) When E.T.A. Hoffmann finally did apply the premises and vocabulary of early Romantic aesthetics to a spe-

cific work of music, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, these concepts had been in play for some time already.

The principal source for this new aesthetic of instrumental music was idealism. A venerable tradition of thought that traces its origins to the philosophies of Pythagoras, Plato, and Plotinus, idealism enjoyed a vigorous renewal in German philosophy and aesthetics toward the end of the eighteenth century through such figures as Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Karl Philipp Moritz, Kant, Schiller, Christian Gottfried Körner, Johann Gottfried Herder, Fichte, and Schelling. At first glance, the "rhapsodizing style" of Wackenroder and Tieck might seem to have little in common with the sober discourse of Winckelmann, Moritz, and Kant, yet these earlier writings provided the essential framework for what are widely considered to be the first manifestations of a Romantic musical aesthetic.¹⁴

In the broadest terms, idealism gives priority to spirit over matter. Without necessarily rejecting the phenomenal world, it posits a higher form of reality in a spiritual realm: objects in the phenomenal world—including works of art—are understood as reflections of the noumenal. From an aesthetic standpoint, idealism holds that art and the external world are consonant with one another, not because art imitates that world, but because both reflect a common, higher ideal. The work of art thus functions as a central means by which to sense the realm of the spiritual, the infinite; it exists in a sphere that is tangible yet not entirely natural. The artwork is artificial in the most basic sense of the word.¹⁵

Within the aesthetics of idealism, the true essence of the artwork could be grasped only through the power of imagination—*Einbildungskraft*—a faculty capable of mediating between the senses and reason, between the phenomenal and the noumenal worlds. The term itself, as used by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Kant, and Fichte, among others, combines an inward-directed activity ("*Ein*-bildung") with a sense of constructive power ("-kraft").¹⁶ Christian Gottfried Körner, writing in 1795, emphasized that we value an artistic work "not by what *appears* in it, but according to what must be *thought*," that is, according to the reflective process demanded by the particular work.¹⁷ For Körner and other idealists, the enjoyment of art was a process not of "idle reception," but rather of "activity." The distinction is crucial: late eighteenth-century aesthetics moved from the premise of passive effect to active construction. The new scenario rendered the listener less important in some respects but more important in others: less important in that the musical work's essence—as opposed to its effect—had become the focus of attention, and more important in that the listener was obliged to take an active role in constructing that essence through the application of the powers of imagination.

Idealism thus stands in marked contrast to the Enlightenment predilection for explaining the emotional power of music in essentially naturalistic or mechanical terms, that is to say, in terms of its effect on the listener. As a philosophical mode of thought, naturalism rejects the notion that anything in the universe lies beyond the scope of empirical explanation, holding that the mind and spiritual values have their origins in (and can ultimately be reduced to) material things and processes. Naturalism provided the philosophical basis for mimesis, the aesthetic doctrine that had prevailed throughout all the arts prior to 1800. By imitating nature or the human passions, a work of art, critics argued, could induce a corresponding emotional reaction in the mind and spirit of the listener.

But instrumental music never fit very well into the mimetic system, which had evolved around the more overtly representational arts of poetry, painting, and sculpture. By the second half of the eighteenth century, most critics viewed direct musical imitations of the external world with skepticism and at times outright derision. Human passions provided a more appropriate object of imitation, for here, as Rousseau pointed out, the composer “does not directly represent” in his music such things as rain, fire, and tempests, but instead “arouses in the spirit” of the listener “the same impulses that one experiences when beholding such things.”¹⁸ Still other writers opted for theories of “expression,” but these systems ultimately depended on the principle of mimesis as well.¹⁹ Even those few eighteenth-century writers who rejected musical mimesis altogether and espoused a kind of protoformalistic sensualism hastened to point out that music without a text was a merely agreeable (*angenehme*) art that stood beneath reason and thus outside the higher realm of beauty, the realm of the fine arts. (In German, the term *schöne Künste* means literally “beautiful arts,” as does its French equivalent, *beaux-arts*.) Because it involved the free interplay of forms rather than of concepts, instrumental music was widely perceived, in Kant’s oft-quoted formulation, to be “more pleasure than culture.”

Many eighteenth-century writers—including Johann Mattheson, Charles Batteux, Johann Joachim Quantz, Rousseau, Johann Nikolaus Forkel, Johann Georg Sulzer, and Heinrich Christoph Koch—sought to explain the emotional power of instrumental music by regarding it as “the language of the heart” or “the language of the emotions.”²⁰ This designation elevated the status of music without words by treating it as a language in its own right: this in itself represented a major step forward in the growing prestige of instrumental music. In the end, however, this approach perpetuated instrumental music’s secondary status by situating it within the conceptual framework of language. From this perspective, instrumental music was defined in terms of what it lacked: specificity. No matter how powerful it might be, a language of emotions was by its very

nature imprecise and ultimately irrational. A lack of precision could scarcely qualify as a desirable linguistic quality, least of all in the Age of Reason.

