

THE VIRTUOSO UNDER SUBJECTION: HOW GERMAN IDEALISM SHAPED THE
CRITICAL RECEPTION OF INSTRUMENTAL VIRTUOSITY IN EUROPE, *c.* 1815–1850

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The purpose of this dissertation is to offer a novel reading of the steady decline that instrumental virtuosity underwent in its critical reception between *c.* 1815 and *c.* 1850, represented here by a selection of the most influential music periodicals edited in Europe at that time. In contemporary philosophy, the same period saw, on the one hand, the reconceptualization of music (especially of instrumental music) from “pleasant nonsense” (Sulzer) and a merely “agreeable art” (Kant) into the “most romantic of the arts” (E. T. A. Hoffmann), a radically disembodied, aesthetically autonomous, and transcendent art and on the other, the growing suspicion about the tenability of the free subject of the Enlightenment. This dissertation’s main claim is that those three developments did not merely coincide but, rather, that the changes in the aesthetics of music and the philosophy of subjectivity around 1800 made a deep impact on the contemporary critical reception of instrumental virtuosity. More precisely, it seems that instrumental virtuosity was increasingly regarded with suspicion because it was deemed incompatible with, and even threatening to, the new philosophic conception of music and via it, to the increasingly beleaguered notion of subjective freedom that music thus reconceived was meant to symbolize. Thus while the virtuoso could be and often was celebrated as a direct embodiment of free subjectivity, he was more typically dreaded as a threat to it.

Chapter One reviews the conceptual links between music and subjectivity in the early German Romantics, Schelling, and Schopenhauer, as well as in Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. The topic of Chapter Two is the impact of early-nineteenth-century aesthetics of music and the philosophy of subjectivity on the critical reception of virtuosity in performance, with focus on the denigration of performance (and thus also of virtuosity) in favor of composition, the imposition of interpretation as the guiding ideal of performance, and the binary opposition between “expressivity” and “empty virtuosic technique”. Chapter Three revisits some of the same issues but in the context of the reception of virtuosity in composition and adds some new ones, such as the valorization of clear-cut formal structures and historically established genres at the expense of program music, improvisation, and most genres of virtuosic music. Finally, Chapter Four examines the hyper-masculine tropes in the reception of some virtuosi, their female rivals, and Chopin, from the perspective of the contemporary gendering of the subject, of music, and of musical instruments.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Zarko Cvejjic (correct Serbian spelling: Žarko Cvejić) was born in 1981 in Belgrade, in what was then Yugoslavia and is now Serbia. Upon graduating from high school in 1999, Cvejjic enrolled in the musicology program of the Belgrade Academy of Music. In 2000, however, he received full funding to read music at the University of Oxford, where he graduated with a first-class degree in 2003. Cvejjic stayed in Oxford for another year, to complete the Master of Studies program in musicology there, which he did with distinction in the summer of 2004. In the fall of that year, Cvejjic enrolled in the PhD in Musicology program at Cornell University.

Apart from nineteenth-century Western music, Cvejjic's interests include Marxist, Lacanian, and gender critical theory, as well as performance and editing of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century music: a professional baritone/countertenor, Cvejjic has performed with several professional early-music ensembles in Oxford, Ithaca, New Jersey, New York City, and Los Angeles, as well as produced the first modern transcription of the Reson Mass, one of the earliest known complete Mass cycles, published by Antico in 2005. Cvejjic has also published on late-twentieth-century popular music—in 2010, *Women and Music* published his article on New Wave performer Klaus Nomi.

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INTRODUCTION

There is hardly a better way to begin a dissertation on the reception of instrumental virtuosity in the nineteenth century than to quote Sir George Grove's succinct yet rich encyclopedic 1889 article on the matter:

A term of Italian origin, applied, more abroad than in England, to a player who excels in the technical part of his art. Such players being naturally open to a temptation to indulge their ability unduly at the expense of the meaning of the composer, the word has acquired a somewhat depreciatory meaning, as of display for its own sake. *Virtuosität*—or virtuosity, if the word may be allowed—is the condition of playing like a virtuoso.

Mendelssohn never did, Mme. Schumann and Joachim never do, play in the style alluded to. It would be invidious to mention those who do.¹

That Sir George begins by highlighting the Continental otherness of virtuosity (the term and/or the practice), by defining it as a “term of Italian origin, applied more abroad than in England”, may be read as symptomatic of virtuosity's low standing in Europe's late-nineteenth-century critical opinion, stemming from its alleged threat: the “temptation to indulge [the virtuoso's] ability at the expense of the meaning of the composer”. Virtuosity is being posited here as inherently inimical to *Werktreue*, the guiding ideal of later nineteenth-century performance practice (and not just nineteenth-century)—the conception of musical performance as the most faithful possible *interpretation* of composer's intentions as they are (supposedly) contained in the work performed; in due course, there will be more to say about this. Virtuosity has a “somewhat depreciatory meaning”, Sir George tells us, though he does exonerate Clara Schumann and Joseph Joachim—two of the most respected and anti-virtuosic virtuosos of his time.² One only

¹ Grove 1889, p. 313. Full bibliographic references to these lexicographic sources are found in Appendix II.

² Indeed, Wieck and Joachim have been credited for helping facilitate the historic shift from virtuosity to interpretation; see Borchard 1996. Chapter Two will address that shift in detail.

wishes he had succumbed to the temptation of mentioning those who do “play in the style alluded to”; unfortunately, Victorian politeness got the upper hand.

By no means was Grove’s negative opinion on virtuosity idiosyncratic, or short-lived, at least in the domain of music lexicography. For instance, some fifty years later, Eric Bloom wrote in his *Everyman’s Dictionary of Music* that virtuosity is “[t]he manner of [musical] perf[ormance] with complete technical mastery”, but “is often used in a derogatory sense, suggesting that no other quality of interpretation is displayed by the perf[ormer]”.³ Another fifteen years on, Willi Apel and Ralph T. Daniel took a similar position in their 1960 edition of the *Harvard Brief Dictionary of Music*, defining “virtuoso” as a “performer who excels in technical ability” and adding that the “term is sometimes used as a derogatory reference to one who excels in technique only, lacking comparable understanding and musical taste”.⁴ Clearly then, fifty years after Sir George had warned his British readers of the dangers of virtuosity, the sentiment that had guided him was still alive—the fear that in its sheer technical display, virtuosity threatens proper musical expression or, in other words, that the virtuoso overshadows the composer and his intentions, the proper subject of musical composition and performance.

A look at late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century Continental sources reveals no major differences. Thus Ernst Büchen’s 1953 *Wörterbuch der Musik* invokes no lesser an authority than Richard Wagner to sound the “fatal overtone” of virtuosity:

Only where technical, manual dexterity becomes an end in itself, the term “virtuosity” assumes a fatal overtone. “In truth, there are different virtuosi; there are among them real, indeed great artists; they owe their reputation to the most ravishing performances of the greatest masters’ noblest musical creations.” (R. Wagner)⁵

³ Bloom 1946, p. 645.

⁴ Apel and Daniel 1960, p. 333.

⁵ Büchen 1953, p. 553: “Nur da, wo das Technische, die Spiel- u[nd] Kehlfertigkeit Selbstzweck ist, erhält der Begriff der Virtuosität einen fatalen Beiklang. In wahrheit, es gibt andere Virtuosen; es gibt unter ihnen wahre, ja

We will be returning to Wagner, too; at this point, it suffices to note that by specifying that there are some *exceptional* virtuosi, who indeed are true, great artists, Wagner clearly implies that many of them are not. Those virtuosi who in Wagner's and presumably Büchen's view do not qualify as "great artists" are not mentioned (perhaps it would have been "invidious" to do so, to paraphrase Sir George Grove), but the deprecating implication is clear enough.

