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Mark Evan Bonds: Music as Thought

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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

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:

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 wondrous 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