Idealism offered an alternative approach by shifting the focus of attention from effect to essence and by placing special importance on the active nature of aesthetic perception. Within the idealist aesthetic, the power of any given artwork lies in its ability to reflect a higher ideal and in the beholder's ability to perceive that ideal. Idealism did not deny the sensuous power of music. To the contrary: the aesthetics of idealism fostered some of the most soaring descriptions of instrumental music ever written. The object of description, however, had shifted from music's effect to music's essence or, more specifically, to the perception of an ideal realm reflected in that music. Within the idealist aesthetic, then, instrumental music remained an imprecise art, with the essential difference that listeners no longer considered this imprecision in relation to nature, language, or human emotions, but rather in relation to a higher, ideal world—to that “wondrous realm of the infinite” (*das wundervolle Reich des Unendlichen*), to use Hoffmann's celebrated phrase. From this perspective, vagueness was no vice. Commentators no longer felt compelled to justify instrumental music by engaging in the futile and inevitably trivializing effort to specify its objective “content.” Instead, they changed the venue of contemplation from the material to the spiritual, from the empirical to the ideal. Freed from the obligation to explain the causal mechanism of their responses to music, idealist critics could revel in those responses all the more freely. One can, after all, be more readily forgiven for resorting to metaphorical excess in trying to describe the infinite, as opposed to one's personal reaction to a specific work of art. The early Romantics were most assuredly not the first to respond deeply and passionately to instrumental music; they were, however, members of the first generation to have at its disposal a philosophical framework in which to express such powerful emotions without embarrassment.

This resurgence of idealism in the eighteenth century owes much to the work of the archaeologist and art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68), whose concept of ideal beauty drew heavily on Plato.²¹ For Winckelmann, the work of art did not imitate any single model in nature, but instead derived its features from a variety of different exemplars. The resulting “ideal figures, like an ethereal spirit purified by fire,” were no mere composites, however: the high purpose of ancient Greek artists had been “to bring forth creations bestowed with a divine and suprasensory sufficiency” that were “freed from every human weakness.”²² In this sense, Winckelmann saw ideal beauty as deriving at least in part from the mind alone, independent of direct reference to experience. And although he at one point explicitly denied that ideal beauty holds

any metaphysical significance, he argued elsewhere that the ideally beautiful has its archetype in God.²³ Herder accurately summed up the reception of Winckelmann's epoch-making *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (1764) in describing the work not so much as an actual history of art as a "historical metaphysics of beauty."²⁴

Plato's theories of beauty are equally evident in the *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (*General Theory of the Fine Arts*, 1771–74), by the Swiss aesthetician Johann Georg Sulzer (1720–79). Sulzer followed the Greek philosopher's distinction among various categories of artistic imitation and idealization. The first and lowest category of artists consists of those who copy nature precisely and without discrimination. Artists who imitate nature more selectively belong to the second, higher category. The third and highest category consists of those for whom nature is not sufficient and who pursue the images of ideal forms. "One can generally say about an artwork that has not been copied from an object in nature that it has been made according to an Ideal, if it has received its essence and form from the genius of the artist."²⁵ But it apparently never occurred to Sulzer or anyone else of his generation to align instrumental music (or for that matter any kind of music) with the concept of the ideal; to do so would have been to elevate what was considered a merely pleasant form of diversion to the highest ranks of the fine arts—which is exactly what many of the Romantics would later do.

Karl Philipp Moritz (1757–93) helped to lay the foundation for this development in his later writings. From 1789 until his death, he lectured in Berlin on antiquity, mythology, and the history of art, and his audiences included Wackenroder, Tieck, Alexander von Humboldt, and the composer Johann Friedrich Reichardt. Moritz openly rejected mimesis as a basis of art, insisting instead that the true artwork must be self-contained and internally coherent and that it must exist for its own sake. He placed special emphasis on the act of aesthetic contemplation. In his essay *On the Unification of All the Fine Arts and Sciences under the Concept of the Perfected Thing in Itself*, he proclaimed that "in contemplating the beautiful, . . . I contemplate the object not as something within me, but rather as something perfect in itself, something that constitutes a *whole in itself* and gives me pleasure *for the sake of itself*, in that I do not so much impart to the beautiful object a relationship to myself but rather impart to myself a relationship to it."²⁶ For Moritz, the contemplation of the beautiful carried the added benefit of drawing attention away from the ills of mortal existence, if only momentarily. "This forgetting of the self is the highest degree of the pure and unselfish pleasure that beauty grants us. At that moment we give up our individual, limited existence in favor of a higher kind of existence."²⁷

The belief that arts in general, and music in particular, could provide refuge from the failed world of social and political life was a key element of romantic aesthetics. Franz von Schober's "An die Musik," set to music by Schubert in 1817, captures perfectly the essence of this outlook:

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| Du holde Kunst, in wieviel grauen Stunden, Wo mich des Lebens wilder Kreis umstrickt, Hast du mein Herz zu warmer Lieb entzünden, Hast mich in eine beßre Welt entrückt! | Thou wonderous Art, in how many gray hours, When life's wild circle closed me in, Did you enflame my heart to a warm love Did you transport me to a better world! |
| Oft hat ein Seufzer, deiner Harf' entflossen, Ein süßer, heiliger Akkord von dir Den Himmel beßrer Zeiten mir erschlossen, Du holde Kunst, ich danke dir dafür! | Often a sigh, drifting from thy heart, A sweet, holy chord from thee, Has opened up to me the heaven of better times, Thou wondrous art, I thank you for this! |

In a diary entry from the previous year, Schubert himself had observed that Mozart's music "shows us in the darkneses of this life a light-filled, bright, beautiful distance, toward which we can aspire with confidence."²⁸ When listening to music, Wackenroder's fictional Joseph Berglinger forgets "all earthly trivialities that are truly dust on the radiance of the soul"; this trivial dust is "cleansed" by music.²⁹ Tieck declares the modern symphony to be capable of "redeeming us from the conflict of wayward thoughts" and leading us "to a quiet, happy, peaceful land," while Hoffmann perceives "a wondrous spirit-realm of the infinite" through the prism of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.³⁰

Within the aesthetics of idealism, the composer assumed a new role as a mediator between heaven and earth, a divinely inspired human who could help to connect the mundane and the divine. When Carl Friedrich Zelter wrote to Haydn in 1804, he likened the elderly composer to a latter-day Prometheus: "Your spirit has penetrated into the sanctity of divine wisdom; you have brought fire from heaven, and with it you warm and illuminate mortal hearts and lead them to the infinite. The best that we can do for others consists simply in this: to honor God with thanks and joy for having sent you in order that we might recognize the miracles He has revealed to us through you in art."³¹ Beethoven himself on more than one occasion cast his art as bridge between the earthly and the divine. In 1810 he urged a young admirer "not only to cultivate your art, but penetrate to its innermost; it deserves this, for only art and science elevate

mankind to the divine.”³² Two years later he wrote to the publisher Breitkopf & Härtel of “my heavenly art, the only true divine gift of Heaven,” and in 1824, writing to another publisher, he spoke of “what the Eternal Spirit has infused into my soul and bids me complete.”³³ Writing to the Archduke Rudolph, Bishop of Olmütz, in 1821, Beethoven declared that “there is nothing higher than to approach the divinity more closely than other humans and from there promulgate the rays of the divinity among mankind.”³⁴ It is unclear from the context whether Beethoven is referring to himself or to the addressee. And this is precisely the point: Beethoven considered his own calling a priesthood of sorts. Nor was he alone in this perception: one reviewer of the 1824 concert that premiered the Ninth Symphony and three movements from the *Missa solemnis* noted, “These new artworks appear as the colossal products of a son of the gods, who has just brought the holy, life-giving flame directly from heaven.”³⁵

Such views rest on the idealist aesthetic, whose philosophical cornerstone was laid in 1790 with the publication of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. Building on his earlier *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781) and *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 1788), Kant emphasized the creativity of perception and the capacity of the imagination to mediate between reason and the senses. It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that after Kant, beauty would be defined no longer as a quality within a given object, but rather as a function of subjective, aesthetic perception.

For Kant, spirit (*Geist*) is the “ability to present aesthetic ideas.” He defined an “aesthetic idea” as “that representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e., concept, being adequate to it.” This representation of the imagination, consequently, can never be completely realized or rendered intelligible through language. Thus “it is easily seen that an aesthetic idea is the counterpart (pendant) of a rational idea, which, conversely, is a concept to which no intuition (representation of the imagination) can be adequate.”³⁶ But Kant explicitly rejected the notion that purely instrumental music might incorporate aesthetic ideas; this art could be judged only on the basis of its form. He therefore relegated instrumental music—along with wallpaper—to the category of “free beauty.” Vocal music, by contrast, belonged to the higher category of “dependent beauty” on the grounds that its text allowed the listener to find correlatives in the concepts of the objects being represented.