Earlier German sources transmit similar sentiments, sometimes in a considerably more explicit and assertive fashion. Thus the influential aesthetician Gustav Schilling's *Encyclopädie der gesammten musikalischen Wissenschaften, oder Universal-Lexicon der Tonkunst* of 1835–42, a milestone of German nineteenth-century music lexicography comprising six volumes and a supplement, contains a lengthy—and mostly scathing—entry on *Virtuos* (virtuoso). While Schilling does admit—grudgingly—that without virtuosity the enjoyment of music would scarcely be possible, most of the entry is an explicit attack on what he perceives as the empty "mechanical" display of modern virtuosity:

We know well that this is happening especially in our time and that the brilliance of our instrumental music in particular is but that aspect of virtuosity, in which an abundance of semi-skilled mechanical dexterity exposes itself.⁶

Consequently, Schilling tells us, only seldom do modern virtuosi attain true artistic greatness:

In fact, one must admit that even the most accomplished masters extremely rarely achieve a truly artistic production and that the whole value of their efforts rests in a greater overcoming of the mechanical.⁷

grosse Künstler: sie verdanken ihren Ruf dem hinreissenden Vortrage der edelsten Tonschöpfungen der grössten Meister' (R. Wagner)". (All translations are mine, unless indicated otherwise.)

⁶ Schilling 1840, p. 781: "Wir wissen wohl, daß in neuerer Zeit dies besonders geschieht, und der Glanz unserer Instrumentalmusik vornemlich nur ist derjenige Theil der Virtuosität, in welchem sich eine Unsumme mechanisch angelernter Geschicklichkeiten offenbart".

⁷ *Ibid.*: "Dagegen aber muß man freilich auch von den ausgebildetsten Meistern bekennen, daß sie sich nur äußerst selten zu einer wahrhaft künstlerischen Production erheben, und der ganze Werth ihrer Leistungen hauptsächlich nur in einer größeren Ueberwindung des Mechanischen besteht".

Old masters, such as Beethoven, Schilling concludes, would be astonished, were they to see what had become of their creations in the hands of a Viotti or a Clementi. But as Schilling asserts, it would not be a desirable kind of astonishment: “older masters would be astonished, but not very pleasantly astonished, if they saw what had become of their noble, beautiful art”.⁸

But when one turns to earlier, eighteenth-century sources, a remarkably different picture emerges. The earliest known lexicon to address virtuosity is Sébastien de Brossard’s *Dictionnaire de musique*, first published in Paris in 1703. Although Brossard does not include an entry on virtuosity or virtuoso/a,⁹ he does address these terms in an article on *virtu* (*virtù*), their common Italian etymological root. However, his broad and neutral explanations of the terms are very far from our, or even Grove’s or Schilling’s, usage:

In Italian, this is not only that habitude of Soul which makes us agreeable to God and causes us to act according to the rules of right reason, but also that superiority of genius, skill, or competence that causes us to excell, either in the theory or the practice of the fine arts, over those who apply themselves as much as we.

It is from this that the Italians have formed the adjectives *VIRTUOSO* or *VIRTUODIOSO* (in the feminine, *VIRTUOSA*), which often serve even as nouns for naming or praising those to whom Providence has deigned to give that excellence or superiority. Thus, according to the Italians, an excellent painter or a skillful architect is a *VIRTUOSO*: but they give this beautiful epithet more commonly and more specifically to excellent musicians, more often to those who apply themselves to theory or composition of music than to those who excell in the other arts. Thus, to say simply in their language that a man is a *VIRTUOSO* is nearly always to say that he is an excellent musician. Our language only has the word *ILLUSTRE* which can correspond roughly to the Italian’s *VIRTUOSO*; the word *VIRTUEUX* has not yet been given this meaning, at least not in serious speech.¹⁰

Clearly then, by Brossard’s time—the beginning of the eighteenth century—virtuosity had received its association with music (though Brossard does mention other, non-musical

⁸ Schilling 1840, p. 782: “[Ä]ltere Meister würden erstaunen, aber auch nicht sehr angenehm erstaunen, wenn sie sähen, was aus ihren edeln, schönen Kunst geworden ist”.

⁹ Throughout the dissertation, *virtuoso/virtuosa* and *virtuosi/virtuose* will be used to distinguish between male and female performers.

¹⁰ Brossard 1982, pp. 223–24.

meanings), but not quite the association with musical performance, which it has for us, since he primarily associates it with music theory and composition. More significantly, Brossard shares none of Schilling or Grove’s anxiety and suspicion discussed above—for him virtuosity is, quite simply, excellence.

Brossard’s lexicon was the first large-scale dictionary of musical terms, but it was accompanied in close chronological proximity by another two equally important publications: Tomáš Baltazar Janovka’s *Clavis ad thesaurum magnæ artis musicæ* (1701) and Johann Gottfried Walther’s *Musikalisches Lexikon oder musikalische Bibliothek* (1732). According to James B. Coover, these three lexica mark the beginning of modern music lexicography.¹¹ Whereas Janovka does not discuss virtuosity, Walther’s entry on “virtu” follows Brossard’s, though Walther stresses the innovative aspect of virtuosity, in theory and performance alike: “Virtu [*ital.*] means one’s musical skillfulness to excel over many others, either in theory or in practice”.¹² The two major English sources of the time present a similar picture: James Grassineau’s entry on “virtu” in his *Musical Dictionary* of 1768 is little more than an English translation of Brossard,¹³ whereas Ephraim Chambers defines virtuoso in his 1786 *Cyclopædia: Or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* as “an Italian term, lately introduced into English, signifying a man of curiosity and learning; or one who loves and promotes the arts and sciences”.¹⁴

In its meaning and reception, then, virtuosity clearly underwent a substantial change from its neutral inception in Brossard’s *Dictionnaire* to Schilling’s and Grove’s critiques—from

¹¹ Coover 2001, p. 310.

¹² Walther 1732, p. 638: “Virtu [*ital.*] bedeutet diejenige Musicalische Geschicklichkeit, vermöge welche jemand für vielen andern, entweder in der Theorie, oder in der Ausübung, etwas ungemeines zum Voraus hat”.

¹³ Grassineau 1768, p. 330.

¹⁴ Chambers 1786, pp. 1136–37.

proficiency and excellence in music theory, composition, or other fields, to technical mastery in musical performance, prone to empty technical display and a wholesale lack of expressivity. To be sure, one should not take dictionaries, encyclopedias, and lexica as entirely transparent sources of objective knowledge: lexicographers typically seek to establish and impose knowledge as much as to transmit it. But this change in the understanding and reception of virtuosity was a phenomenon wider than music lexicography: towards 1800 and beyond, virtuosity encountered more and more suspicion and hostility across the board, particularly in the then-burgeoning music journalism.¹⁵ Therefore, the rising hostility against virtuosity seen in nineteenth-century music lexicography was only a reflection of a more general tendency.

To document that tendency and construct a historical interpretation and understanding of it is the purpose of this dissertation.

A Selective Survey of Modern Scholarly Literature on Virtuosity in Reception

“Virtuosity ought to be a subject for today”, writes Jim Samson in *Virtuosity and the Musical Work: The Transcendental Studies of Liszt*. Samson goes on to list a number of compelling reasons why we should bother with virtuosity:

It brings into focus key questions about the relation of performance to text, and therefore about the limits of what we can usefully say about musical works without reference to their performance—to the act of performance. It spotlights the performance, undervalued

¹⁵ Jander 2001: “With the flourishing of opera and the instrumental concerto in the late 18th century, the term ‘virtuoso’ (or ‘virtuosa’) came to refer to the violinist, pianist, castrato, soprano etc. who pursued a career as a soloist. At the same time it acquired new shades of meaning as attitudes towards the often exhibitionist talents of the performer changed. In the 19th century these attitudes hardened even more”. The rising hostility to virtuosity in the late eighteenth century is also surveyed in Stegemann 1982, Kaden 2004, and Reynaud 2005. Full bibliographic references to all secondary literature are found in the Secondary Literature section of the Bibliography, pp. 318–79.

in music history [...] And also the performer, an individual pursuing personal fulfilment of one sort or another, but also a participant in the larger practice, with unspoken and unwritten obligations and responsibilities.¹⁶

Samson is indeed right that performance has been undervalued in music history and, one might add, in musicology as well. Of course, as Samson is well aware, the larger issue here is the focus on compositions (that is, works) as history, rather than performance as history in so much of modern musicology; in other words, Samson argues that musicology has for too long focused on composers rather than performers as agents of music history. And as this dissertation goes on to show, not only does virtuosity's association with performance make it an object of study worthwhile to musicology, but it was also a major cause of the deterioration of virtuosity in critical opinion, conditioned precisely by the historical undervaluing of performance and focus on composition, which Samson notes. Also, as Chapter Three shows in particular, in the early and mid-nineteenth century, virtuosity applied not only to performance, but to composition as well, with far-reaching consequences for the critical reception of music deemed virtuosic. For all those reasons and more, musicology would do well to heed Samson's call. However, it has yet to do so, since the volume of existing scholarship on virtuosity is surprisingly slim, given the magnitude and complexity of the issue.¹⁷ In fact, the present dissertation is the first book-length study of the critical reception of instrumental virtuosity in general, as opposed to a study focused on a particular performer and his or her compositional oeuvre (such as Samson's *Virtuosity and the Musical Work*), in which the general cultural discourse is treated only briefly. The focus on instrumental virtuosity also distinguishes the present study from those such as Paul Metzner's

¹⁶ Samson 2003, p. 4.