Kant clearly considered “free beauty” an inferior category of art, for the contemplation of mere form, without concepts, would eventually “make the spirit [*Geist*] dull, the object in the course of time repulsive, and the mind dissatisfied with itself and ill-humored.”³⁷ He dismissed any ideas one might experience while listening to instrumental music as mere

mechanical byproducts of associative thought. Unlike poetry, music speaks “only through sentiments and without concepts, and thus . . . leaves nothing to be contemplated.” It was on this basis that he deemed untexted music to be “more pleasure than culture,” even while affirming its power to move the emotions.³⁸

Kant’s emphasis on aesthetic cognition nevertheless provided an important opening for later writers grappling with the dichotomy between form and content. One of the most influential of these post-Kantian critics was Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), who developed the tenets of aesthetic idealism in a series of widely read essays dating from the mid-1790s, beginning with an extended review of a collection of poetry by Friedrich von Matthisson. In a remarkable passage, Schiller argued that “although the *content* of emotions cannot be represented” in any work of art, “the *form* certainly can be.” Schiller went on to point out that there is in fact a “widely beloved and powerful art that has no other object than the form of these emotions. This art is *Music*.”³⁹

In short, we demand that in addition to its expressed content, every poetic composition at the same time be an imitation and expression of the form of this content and affect us as if it were music. . . .

Now the entire effect of music, however (as a fine art, and not merely as a agreeable one), consists of accompanying and producing in sensuous form the inner movements of the emotions through analogous external motions. . . . If the composer and the landscape painter penetrate into the secret of those laws that govern the inner movements of the human heart, and if they study the analogy that exists between these movements of the emotions and certain external manifestations, then they will develop from merely ordinary painters into true portraitists of the soul. They will leave the realm of the arbitrary and enter the realm of the necessary. And they may justly take their places not beside the sculptor, who takes as his object the *external* human form, but rather beside the poet, who takes as his object the *inner* human form.⁴⁰

While still essentially mimetic in its assumptions, Schiller’s pronouncement helped to move the focus of debate away from content and toward form. Like Hanslick, Schiller denied that music itself embodies emotional content; rather, it works through a process of analogical structure, mediated by the listener’s imagination. The poet retains the ability to direct the imagination of his audience in a more defined direction, but even this capacity is limited, for while the poet can “indicate those ideas and allude to those emotions, he cannot develop them himself.” Above all, he must not preempt the imagination of his readers. An overly precise indication of ideas or emotions would constitute a “burdensome limitation,” because the attractiveness of an aesthetic idea lies in our freedom to perceive its content in a “boundless profundity.” “The actual and explicit content

that the poet gives is always finite; the potential content, which he leaves for us to project into the work, is an infinite entity.”⁴¹

The “art of the infinite” and “infinite longing” play an even greater role in Schiller’s essay “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry” (1795–96). The dichotomy between the naïve (the natural and sensuous) and the sentimental (the reflective and abstract) corresponds roughly to the phenomenal and noumenal. The task of the modern poet is to bridge the gulf between the two. But because this cannot be realized on earth, the poet’s striving for such a synthesis must necessarily remain “infinite.” The genius of sentiment, according to Schiller, “abandons [phenomenal] reality in order to ascend to ideas and to rule over his material with his own freedom of activity.”⁴² In so doing, however, the artist runs the risk of devolving into a realm of meaningless abstraction. On precisely these grounds, Schiller elsewhere rejected those works of music by “recent”—unnamed—composers that appealed merely to the senses.⁴³

Although Schiller was disinclined to comment at any length on the integration of the sensuous and the abstract in instrumental music, he helped to establish a framework for the reevaluation of this art in the work of his close friend Christian Gottfried Körner (1756–1831), who happened to be an accomplished musician. Körner’s essay “On the Representation of Character in Music” was first published in 1795 in Schiller’s journal, *Die Horen*. Following Schiller’s lead, Körner rejected Kant’s notion that instrumental music constituted a merely agreeable art rather than a fine art. The purpose of an agreeable art, Körner argued, is to please its audience by moving the emotions, through the process of *pathos*. Works of fine art, by contrast, exist as self-contained entities; their purpose is the representation of character, or *ethos*. Early in his essay, Körner neatly summarized the historical stages of eighteenth-century thought regarding the questions of imitation and representation in music:

For a long time, the notion of what was worthy of representation in music was governed by remarkable prejudices. Here, too, there was fundamental misunderstanding about the principle that the imitation of nature should determine the art. For some, the mimicking of everything audible was considered the essential business of the composer, from the rolling of thunder to the crowing of the rooster. A better kind of taste gradually begins to spread. The expression of human sentiment replaces noise lacking a soul. But is this the point at which the composer is to remain, or is there a higher goal for him?⁴⁴

The answer, he believed, is that the artist must go beyond the expression of transitory sentiment and complement that which is missing in individual, phenomenal exemplars: “He must *idealize* his material.” Only through art, Körner maintained, can the infinite be made perceptible, however dimly, for it can otherwise only be imagined. Thus the artist

“must raise us up to himself and represent the infinite in perceptible form.”⁴⁵ For Körner, the characteristic is the symbolic manifestation of the ideal. Character is the quality that unites the realms of morality and aesthetics, and by associating music with moral character, Körner was able to elevate the status of instrumental music to that of a fine art.⁴⁶ He rejected the notion that music unsupported by dance, drama, or poetry could not, on the grounds of its vagueness, depict character. Körner stopped short of explicitly articulating an essential equality between instrumental and vocal music, yet his brief essay represents an important advance in the emerging prestige of instrumental music.

By the end of the 1790s, the concept of the artwork as a perceptible manifestation of the ideal was being articulated ever more systematically by such figures as Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775–1854), and August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845). Schelling, in particular, insisted that art and philosophy were in the end concerned with the same basic issue: to reconcile the world of phenomena with the world of ideas.⁴⁷ Like Schiller, he saw profound meaning in the congruence of artistic and natural forms and considered the artwork to provide a window on their essential unity. In his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), Schelling advocated art as the key to perceiving the nature of this unity. His *Philosophy of Art*, in turn, based on lectures first delivered at Jena in 1802–3, has justly been called “the first explicit art-philosophy in the history of the Western world.”⁴⁸ Art is the means by which the real and the finite can be synthesized with the ideal and the infinite. “Through art, divine creation is presented objectively, for both rest on the same imagining of the infinite ideal into the tangible. The exquisite German word *Einbildungskraft* actually means the power of an inward formation of the whole, and in fact all creation is based on this power. It is the power through which an ideal is at the same time something tangible, the soul the body; it is the power of individuation, which of all powers is the one that is truly creative.”⁴⁹

Within this framework, Schelling saw the “forms of music”—by this he meant rhythm, harmony, and melody—as “the forms of eternal things insofar as they can be contemplated from the perspective of the real. . . . Thus music manifests, in rhythm and harmony, the pure form of the movements of the heavenly bodies, freed from any object or material. In this respect, music is that art which casts off the corporeal, in that it presents movement in itself, divorced from any object, borne on invisible, almost spiritual wings.” Rhythm, harmony, and melody are the “first and purest forms of movement in the universe. . . . The heavenly bodies soar on the wings of harmony and rhythm. . . . Borne aloft by the same wings, music soars through space to weave an audible universe out of the transparent body of sound and tone.” Schelling openly acknowledged his debt to Py-

thagoreanism at this point, but insisted that Pythagorean theories had been quite poorly understood in the past.⁵⁰

On this basis, then, one might reasonably expect that Schelling would deem instrumental music to be the highest of all arts precisely on the basis of its incorporeality, which in turn would allow the greatest possible range of freedom for imaginative perception. For Schelling, however, the contemplation of the ideal was but a means to the end of achieving the Absolute, which he defined as the integration of the material and the spiritual, the phenomenal and the ideal. Although the artist and the philosopher pursue the same essential task, the former does so by using symbolic forms in a manner he himself does not fully understand. The material of the philosopher, by contrast, is rational thought, which can be more readily idealized and then reintegrated into the realm of the phenomenal. Schelling therefore preserved the traditional hierarchy that accorded the place of honor to the verbal arts.

Schelling's work nevertheless provided an important advance in the aesthetics of instrumental music. He broke decisively with earlier systems based on the principle of mimesis, and he insisted on the metaphysical significance of all aesthetic intuition, including the perception of instrumental music. In this respect, Schelling's philosophy of art (which is in fact a philosophy *through* art) represents an aesthetic system qualitatively different from the one in which Kant, only a little more than a decade before, had deprecated instrumental music because of its purported inability to accommodate ideas. The rising tide of art-philosophy had lifted the status of all artistic vessels, including that of instrumental music.

Schelling's philosophy reverberates throughout the subsequent history of idealist aesthetics. August Wilhelm Schlegel's lectures on art (Berlin, 1801–2) also pursue the idea that the beautiful is a symbolic representation of the infinite and that the infinite becomes at least partly perceptible through the beautiful. The human spirit contemplating beauty is directed in "infinite striving" toward beauty. Schlegel used this premise to expose the inadequacy of earlier psychological, empirical, and sensualist theories of music. Sound is the "innermost" of the five senses, dealing with transitory phenomena in a play of successions; and music, as exemplified by the sound of the chorale (quite apart from any underlying text), provides us with "an intimation of harmonic perfection, the unity of all being that Christians imagine through the image of heavenly bliss."⁵¹ Because of its incorporeality, "one must accord music the advantage of being ideal in its essence. It purifies the passions, as it were, from the material filth with which they are associated, in that music presents these passions to our inner sense entirely according to their form, without any reference to objects; and after touching an earthly frame, it allows these passions to breathe in a purer ether." All that remains after the experience of listening

is “a single, immutable, and thoroughly infinite striving, reverent contemplation [*Andacht*].”⁵² Friedrich Schlegel, the brother of August Wilhelm, concurred. He called hearing “the most noble of the senses” and praised it for its ability to take us “beyond the tyranny of the physical object.” Because of its incorporeal nature, music was the one art most closely corresponding to the ever-fluid nature of the incorporeal “I.” For Schlegel, music was “less a representational art than a philosophical language, and really lies much higher than mere art.”⁵³

IDEALISM AND THE NEW AESTHETICS OF LISTENING

Idealist vocabulary and categories of thought figure prominently in the musical aesthetics of the early Romantics. The emphasis on specific points varies from writer to writer, but many of the most basic terms and concepts derive from idealist philosophy.

Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773–98) was the single most important figure in the articulation of a new aesthetic of listening at the end of the eighteenth century. Unlike most of the other writers discussed up to this point (with the notable exception of Körner), Wackenroder had substantial training in music. He received early instruction in his native Berlin from Karl Fasch, founder of the Singakademie, and he appears to have tried his hand at composition as well.⁵⁴ At Göttingen, Wackenroder studied under the theorist, historian, and composer Johann Nikolaus Forkel, and his keyboard skills were good enough to have elicited an invitation from a musical society in Bamberg for a public performance of a concerto by Haydn.⁵⁵ In the last years of his brief life, he collaborated with his friend Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853), a poet and playwright who in turn was responsible for the posthumous (anonymous) publication of Wackenroder’s *Phantasien über die Kunst* (*Fantasies on Art*, 1799), to which Tieck added several essays of his own.⁵⁶

Wackenroder’s first major publication, *Herzensergiessungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* (*Outpourings from the Heart of an Art-Loving Monk*, 1796), attracted immediate attention. Published anonymously, it was thought for a time to have been written by none other than Goethe himself, and there was sufficient demand for the work to be reissued (along with the *Fantasies on Art*) in 1814 and in further subsequent editions. The *Outpourings* and *Fantasies on Art* incorporate all the essential elements of the idealist aesthetic. Nature and art are “two wondrous languages” of “mysterious power” granted to us by God “in order that mortals might grasp (as fully as possible) heavenly things in their full power.”⁵⁷ Joseph Berglinger, Wackenroder’s fictitious musician, declares music to be “the most wondrous” of all the fine arts because “it represents human

emotions in a super-human manner” and “shows us all the movements of our emotions in a manner that is incorporeal, clothed in golden clouds of ethereal harmonies, above our heads.”⁵⁸ Insofar as music is a language at all, it is “the language of angels.” It is the “only art that leads us back to the most beautiful harmonies of the manifold and contradictory movements of our emotions.”⁵⁹

Music is the darkest and most powerful of all the arts. Its “waves” stream forth with “pure and *formless* essence . . . and particularly the thousandfold transitions among the emotions. In its innocence, this idealistic, angelically pure art knows neither the origins nor the impetus for its motions, and it does not know the relationship of its feelings with the actual world.”⁶⁰ Here, Wackenroder encapsulates the creed of idealist aesthetics with remarkable concision. Music occupies a separate world of ideals, independent of earthly objects and emotions, and it has the power to lift us out of the ills of life to a higher region. Beyond this, we find virtually no attempt to explain a cause-and-effect relationship between work and listener in Wackenroder’s writings, for the fundamental nature of discourse on music has changed: the perspective is no longer even remotely naturalistic.

Tieck shared these views on the essence of instrumental music, strenuously disavowing any connection of this art with the phenomenal world. Instead, he emphasized that musical notes “constitute a separate world unto themselves.”⁶¹ In one of the very few extended discussions of a specific work of music by early Romantic writers, he praised Johann Friedrich Reichardt’s overture to a German-language adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1787). Tieck’s choice of works has been widely misunderstood: it has been suggested that he knew nothing of the music of Haydn and Mozart, but this seems implausible for an artist intensely interested in music and living in Berlin during the late 1790s.⁶² Reichardt’s music to *Macbeth* was quite well known at the time, and the fact that it served as a prelude to one of Shakespeare’s most famous dramas allowed Tieck to emphasize the greater emotional power of instrumental music over the subsequent stage production.⁶³ Tieck argued that the overture was capable of projecting its own complete and self-contained “drama” of a kind that “no poet could ever give us,” not even Shakespeare. The music was a “drama without characters” that referred to no story and “relied on no laws of probability.”⁶⁴

Wackenroder and Tieck were both still in their twenties when they presented their idealist aesthetic of instrumental music. Many older writers, understandably, clung to more traditional outlooks well into the nineteenth century. Goethe, for one, appears never to have embraced the enhanced aesthetic status of instrumental music. Like many writers before him, he compared the string quartet to a conversation among four intelli-

gent individuals, but the implicit imagery of music as a language was already old-fashioned by this time. But other critics of his generation gradually embraced the new mode of listening. Writing to Goethe in 1809, the composer Carl Friedrich Zelter described the act of listening as a process in which a physical response led to a heightened mental striving for a world beyond:

There are certain symphonies by Haydn that in their loose, liberal progression bring my blood into a comfortable motion and give the free parts of my body the inclination and tendency to work outwardly. At these times, my fingers become softer and longer, my eyes wish to see something that until now no eye has ever glimpsed, the lips open themselves, that which is within me wants to go out into the open.⁶⁵

Zelter's account manifests a curious but by no means incompatible mixture between older (passive, physical) and newer (active, mental) modes of listening in the early nineteenth century. Both the body and mind are moved at one and the same time; the spirit transcends the realm of the phenomenal and catches a glimpse of that which would otherwise remain inaccessible.