¹⁷ Heinz von Loesch briefly treats the matter in Loesch 2004a. In his interpretation, musicology has neglected virtuosity due to the latter's association with performance; in Chapter Two, we will see that that association certainly played an important part in the denigration of virtuosity in its early and mid-nineteenth-century critical reception.

Crescendo of the Virtuoso and Susan Bernstein's *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century*, which look at virtuosity in a number of different cultural practices. The existing scholarship on the reception of instrumental virtuosity *per se* is available in a dozen or so essays, articles, and book chapters, which are summarized below. The following survey will necessarily be somewhat selective, inasmuch as it will include only studies of virtuosity *per se*, not those of individual virtuosi and their reception histories, such as, for instance, Samson's invaluable work on the reception of Chopin. But of course, such studies will be addressed, too, where appropriate, in the chapters that follow.

The major book-length study is Samson's *Virtuosity and the Musical Work*. The volume's subtitle suggests that it is focused on a repertory—Liszt's *Transcendental Studies*—but Samson's agenda is more ambitious: he covers topics ranging from the history of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century pianism, its cultural circumstances, to the complicated relationship between nineteenth-century virtuosity (and its reception) and Idealist philosophy. Samson's chief concern, though, belongs in the domain of nineteenth-century music aesthetics, more specifically the aesthetic problematic of the musical work concept and its complex relations with nineteenth-century virtuosity:

I want to argue that as virtuosity meshed with a Romantic aesthetic, it generated a dialectical relationship with a strengthening sense of the autonomous musical work, involving taste and ideology as well as form and closure.¹⁸

Following Lydia Goehr's important claim about the "regulative" function and status of the work concept in Western music aesthetics starting around 1800,¹⁹ Samson sets up his dialectic between virtuosity and the (perceived) aesthetic autonomy of nineteenth-century music (or the work

¹⁸ Samson 2003, p. 4.

¹⁹ Goehr 1992, particularly pp. 89–119.

concept as its proxy), whereby one challenges and even threatens to destroy the other. This dialectic, however, does not necessarily result in a synthesis:

Virtuosity, narrowly associated with display and spectacle, could be viewed in certain quarters as detrimental to music, opposing rather than enabling true creativity. [...] This notion, the occlusion of meaning or reference, continued to resonate in nineteenth-century virtuosity [...] Indeed metaphysical, ethical and aesthetic issues all mingled in this polemic.²⁰

Samson's conclusion that virtuosity "is a kind of immanent critique of the work-concept, the canon, and the idea of absolute music"²¹ confirms that this is a dialectic without synthesis: virtuosity's sheer performativity and sensuous ephemerality put it at loggerheads with the aesthetic(ist) valorization of interiority inherent in the notion of aesthetic autonomy and the work concept as its exponent. Consequently, this clash generates the "opprobrium that has so often clung to virtuosity", as "surplus or supplement, a surplus of technique over expression, detail over substance, even (implicitly) facility over quality".²² In particular, this notion of "a surplus of technique over expression" will feature prominently in Chapters Two and Three. Crucially, Samson argues that virtuosity generates so much opprobrium because it challenges the aesthetic autonomy of music, by diverting one's attention away from the work and onto performance and by using (or abusing) music to win money and public approval for the virtuoso.

In her *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century*, Susan Bernstein similarly highlights the threat that virtuosity and the figure of the virtuoso pose to the purported purity of the aesthetically autonomous artwork:

It is obstinately grounded in materiality and singularity. The virtuoso performance can never be dissociated from the time and space of its occurrence; it takes place in a foundational relationship to its instrument and is constituted by the physical contact with

²⁰ Samson 2003, pp. 69–70.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

the stage, the audience, and the ambiance. The figure of the virtuoso emerges through the material details of clothing, personal appearance and charisma, name, fame, and money.²³

Bernstein concludes that virtuosity thereby “both produces and exposes the mundane and material conditions of production—need, greed, egotism, and calculation”.²⁴ According to Bernstein, the anxiety therefore is that the sheer materiality of virtuosity threatens to soil the pure interiority of the aesthetically autonomous artwork, but in reality it only unmasks the latter as a fallacy. Furthermore, as we have already seen in Schilling’s attack on virtuosity, the virtuoso’s self-display disturbingly uses the work as a mere prop, without forging an organic, expressive bond with its essence:

In mere virtuosity, the effect is caused by mechanical instruments and techniques, not by the intended expression of a transcendent subject. [...] The “bad” virtuoso practices empty mechanical techniques and mars the work he plagiarizes as he performs.²⁵

This notion of music as “expression of a transcendent subject” will be very important throughout this dissertation. Virtuosity is at best problematic, then, inasmuch as it seems irredeemably grounded in the body, the instrument, the physical, the particular. Worse still, it appears to subject the aesthetically autonomous art of music to an extraneous purpose, that of its own self-display; it thus violates the aesthetic autonomy of music, inasmuch as one of the defining prerequisites of aesthetically autonomous music is that it be its own purpose. At the very worst, however, virtuosity involves no aesthetically autonomous music at all, in other words no interiority, and indulges in empty technical display for its own sake.

Several other scholars have contextualized the historical reception of virtuosity along similar lines. One of them is Erich Reimer, who explores the concept of “true virtuosity” from the viewpoint of German late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century music aesthetics of

²³ Bernstein 1998, p. 11.

²⁴ Bernstein 1998, pp. 13–4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

expression: unlike vulgar mundane virtuosity, true virtuosity exists not for its own sake, but faithfully to express the spiritual content of the musical work.²⁶ Similarly, Albrecht Riethmüller discusses the historical reception of virtuosity through the dichotomy between virtuosity as a tool of musical expression and an autonomized virtuosity, that is, virtuosity out of control.²⁷ In her discussion of Liszt as a paradigmatic virtuoso, Cécile Reynaud interprets the later nineteenth century's hostility to virtuosity as the fear of the "literally diabolical dangers of an expressionless virtuosity that mechanizes music".²⁸

Similar conclusions are made in "The Concert and the Virtuoso", an article that Richard Leppert co-wrote with Stephen Zank. Leppert situates the reception of Liszt, as paradigmatic of the shifting cultural status of virtuosity, in the context of the early-nineteenth-century aesthetics of music:

Liszt performed during a period when aesthetics as a field of philosophical inquiry was first defined and, so far as music is concerned, widely discussed in journals published throughout Western Europe. No small matter: for the first time in Western history, the cultural pecking order of the arts was rearranged so that music, formerly judged lesser than the textual and visual arts, was considered preeminent.²⁹

Similarly to Samson, Leppert posits this aesthetic climate, with its valorization of the introverted quality of instrumental music, as inherently hostile to virtuosity's radical exteriority and performativity. But in the same paragraph he adds an important twist: "Music was the sonorous sign of inner life, and inner life was the sign of the bourgeois subject, the much heralded, newly invented, and highly idealized 'individual'".³⁰ Significantly, Leppert here posits the interiority of music, prized in early-nineteenth-century music aesthetics as ineffable yet authentic, as a

²⁶ Reimer 1996.

²⁷ Riethmüller 2001.

²⁸ Reynaud 2003, p. 109.