Other writers of this same generation also shifted their allegiance to the aesthetics of idealism during the closing years of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth. The writings of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) illustrate this change particularly well, for his views on the nature and aesthetic worth of instrumental music changed markedly over the course of his life. His fourth *Kritisches Wäldchen* (*Critical Thicket*, written in 1769 but not published until 1846) maintained the conventional image of music as a language of passions, and within this conceptual design, instrumental music inevitably suffers because of its semantic obscurity. By the mid-1780s, Herder's views had begun to change. In an essay of 1785 entitled "Which Produces the Greatest Effect, Painting or Music? A Dialogue of the Gods," Apollo presides over a dispute on Mount Olympus between the goddess of music and the goddess of painting. Painting charges that Music is dark and confusing. Music responds that what is

dark and confused in your emotions is due to your organ of perception, not my tones, which are pure and clear, the highest model of harmonious order. They are (as was once pointed out by a wise mortal inspired by me [i.e., Pythagoras]) the relationship and numbers of the universe in the most pleasant, facile, and powerful of all symbols. In criticizing me, my sister, you have therefore praised me. You have praised the infinite quality of my art in its innermost workings.

The goddess of poetry is summoned to judge the debate and finds in favor of Music, but she reminds her "that without my words, without song,

dance, or other action, you must concede that for humans, your emotions remain perpetually in the dark. You speak to the heart, but to the understanding of how very few!”⁶⁶ Poetry thus reiterates the then-standard view that only through word or gesture can music become intelligible, but in so doing she emphasizes the shortcomings of human perception rather than the shortcomings of music itself.

Herder’s late *Kalligone* (1800), in turn, reads like a thoroughly idealist tract. In rebutting Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, Herder unambiguously declared instrumental music to be the highest of all the arts because it provides a means of perceiving the Absolute, the realm in which distinctions between subjectivity and objectivity disappear. Music surpasses all other arts in the way the spirit surpasses the body, for music is spirit—*Geist*—and “related to motion, great nature’s innermost power. What cannot be made visible to man—the world of the invisible—becomes communicable to him in its [music’s] manner, and in its manner alone.”⁶⁷ Herder emphasizes *Andacht*—reverent contemplation—as the cognitive quality that moves the listener to a “high, free realm” when hearing music without words. A more spiritual version of Kant’s *Einbildungskraft*, *Andacht* implies a sense of active reflection combined with reverence for the divine, the infinite.⁶⁸ Through reverent contemplation, the aesthetic experience was now seen to take place in a transcendent sphere, “pure and free above the earth.”⁶⁹ Herder’s insight is critical to understanding the Romantic aesthetic, for it was not a change in the contemporary repertory that was transporting listeners to a higher realm, but rather a change in the perceived nature of aesthetic cognition—which is to say, a change in attitudes toward listening.

Christian Friedrich Michaelis (1770–1834), although only slightly older than Wackenroder and Tieck, is another writer whose works reveal a similar change in outlook. Michaelis published two separate pamphlets entitled *Über den Geist der Tonkunst* (*On the Spirit of Music*, 1795 and 1800) both of which take as their point of departure Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. Although willing to grant instrumental music a higher aesthetic status than had Kant, Michaelis nevertheless adhered in these early essays to the view of instrumental music as “more pleasure than culture.”⁷⁰ By 1804, however, in a commentary on Herder’s hierarchy of the arts, Michaelis acknowledges that the individual and the ideal can be integrated most readily and thoroughly through music alone and that the infinite can be expressed through the finite in a more vivid manner than in any other art.⁷¹ By 1808, in an essay entitled “On the Ideal in Music,” Michaelis had abandoned the naturalist perspective altogether and openly embraced idealism. Music “presents entirely and purely the spirit of art in its freedom and individuality” and conjures up before our fantasy “such an entirely individual world that we would search in vain for an

original in artless reality.”⁷² The ecstatic tone of Wackenroder and Tieck is missing, but the perspective is recognizably the same.

Michaelis’s “conversion” to idealism is typical of his time. The notion of the artwork—and the work of music, in particular—as an earthly manifestation of the Absolute won widespread acceptance in the first decade of the nineteenth century. The vocabulary of idealism pervades much of the criticism written during this time: Music is widely described as “supernatural,” “mystic,” “holy,” “divine,” “heavenly.” The mechanical associations with the passions were no longer the central concern they had been only a short time before; instead, the emphasis had shifted toward the premise that music is the reflection of a higher, more spiritual realm. The anonymous reviewer of Wackenroder and Tieck’s *Fantasies on Art* in Leipzig’s *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, for one, seems to have taken the idealist aesthetic as a given: the essence of art, he observes almost in passing, is to “manifest the supra-sensuous, to unite the finite and the infinite.” And it was a mistake, this reviewer argues, to draw a parallel between sounds and colors (in Wackenroder’s essay “Die Töne”) on the grounds that the corresponding play of sensations between sounds implicitly relegates music to the agreeable rather than to the fine arts.⁷³

Idealist premises are also evident in the lengthy and perceptive “Observations on the Development of Music in Germany in the Eighteenth Century,” by Johann Triest, a pastor in Stettin, published in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in 1800–1801. Triest argued that instrumental music is no mere receptacle for vocal music, nor derived from it, but is instead fully capable of incorporating aesthetic ideas. Triest thus preserved Kantian terminology while extending the domain of instrumental music beyond the realm of the merely sensuous. Even more so than vocal music, instrumental music is able to incorporate “spirit and life” by intimating an ideal.⁷⁴ In the works of Shakespeare and Mozart, according to the playwright, novelist, and critic Franz Horn, writing in 1802, there is no longer “any conflict between the ideal and the real, the internal and the external”; instead, the “infinite is made manifest for the fantasy” of the beholder.⁷⁵ And it is altogether telling that Heinrich Christoph Koch should include “Ideal” as an entry in the abridged version of his musical dictionary of 1807, even though it is not to be found in the much larger original edition of 1802. Here, Koch emphasizes the freedom of the listener’s imagination and speaks of a “poeticized world” (*erdichtete Welt*) within which the images of our fantasy can play.⁷⁶ And for the critic Amadeus Wendt, the goal of the composer is to create in sensuous form “an image of the infinite.”⁷⁷

E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776–1822) thus appeared on the scene of idealist aesthetics at a relatively late stage: the basic concepts and vocabulary of his music criticism were already well established by the time he began

writing reviews for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in 1809. Like earlier writers, Hoffmann perceived music as occupying an altogether separate sphere beyond the phenomenal, thereby endowing musical works with the power to provide a glimpse of the infinite. Instrumental music “discloses to man an unknown realm, a world that has nothing in common with the external sensuous world that surrounds him, a world in which he leaves behind him all feelings that can be expressed through concepts, in order to surrender himself to that which cannot be expressed” in words. In vocal music, it is only because the text is “clothed by music with the purple shimmer of Romanticism” that we can be led into “the realm of the infinite.”⁷⁸ When united with a text, music is forced to descend to the realm of common, everyday life and “speak of specific passions and actions. . . . Can music proclaim anything else but the wonders of that region from which it descends to us to resound?” In an utter reversal of traditional aesthetic hierarchies, Hoffmann left open the possibility that vocal music could achieve the exalted realm of instrumental music if the poet could raise himself to the level of the composer and do justice to the music.⁷⁹

As in earlier writings influenced by the idealist aesthetic, Hoffmann’s music criticism abounds with sacred metaphors. He adopted Schelling’s view of the artist as a high priest capable of providing mankind with a glimpse of a distant “spirit-realm,” and he perceived musical harmony as “the image and expression of the communion of souls, of union with the eternal, with the ideal that rules over us and yet includes us.”⁸⁰ Hoffmann saw the origins of music in the liturgy of the church and emphasized that music’s divine nature had now extended into the secular sphere as well. Thus, while he acknowledged that “instrumental music had elevated itself in recent times to a level of which the old masters [before Haydn and Mozart] had no concept,” it is important to recognize that his aesthetic applies to vocal as well as instrumental music, and not merely to the music of the present and recent past.⁸¹ The sacred works of Palestrina and Leo are just as capable of providing a glimpse of the divine as are the symphonies of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. The presence or absence of a text and the style of the music are ultimately less important than the essential nature of music itself. Beethoven’s instrumental compositions gave Hoffmann the immediate impetus for some of his most inspired essays, but they did not provide him with the philosophical and aesthetic outlook that underlies these writings.

Hoffmann’s particular contribution lies in his superior prose and his ability to integrate philosophical and aesthetic concepts with more technical issues of musical detail. I shall return to Hoffmann’s account of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony in chapters 2 and 3; for the moment, suffice it to say that the idealist aesthetics of instrumental music had already devel-

oped largely outside the domain of music criticism and almost entirely outside discussions of (or even familiarity with) the music of Beethoven. Beethoven's music, in short, did not create a revolution in listening; he was, however, the direct and immediate beneficiary of this new outlook. Symphonies, until only recently consigned to the same category of the "agreeable" arts as wallpaper, were now beginning to be perceived as manifestations of the infinite and, as such, as vehicles of truth.