²⁹ Leppert and Zank 1999, p. 253.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

template of early-nineteenth-century subjectivity, itself perceived as irreducible and free. In one of his guises, at least, the virtuoso also fascinates by virtue of being a model *par excellence* of this liberated subjectivity—“the literal embodiment of extreme individuality”.³¹

In *The Virtuoso Liszt*, Dana Gooley similarly posits Liszt *qua* paradigmatic virtuoso, as a model of a radically free, heroic individuality:

Virtuosity is about shifting borders [...], the limits of what seems possible, or what the spectator can imagine. Once this act of transgression is complete, the border shifts, and the boundaries of the possible are redrawn. If the performer does not cross a new, more challenging one, he will no longer be perceived as a virtuoso [...] Franz Liszt remains the quintessential virtuoso because he was constantly and insistently mobilizing, destabilizing, and reconstituting borders.³²

“The virtuoso Liszt has, indeed”, Gooley continues, “always served as a figure for fantasies of omnipotence: over pianos, women, and concert audiences”.³³ We will be returning to this notion of virtuosic omnipotence (not least sexual), especially in Chapters Two and Four. Likewise discussing Liszt, James Deaville sees him as no less than a model of the (bourgeois) subject’s political emancipation.³⁴ The virtuoso is celebrated, then—or rather fantasized about—as an omnipotent hero, because he accomplishes the seemingly impossible and performs the seemingly un-performable; he is everybody’s more or less secret fantasy of free, unbound individuality.

That fantasy also lies at the heart of Paul Metzner’s *Crescendo of the Virtuoso*, alongside Bernstein’s *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century* the only other book-length general discussion of nineteenth-century virtuosity. In places such as his assertion that nineteenth-century virtuosos “pointed the way to a new transcendence, not to a heavenly eternity but to an earthly future of ever-expanding possibility in which there seemed to be no limit to what the human body,

³¹ Leppert and Zank 1999, p. 259.

³² Gooley 2004a, p. 1.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁴ Deaville 2003.

including the brain, could be trained to do”,³⁵ Metzner approximates Gooley’s discussion of Liszt as paradigmatic of the public’s heroicized perception of the virtuoso. But Metzner’s interests cover a much wider field—nineteenth-century Parisian virtuosity, broadly defined (in line with Brossard, it might be added) as technical excellence in almost any field whatsoever, performed and displayed before an audience.

This notion of performativity as inherent to virtuosity is certainly important; I have already tried to illustrate above its centrality to Samson’s dialectic between virtuosity and the musical work concept, who correctly notes that “virtuosity needs to show itself—to present itself—in order to exist”.³⁶ But Metzner posits it only as an aspect of what he sees as the new, self-promoting, free individual of revolutionary France and Europe; he views the virtuoso as the paradigm of that new individual:

A trend toward increasingly unrestrained self-promotion developed almost imperceptibly in French, indeed Western, society over the course of the second half of the eighteenth century. This trend became unignorable in the first half of the nineteenth century, when the virtuosos could be found in its vanguard.³⁷

The emergence of what Metzner terms the “Romantic” individual is only one of the factors that he sees as facilitating the “crescendo of the virtuoso”; others include the proliferation of public spaces (also important for Samson) and the revaluation of technical and practical knowledge. The focus is on revolutionary Paris (roughly between 1789 and 1848), because it was there that all of those factors converged:

[T]he cultivation of technical skill was encouraged by the appreciation in the value of practical knowledge, and that self-promotion was encouraged by the dissemination of the

³⁵ Metzner 1998, p. 255.

³⁶ Samson 2003, p. 78.

³⁷ Metzner 1998, p. 265.

self-centered worldview, all of which took place during the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries throughout the Western world but with particular intensity in Paris.³⁸

“The Age of Revolution validated virtuosity”, he concludes.³⁹

But that validation is only a part of the story—for this was an age that was at once fascinated with virtuosity and profoundly suspicious of it, at times even overtly hostile to it: the self-sustained virtuoso, unfettered by aristocratic patronage,⁴⁰ may have played into the cherished bourgeois values of (financial) independence and entrepreneurship rather nicely—as Maiko Kawabata aptly put it, virtuosic “hero-figures compensated for the seeming emptiness of everyday experience”⁴¹—but he could just as well be seen as *no more* than an entrepreneur and at that, an entrepreneur in music, in capitalism the one commodity that was supposed to be impervious to entrepreneurship;⁴² evidence of this we have already seen in some of those nineteenth-century encyclopedic entries presented above. And this hostility was not confined to music dictionaries and encyclopedias of the time; in fact, 1830s Paris was a hotbed not only of virtuosic stardom, but also of increasingly assertive polemics against it. Gooley, for instance, goes so far as to call the 1830s “the most intense period of anti-virtuosity backlash in the history of instrumental music”.⁴³

³⁸ Metzner 1998, p. 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

⁴⁰ Though, according to David Gramit, not so much in Germany as in France and England: “in the German states dozens of court musical establishments, from the tiniest ecclesiastical court to the royal establishments of Berlin or Vienna, continued to provide livelihoods for numerous German musicians well into the nineteenth century”; see Gramit 2004, p. 83. Gramit credits the survival of aristocratic patronage in Germany for the rise of the notion of music’s aesthetic autonomy in German and not in French or English thought.

⁴¹ Kawabata 2004, p. 106.

⁴² Cf. Gramit 2004, p. 81: “it cannot be denied that considering the concept of musical entrepreneurship in relation to the realm of classical music creates an uneasy association. Whereas entrepreneurship is inevitably connected with the worlds of commerce and marketing, the very notion of the classical is seen to imply that here, at least, the music is freed of such base associations and employed to loftier ends transcending the temporally limited and the material”.

⁴³ Gooley 2004a, p. 13.

The studies discussed above are primarily focused on the role of early-nineteenth-century music aesthetics in generating hostility toward the figure of the virtuoso. But aesthetics was only one context for the assessment of the virtuoso: the other, perhaps larger context was precisely the early-nineteenth-century individualism that Metzner so unproblematically celebrates, the valorization of the heroic, bourgeois individual and his (for it was always a he—more on that in Chapter Four) allegedly boundless powers. In fact, just like virtuosity, that individualism provoked as much fascination as it did fear and anxiety. And even though none of the studies of virtuosity discussed so far make this their prime concern, their authors are all manifestly aware of it. Samson’s book is a case in point: despite his focus on music aesthetics and the work concept, he gestures toward this issue in a number of places. He tells us, for instance, that the virtuoso “stood for freedom, for Faustian man, for the individual in search of self-realisation—free, isolated, striving, desiring”.⁴⁴ But then at the same time, this was a risky game: “Highly valued when kept within certain boundaries, individuality courted censure when it exceeded them, just as it courted popularity”.⁴⁵ And Richard Leppert, too, draws a similar conclusion: “The virtuoso was a troublesome paradox: he was the literal embodiment of extreme individuality, but one that ran risk of exceeding the demands of bourgeois decorum, reserve, and respectability”.⁴⁶ In his take on virtuosity and subjectivity, Bruno Moysan likewise focuses on the ambivalent status of the virtuoso as an embodiment of both extreme individuality and lack of rational control.⁴⁷

Only Dana Gooley has addressed this problematic status of virtuosity with regards to subjectivity in substantial detail. In “The Battle against Instrumental Virtuosity in the Early

⁴⁴ Samson 2003, pp. 75–76.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

⁴⁶ Leppert and Zank 1999, p. 259.

⁴⁷ Moysan 2005.

Nineteenth Century”, Gooley surmises a number of possible reasons for the opposition to instrumental virtuosity so prevalent in German criticism of the time, among them the vested interests of the entrenched class of music professionals in German cities and towns and a certain “small-town mentality” in their hostility to (by definition) foreign, itinerant virtuosi. But, seeking to account for “the extremely fervent and moralistic tone of much anti-virtuosity rhetoric”, Gooley focuses on “a preoccupation with the solo virtuoso as a positive or negative model of selfhood”, which he diagnoses in much of this body of criticism.⁴⁸ In a move comparable to what this dissertation will do, Gooley brings German Idealist philosophy, that is, more precisely, Hegel’s aesthetics of performance and conception of subjectivity (much more on which in Chapter One below), to bear on the contemporary reception of instrumental virtuosity, noting that Hegel’s “ideas are echoed in the essays on virtuosity” he chose to discuss. Gooley asserts that a “common critique of virtuosity [...] was the charge of excessive egotism [...] philosophically minded watchdogs faulted virtuosity for its glorification of the ‘kleines Ich’, the individual with no representation in the social or aesthetic object”.⁴⁹ The point of contention with Hegel is that the virtuoso, with his unrestrained performance of individuality, lapses into what Hegel diagnosed as “atomicity”, in his opinion the most dangerous tendency of modernity, whereby individuals care only for their most selfish, immediate interests, entirely disregarding those of the community to which they belong (e.g. their estate, town, and, finally, the state). By contrast to that perceived “atomicity” of the subject of modernity, Hegel theorizes the social as the only truly free subject: one who understands that he (Hegel explicitly reserves real, “actual” subjectivity for men) may only realize his essence and freedom in a mutually respecting

⁴⁸ Gooley 2006, pp. 76–77.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

communion with other fellow-subjects. Hegel will duly put his understanding of free subjectivity to work in his political philosophy—but more on that in Chapter One. As for musical performance, the true Hegelian performer is therefore the one who realizes that he is only a part of a larger whole (a chamber ensemble, an orchestra; also, of the work being performed) and not the only “subject” around. And the virtuoso, stealing all the limelight and putting himself at the center at the expense of everybody and everything else, clearly appears to be in violation of that precept.

That the virtuoso’s embodiment of extreme individuality was a risky business is manifest in the case of Liszt, the paradigmatic embodiment of virtuosity. Thus, reflecting on the wide variety of public personae that Liszt wore during his short but eventful virtuoso career (over a thousand recitals over the course of ten years)—“interpreter of ‘classical’ works, German patriot, Hungarian patriot, man of letters, the composer-pianist, the artist as aristocrat, as prophet, as humanitarian, or as revolutionary”⁵⁰—Gooley notes that Liszt strove for universality, but only ended up assuming a number of seemingly incompatible guises,⁵¹ which, in the eyes of the public, at times likened him—pejoratively—to a “chameleon”.⁵² Pointing to the disturbing suspicion of an emptiness behind all those guises, Bernstein’s conclusions can be interpreted as taking Gooley’s insights to their logical outcome:

This is why Liszt is *verkehrt*, inverted; there is no original presence behind his appearance, for his presence as Liszt consists precisely of his staged appearance. Liszt’s art is not *composition*, expression in revelation, but performance: the organization and realization within time of the technical means of producing effects. [...] he inscribes veritable expression into the dissimulating traits of the virtuoso performance.⁵³

⁵⁰ Gooley 2004a, p. 14.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 264: “He tried to mean everything, only to end up meaning a multitude of things”.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵³ Bernstein 1998, p. 67.

It is equally important to note that Liszt here appears as but an embodiment—albeit a paradigmatic one—of the virtuoso in general:

Liszt presents a spectacle of alteration. His consistent inconsistency forms the very consistency of the virtuoso—an inconsistency determined by the oscillation between egotistic protrusion and transmissive self-effacement. Liszt's most disturbing trait is probably his ability to simulate the genuine with the same ease as he produces the hyperbolically artificial, that is, to manipulate both sides of the virtuoso's character.⁵⁴

Facing an overwhelmingly wide array of guises, many of which seem mutually exclusive but still equally compelling, one finds it difficult to tell who the “real” Liszt/virtuoso is, Bernstein argues, or even if there was such a thing at all. Several other authors have drawn similar conclusions. Cécile Reynaud writes about “an expressionless virtuosity that [...] in the end prefers as its genitor not the musician but the automaton”.⁵⁵ Similarly, Kerry Murphy sees the virtuoso in the nineteenth-century imagination as both a romantic hero and a symptom of that age's “cult of mechanization”.⁵⁶ Finally, Pascal Fournier's dissertation is a study of occultist tropes in the reception of virtuosity, whereby the virtuoso is imagined—and feared—as a soulless body possessed and animated by the Devil.⁵⁷ Virtuosity, then, not only compromises the purity and freedom of the individual and the autonomous work of art as its model, but also challenges those very notions, threatening to expose them as false. Its disturbing suggestion is, in other words, that there is no interiority, that performative exteriority is all there is and that there is nothing behind it.

⁵⁴ Bernstein 1998, p. 112.

⁵⁵ Reynaud 2003, p. 109.

⁵⁶ Murphy 1995, p. 94.

⁵⁷ Fournier 2001.

Interpreting Secondary Literature and Going Beyond

So far, we have seen that by the late nineteenth century the reception of virtuosity had undergone a substantial shift, from neutral acceptance in Brossard and other eighteenth-century sources, to explicit hostility in the likes of Schilling and Grove. We have also seen how modern scholarship has interpreted this change. Although the interpretations summarized above might seem quite heterogeneous to the casual observer, part of the argument advanced here will be that they actually share some substantial common ground. That common ground is twofold. Firstly, it has to do with the determination of this dissertation's object of study: all of the readings discussed above, like the present dissertation, address instrumental virtuosity only, and not the vocal virtuosity of opera. There are a number of specific reasons for this. The first is the fact that (vocal) virtuosity had been central to opera almost since its inception in early-seventeenth-century Italy, whereas in instrumental music it only really came to the fore towards 1800, with the expansion of public concert life (more on which below). And although (vocal) virtuosity had generated hostility at least as early as Benedetto Marcello's *Il teatro alla moda*, his famous 1720 satirical pamphlet, as well as arguably spawned numerous attempts of opera reform later on in the century (Metastasio, Gluck), it was never so roundly condemned by the critical community as instrumental virtuosity was from the 1830s on.

Opera critics' greater tolerance for virtuosity brings us to the second main reason why contemporary scholarship (including this dissertation) has focused on instrumental rather than vocal virtuosity: aesthetics. More precisely, the new romantic aesthetics of music, emerging around 1800 and discussed in Chapter One below, applied to instrumental music only, inasmuch as E. T. A. Hoffmann, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and, before them, even Kant, regarded

only instrumental music as purely musical, free of text, staging, and other such extra-musical “admixtures”, as Hoffmann called them. In other words, for Hoffmann and his colleagues music was an abstract (and metaphysical) art of combining wordless sonorities in time and harmony. Therefore, to them it seemed obvious that only instrumental music was pure music, whereas vocal music was music *with* words, opera was music *with* words and *with* staging, etc.; Chapter One deals with this in detail.

Of course, the traditional segregation of opera from instrumental music in the consideration of aesthetics is problematic and warrants a study of its own. For instance, regarding vocal music (including opera), one might well argue that the sung words, syllables, vowels, and consonants are, *qua* timbre, an integral and inseparable part of the sound of music, just as instrumentation and orchestration are among the key aspects of the sound of a symphony. Unless we actually deem music somehow separable from and independent of sound (as much of nineteenth-century aesthetics did; more on which below), no analytical study of music that disregards the actual sounds of music (*qua* timbre, for instance, in an orchestral work) should claim to be producing complete analytical readings of music. And as Chapter One shows in greater detail, early-nineteenth-century aesthetics had no qualms about segregating instrumental music from other kinds of music and, moreover, emphatically posited music as independent from sound and thus also from performance. Chapters Two and Three show what consequences such a conception of music had on the valorization of composition and performance in critical discourse and, by extension, on the critical reception of virtuosity. Briefly returning to opera once more, one might also read the rising hostility to instrumental virtuosity as an anxiety provoked by the perceived bleed-through of operatic theatricality and stardom into the supposedly sacrosanct domain of instrumental music.

Secondly, the common ground shared by all the readings of virtuosity discussed above, as well as this dissertation, concerns the link between virtuosity and subjectivity. Most of the authors addressed above discuss it explicitly, in terms of the virtuoso serving as a model of free and enterprising bourgeois subjectivity. What distinguishes this dissertation from those earlier studies is that I seek to interpret the hostility to virtuosity in much of its early and mid-nineteenth-century reception by linking the contemporary developments in the aesthetics of music to those in the conception of subjectivity. Of course, linking nineteenth-century aesthetics and subjectivity is hardly new; what is new, however, is the interpretation of early and mid-nineteenth-century critical reception of virtuosity built upon it, which this dissertation offers. We will be returning to that shortly; but before that, we must spend some more time on the links between aesthetics (especially that of music) and subjectivity.

Those links have been most compellingly discussed outside of musicology, by Andrew Bowie in his *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*—a key text for this dissertation. Bowie's main claim is that the aesthetic autonomy of art and especially of music served as a symbol for that of the subject, at a time when post-Napoleonic reactionary political repression and the economic repression of early capitalism were making the notion of subjective freedom seem increasingly tenuous. Supposedly autonomous and inherently worthy, art was thus meant to provide a model of existence endowed with both freedom and absolute, not merely exchange value. In other words, Bowie's central claim is that the major thinkers of early-nineteenth-century German Romanticism—Novalis, Hölderlin, Schelling, Friedrich Schlegel, and E. T. A. Hoffmann, among others—conceived of art and especially of music as aesthetically autonomous and transcendental in order to provide a model of the autonomy of the human subject:

The aesthetic product thus becomes a utopian symbol of the realisation of freedom: in it we can see or hear an image of what the world could be like if freedom were realised in it.⁵⁸

Strictly speaking, Bowie's "aesthetic product" pertains to all kinds of aesthetic creativity, here understood as the production of objects or works without an immediate, material use-value. But the pride of place here belongs to the musical aesthetic product, because, as Bowie asserts, "[m]usic inherently has the potential to sustain aesthetic autonomy via its non-representational character".⁵⁹ In other words, music is seen as more autonomous than any other art, because it is non-representational: unlike painting or sculpture, it does not depend on an extraneous object of representation. Crucially then, music does not and cannot represent anything, and its interiority, though accepted as metaphysically existent, remains mysterious and ineffable. Thus in one of the strangest twists of Western philosophical aesthetics, what used to disqualify music, and especially instrumental music, as "pleasant nonsense" in the words of Johann Sulzer, or as a merely "agreeable art" in those of Kant—namely, music's non-representationality—after 1800 comes to elevate it as "the most romantic of the arts". Or, as Mark Evan Bonds put it: "Long regarded as a liability, the vague content of instrumental music was now seen as an asset".⁶⁰ But even more importantly, Bowie points, music thus reconceived, comes to symbolize the autonomous subject and its own ineffable interiority.⁶¹

However, there is one more conclusion that Bowie fails—or refuses—to draw: that German philosophers' reliance on music as paradigmatic of the autonomous subject increased as

⁵⁸ Bowie 2003a, p. 57.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁶⁰ Bonds 1997, p. 387.

⁶¹ In his *Music, Philosophy and Modernity* Bowie will forward an even more ambitious claim, that nineteenth-century thinking on freedom and subjectivity shaped not only the contemporary philosophical discourse of music, but also contemporary music itself: "Ideas about music and the most significant music itself both take on and create new meanings in relation to conflicting conceptions of *freedom*"; see Bowie 2007, p. 171.

the philosophical, political, and economic tenability of that subject diminished over the course of the nineteenth century. Two notable examples, the first of which will be discussed in detail below, are Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. As is well known, both thinkers centered their thought on a radical rejection of the free and self-identical subject of the German Enlightenment and both elevated music above all the other arts, into a domain of its own. By contrast, the two other central figures of German Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought, Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, still subscribed to the notion of subjective freedom (albeit in very different ways, more on which below), whilst consigning music lower in their respective aesthetic hierarchies, below poetry and philosophy in Hegel's case and in Kant's, below the visual arts. It is as though Schopenhauer and Nietzsche had a more urgent need for the aesthetic autonomy of music than either Kant or Hegel did, as a sanctuary from the bleak import of their own conclusions about human subjectivity.

Bowie's compelling demonstration, regarding Schopenhauer and Schelling, of the relevance of the nineteenth century's progressively more skeptical accounts of subjectivity to the contemporary apotheosis of music in philosophical aesthetics, along with the absence of a comparable apotheosis in those thinkers who still posited the subject as essentially free—Kant and Hegel, both discussed in Chapter One—informs the project of this dissertation. Since, as Bowie shows, the new philosophical conception of music as autonomous and transcendental came to the aid of an increasingly tenuous-looking free subjectivity by symbolizing it (though not, as noted above, for those thinkers who still posited the subject as free), any perceived attack on such a conception of music was by extension also perceived as an attack on the free subject that such a conception of music was meant to symbolize. In other words, virtuosity grew suspect because it was increasingly deemed incompatible with, and threatening to, the idea of music as a

transcendental and aesthetically autonomous art and via it, also to the notion of subjective freedom, which that philosophic conception of music symbolized. To put it another way, we might say that virtuosity was dreaded because it exposed the irreducible bodily grounding and social contingency not only of music, but also of the human subject. Virtuosity simply does not fit into Bowie's narrative of the rise of music in Idealist philosophy, because it takes music out of the realm of the autonomous and absolute and places it in that of contingent, embodied performance. By re-embodiment music, as it were, virtuosity strips it of its potential to symbolize the increasingly embattled free human subjectivity. In effect, virtuosity grows obsolete due to its incompatibility with the new Romantic notion of music as abstract and metaphysical and siding with the old, Enlightened, and, as we will see in Chapter One, very Kantian view of music as bodily performance.

Of course, none of this means to suggest that other interpretations, such as Gooley's discussed above, are necessarily flawed or inadequate: such more "mundane" concerns as wanting to keep one's job did probably play a big part in German music professionals' hostility to virtuosi, as Gooley argues. But in referring to Hegel's conception of subjectivity, Gooley focuses not so much on those immediate causes of early- and mid-nineteenth-century hostility to instrumental virtuosity, the critics' vested interests and the like, as on the *terms* (philosophic, intellectual, aesthetic) of that hostility. The present dissertation is in that limited regard somewhat similar to Gooley's effort, but with the crucial difference that it attempts to situate the many different aspects of the contemporary critical reception of instrumental virtuosity (not just the perceived "egotism" of virtuosi) within a wider conceptual framework of contemporary music aesthetics and philosophy of subjectivity.

Therefore, Metzner's reading of the virtuoso as a celebrated representation of the new, heroic, bourgeois individuality, or Leppert's warning that virtuosity was also viewed with revulsion because it overstepped the bounds of bourgeois propriety, are not the whole story; neither is Samson and others' exclusive focus on the rise of the work concept in the aesthetics of music. The present study does not pretend to be the whole story either, but seeks to complement those readings by positing that both virtuosity and the romantic aesthetics of music, with which virtuosity was perceived to be incompatible, should be seen within the larger context of the nineteenth-century crisis of free subjectivity: virtuosity, grounded in the body and dependent on the market, reveals the untenability of the philosophical conception of music as free and transcendent and via it, that of the utopian conception of the subject as essentially free, in contrast to its reality, then as now, of political and economic contingency. Simply put, virtuosity exposes the clash between philosophic, metaphysical conceptions of music and the historical-materialist concerns of the production and consumption of music as a cultural practice. The economic and commodified figure of the virtuoso squares neither with the free subject of Idealist philosophy nor with the aesthetic autonomy of music that was meant to symbolize it. Borrowing David Gramit's apt expression, we might say that virtuosity was castigated because it revealed the sad truth that even "serious music still needed to be sold".⁶² Hence the constantly deteriorating critical reception of virtuosity throughout the nineteenth century and the critics' ultimately successful drive to marginalize the virtuosity of the kind practiced by Liszt and his contemporaries. As the chapters below demonstrate, only if music aesthetics is viewed within the larger context of the nineteenth-century philosophical thinking on subjectivity can we understand a number of prominent aspects of contemporary critical reception of instrumental virtuosity: for

⁶² Gramit 2004, p. 90.

instance, why nineteenth-century critics valued composition so much more than performance (including, of course, virtuosity), reconceptualized performance as an interpretation of the work, demanded originality but condemned idiosyncrasy, insisted on a never fully explained notion of expressivity and distrusted technique in virtuosic performance and composition alike, and preferred the clear-cut formal structures of earlier (and dead) composers' music and their old, "respectable" genres (e.g. the sonata and the fugue) to the new, more rhapsodic forms and genres of virtuosic music (e.g. fantasias, sets of variations, etc.). These are only some of the specific issues in the reception of virtuosity that, prior to this dissertation, had not been explored or discussed in sufficient detail. The chapters below show how all of those lines of criticism conspired to bring the *Glanzzeit* of virtuosity to an end.

The Scope, Sources, and Methodology

The scope of this dissertation is determined by key events in political history, the history of philosophy, and the history of music performance and criticism. Roughly, that scope covers the critical reception of virtuosity in three centers of European concert life: Leipzig, Paris, and London, as transmitted by the major music periodicals issued in those cities between 1815 and 1850. This section serves to explain the delimiting of the dissertation's object of study to those few decades and geographic locales.

While, of course, virtuosity and virtuosi had existed long before 1815 (e.g. Corelli, Locatelli, and Tartini on the violin, C. P. E. Bach and his father on the keyboard, etc.),⁶³ the public kind of virtuosity practiced by the likes of Liszt only became possible after 1815 and ended around 1850, when a number of virtuosi, including Liszt, Thalberg, and Chopin, retired or died.⁶⁴ This was due to a variety of developments in political history and that of music performance and criticism. First, following three and a half decades of protracted turmoil, wars, and revolutions that had erupted in 1789, Napoleon's final defeat in 1815 re-established political stability across Europe, albeit enforced with ever more stifling vigilance, especially in Central Europe and Restoration France. Nonetheless, the Congress of Vienna reanimated the concert scenes of major Continental centers, such as Vienna and Paris, as well as those of other cities, and provided relative freedom of travel across Europe's convoluted political borders, without which the careers of travelling virtuosi such as Liszt or Paganini would have been impossible. Also, the return of political stability in continental Europe enabled economic activity to resume there, including the construction of railways, which began in Belgium in 1835. The development of rail travel in Britain, Europe, and the United States enabled a larger stratum of the population to travel across long distances, as well as virtuosi like Liszt and Thalberg to tour not only the major centers, but also some more "exotic" places, such as Moscow and Saint Petersburg, Madrid and Lisbon, Bucharest, Istanbul and many smaller cities and towns across Europe and the Americas. Trains carried not only people, but also information, news, and ideas around, which enabled the burgeoning musical press (more on which below) to keep its readership abreast of

⁶³ For studies of eighteenth-century instrumental virtuosity, see Reimer 1973 and Millot 1993.

⁶⁴ In Richard Taruskin's useful summary: "There were always itinerant musicians [...] The difference was that such musicians, especially the instrumentalists, had formerly subsisted at the margins of society, only remotely involved with [...] literate traditions [...], which were the product and preserve of the higher social echelons. The new nineteenth-century itinerants, by contrast, were the stars of the musical world, and took their place among the literate tradition's primary bearers and beneficiaries"; see Taruskin 2010.

musical life across Europe and even the Americas, not just that of their own towns and immediate surroundings. This in turn conditioned the emergence of a European-wide international critical opinion on music. All of these developments would have been unthinkable only a decade or two before. Last but not least, the post-Napoleonic resumption of economic activity on the Continent enabled the piano makers of Vienna and Paris to resume their trade and develop technical improvements to their instruments, without which many of Liszt's feats would have been impossible: the facility of touch characteristic of Viennese pianos (Steiner and others), Érard's double escapement, and the sturdiness of Broadwood's designs.⁶⁵ The European-wide revolutions of 1848 were to disrupt that economic activity and political stability once more.⁶⁶

But while it lasted, stability and prosperity (at least as far as the privileged classes were concerned) enabled an unprecedented expansion of musical life in a number of European capitals, first and foremost Paris, then London, and then to a lesser degree Vienna, Berlin, Leipzig, and Saint Petersburg. What made Paris and London stand out were their sheer size, supported by wealth plundered from the respective colonial empires of Britain and France, and the expansion of musical life in those two cities beyond the traditional confines of royal and aristocratic palaces into the new public concert halls and semi-public salons, patronized by the ascendant bourgeoisie, equally rapacious for money and cultural prestige. For all those reasons, the present study is focused on the critical reception of virtuosity in the musical life of Paris and London, as transmitted by the music periodicals (more on which below) that were issued in those

⁶⁵ The important topic of the early-nineteenth-century technological innovations in piano-making will be addressed again, in the context of Paris and London as the two main centers of nineteenth-century musical life in Europe. For more general information on the history of piano-building, see any of the following studies: Leipp 1969, Ehrlich 1975, Wainwright 1975, Ehrlich 1976, Grover 1976, Haine 1985, Hildebrandt 1988, Loesser 1990, Cole 1998, and Good 2001.

⁶⁶ More detailed discussions of early-nineteenth-century socio-economic conditions and their impact on the history of music in that century may be found in a number of nineteenth-century music history, for instance in Raynor 1976, Dahlhaus 1989, and Taruskin 2010.

two cities between *c.* 1815 and *c.* 1850, as well as their coverage of major virtuosi's performances in other cities and towns. In addition, for reasons that are explained further below, we will also be looking at the coverage of virtuosity by two major music periodicals published in Leipzig at this time.

Despite London's superior wealth and France's chronic political instability, Paris indeed was "the capital of the nineteenth century", contemporary virtuosity included.⁶⁷ It was one of the world's largest cities, the capital and greatest city of a vast colonial empire, all of which vouchsafed for plentiful patronage, both institutional and private. Among the former, the foremost was the concert hall of the Conservatoire, founded in 1795, which, under François Habeneck's able directorship, boasted of Europe's best orchestra of the time. The hall of the Conservatoire was also a major venue for the numerous virtuosi who resided in or toured Paris every season. The private venues included the many aristocratic and bourgeois salons, as well as the showrooms of the major piano manufacturers based in Paris, such as Pleyel and Érard. The technological improvements in the construction of pianos, such as Érard's double escapement, which enabled Liszt to dazzle his audiences by repeating the same note on the keyboard at extremely fast tempi, were also an important factor in the rise of public concert virtuosity, because, simply put, they made pianos louder and therefore able to dominate spaces larger than ever, including, eventually, the Opéra, which Liszt was famously the first to use for a solo recital. Liszt was in fact the first virtuoso to stumble upon the idea of giving solo recitals: the

⁶⁷ On public concert virtuosity in Paris, see Mongrédien 1996, Leppert and Zank 1999, Simeone 2000, Betz 2001, Audéon 2002, and Levin 2009. Johnson 1995 is a great historical study of the musical life of revolutionary Paris in general.

usual public-concert practice, in Paris as elsewhere, was to aim at the greatest possible variety, by programming solo, orchestral, and vocal music all in a single evening.⁶⁸

If Paris was Europe's cultural capital, then London was certainly its political and financial counterpart. For most of the century, it was the largest city in the world and the capital of an even vaster colonial empire than that of France. Unlike Paris, it had an unperturbed nobility, in addition to an even wealthier bourgeoisie, which between the two of them generated unprecedented levels of patronage. If Paris still was the more culturally prestigious of the two cities, London was where the real money was made. Indeed, leading British and European music periodicals routinely criticized virtuosi such as Paganini and Liszt for subjecting their London audiences to ridiculously inflated ticket prices, many times higher than the most expensive recital, concert, and even opera tickets in Paris, Vienna, or Berlin. Nevertheless, in London such overpriced recitals were routinely attended in full. The city's main venue was the Hanover Square Rooms, opened in 1775. London could also boast of a dynamic piano-manufacturing industry, dominated by the Broadwoods and their superb, stable, and reliable design, which enabled the (mostly Continental) virtuosi of the London Pianoforte School to challenge the violin's supremacy as the ruling instrument of solo virtuosity.⁶⁹

No other European city could hope to rival London or Paris: Vienna, Europe's third largest city, was still reeling from Napoleon's occupations of 1804 and 1809, which had caused massive depopulation. The city offered mostly theatrical entertainment (sung and spoken) in its splendid venues, but there were almost no venues suited to virtuosic recitals. Until the opening of

⁶⁸ For brief historical summaries of nineteenth-century public-concert programming, see Lichtenfeld 1977 and Schneider 2000.

⁶⁹ For more on the London pianoforte school, see Temperley 1985 and Leppert and Zank 1999, pp. 239–40. For more on nineteenth-century London's music life in general, see Temperley 1988. For more on public virtuosity in London between 1770 and 1840, see Wood 2010.

the two halls of the Musikverein in 1870, practically the only option were the two halls of the Hofburg Redoutensaal; the larger was a seventeenth-century opera hall refurbished in 1700, the smaller was mostly used for balls, and both were expensive, heavily overbooked, and for most virtuosi too large.⁷⁰ Moreover, not even musical press was spared Prince Metternich's vigilant censorship in Vienna, which makes the musical life of post-Napoleonic Vienna harder to reconstruct than those of Paris or London.⁷¹ As for Berlin in the first half of the nineteenth century, it was only becoming a major city and cultural center at that time, recovering, similarly to Vienna, from the Napoleonic turmoil, the capital not of an empire but of a kingdom, albeit an aspiring one. In Berlin, too, though perhaps not quite so much as in Vienna, censorship did make an adverse effect on the city's musical press.⁷² Due to its size, imperial and aristocratic (though not bourgeois) wealth, the only other contender could have been Saint Petersburg, which did attract some virtuosi, such as Daniel Steibelt (1765–1823), to reside there, and many others to visit, including Robert and Clara Schumann. However, it was simply much too remote, in an age when roads were often treacherous and rail transportation was still in infancy, especially in Eastern Europe; furthermore, Saint Petersburg had very little press coverage of music.

The expansion of musical life and the concert-going public in those cities, especially in Paris and London, created a need for easily accessible information on local as well as regional, national, and international concert scenes, which the development of railways and telegraphy made seem less remote than ever before. Periodicals entirely dedicated to music, which had started to appear during the mid eighteenth century, were now given a significant boost from the growing needs of the European concert-going public. The “intellectual history of an epoch is

⁷⁰ For more on Viennese musical life between 1800 and 1850, see Gebesmair 2001. For concert life in Vienna, London, and Paris between 1830 and 1848, see Weber 1975.

⁷¹ Ullrich 1971.

⁷² For more on music reception in Berlin, see Rehm 1983.

strikingly reflected in its periodicals”, Imogen Fellingner and Julie Woodward assert;⁷³ a part of that intellectual history is certainly the critical reception of virtuosity. Therefore, this dissertation’s central historical sources comprise a selection of early- and mid-nineteenth-century Europe’s most influential music periodicals, which contain the bulk of information on the contemporary critical reception of instrumental virtuosity. Its focus on the major music periodicals edited in three different languages (German, French, and English) is one of the features that make this dissertation a study of early- and mid-nineteenth-century instrumental virtuosity without precedent in modern scholarship. Major non-musical dailies and weeklies, such as *The Times* of London and Paris’s *Journal des débats*, did also publish articles on music, mostly concert and opera reviews; but the present study is focused on the music periodicals, because they had the space and knowledge to treat virtuosity in much more detail, including issues pertaining to the aesthetics of music, which is crucial to the line of interpretation offered in this dissertation, as discussed above. In particular, the focus is on articles relating to some forty violin and piano virtuosi (virtuosi on other instruments being negligible in number and journalist coverage; see Appendix I), compiled by perusing the selected periodicals (and with much assistance from secondary literature on virtuosity)⁷⁴ and presented in Appendix III: reviews of their performances and compositions (for they all both composed and performed, usually their own music), their own reviews of or against other virtuosi (such as Liszt’s infamous “criticism” of Thalberg in the *Revue et Gazette*) and other published texts, as well as texts on virtuosity *per se* and on other relevant subjects, mostly from the domain of music aesthetics. The sheer breadth of the primary sources covered, relating not only to such major figures as Paganini,

⁷³ Fellingner and Woodward 2001.

⁷⁴ The most useful sources include: Charpentier 1925, Lenz 1971, Pincherle 1984, Cowden 1989, Roth 1997, Hamilton 1998, Gutknecht 2001, Schuenemann 2002, Eisen 2005, and Poniatowska 2006.

Chopin, Liszt, and Clara Schumann, but also to dozens of virtuosi who were then famous but are now largely forgotten, such as Ole Bull, Camillo Sivori, Heinrich Ernst, Henri Vieuxtemps, Alexander Dreyschock, and Marie Moke Pleyel, makes this the most exhaustive study of virtuosity in modern scholarship.

The rise of major music periodicals at this time, itself conditioned by the developments in political and music history discussed above, also helped define this dissertation's timeframe, that is, its starting point, inasmuch as all but one of them emerged only after 1800. While it must be noted that even in Paris and London, few people in the early and mid-nineteenth century were literate, intellectual, and wealthy enough to read music periodicals, those who did, formed the concert-going cultural elite, over whose music preferences respected critics such as Fétis or Schumann did hold considerable sway. This elite comprised the nobility (or, in Paris, its remnants), as well as the ever growing echelons of upper and even middle bourgeoisie.⁷⁵ Especially during the summer months, when many of these aristocratic and bourgeois families retired to their country estates, the major periodicals, obtained through post by subscription, were the best way to stay abreast of the musical goings on in the capital and the large centers abroad.⁷⁶ And while the circulation numbers of even the most influential periodicals rarely exceeded a thousand,⁷⁷ the major music journals were still powerful enough to create and shape public opinion on music and along with it, people's careers.

⁷⁵ For more information on the concert-going publics of Paris, London, and Leipzig, see Johnson 1995, Temperley 1988, and Herklotz 2000.

⁷⁶ For more general information on European nineteenth-century journalism in music and beyond, see Aitken 1987, Bloom 1972, Braun 1972, Bruckner-Bigenwald 1965, Cohen 1991, Don Vann and VanArsdel 1994, Ellis 1995, Fellinger and Woodward 2001, Langley 1983, Morrow 1990, Pederson 1995, Reeve 1987, and Schmitt-Thomas 1968.

⁷⁷ Katherine Ellis details that the prestigious *Revue et Gazette de Paris* had around 600 subscribers on average, reaching 875 by 1846, which was meager in comparison to *Le Siècle's* 41,500. But she also specifies that major European cities had numerous public reading rooms, where patrons had regular access to a wide selection of periodicals for a small fee—Paris alone had over 500 of these *cabinets de lecture*. See Ellis 1995, p. 1.

Now while it is true that music periodicals started appearing in Germany, France, and England as early as the 1690s, most of these publications contained either notated music only, or notices on important musical events (new operas and the like) with very little or no criticism at all.⁷⁸ Europe's first comprehensive scholarly and universal periodical on music appeared not in Paris or London, but in Leipzig, owing to the disproportionately vibrant cultural life of that Saxon town, the publishing center of German-speaking Europe⁷⁹ and a "city known throughout the German lands as a center for liberal thought".⁸⁰ That pioneering music periodical was the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, founded by Breitkopf & Härtel, the music publishers, in 1798. In Imogen Fellinger's assessment, it represented "the highest period of development in the 18th century and at the same time ushered in a new era in the history of musical periodicals".⁸¹ This is mainly because future journals—in Germany and beyond—followed its division into essays, biographical information, reviews of theoretical works and music, descriptions of instruments, news items in the form of letters, and miscellanea. Its first editor-in-chief was the superbly esteemed critic and playwright Johann Friedrich Rochlitz (1769–1842), a friend of Goethe, Schiller, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Spohr and Weber, and an acquaintance of Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert.⁸² Rochlitz edited the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* until 1818, "raised the journal to a high intellectual level and founded its international reputation as the leading musical periodical".⁸³ His was the first journal to enlist an extensive set of collaborators, no fewer than 130 in its first decade alone. Rochlitz was succeeded by Gottfried Härtel (of Breitkopf & Härtel,

⁷⁸ Fellinger and Woodward 2001.

⁷⁹ For more on Leipzig as a center of music publishing, see Plesske 1974; for more on Leipzig's musical life in the nineteenth century, see Herklotz 2000; for more on the rise of music criticism in Germany around 1800, see Pederson 1995.

⁸⁰ Daverio 1997, p. 115.

⁸¹ Fellinger and Woodward 2001.

⁸² Leuchtman and Deaville 2001.

⁸³ Fellinger and Woodward 2001.

1818–27), Gottfried Wilhelm Fink (1827–41), Carl Ferdinand Becker, Moritz Hauptmann, and Johann Christian Lobe. The most distinguished of these was probably Fink, largely owing to his “stubborn stand against the younger Romantics”, most notably Schumann.⁸⁴ Still, despite Fink’s opposition to Romanticism in music, under his editorship the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* regularly published editorial extracts from such romantic figures as Novalis, complemented with the more “classical” thoughts of Goethe and Fichte.

Before moving on to Fink’s competition, a word of caution is here in order: at this time, major music-publishing houses such as Breitkopf & Härtel did not hesitate to found and/or purchase and blatantly use their music periodicals to market their own publications, so the reviews published in such in-house periodicals, especially reviews of printed music, must always be taken with a grain of salt.⁸⁵ That said, we are not really after *the truth* here, in terms of doing music-historical detective work in order to determine whether the coverage of a particular virtuoso in a particular journal was fair or not; rather, we will be looking at the terms, values, and prejudices of that criticism, so as to arrive at an aesthetic-historical interpretation of the journalist reception of virtuosity in the early and mid-nineteenth century. In 1848 Breitkopf & Härtel discontinued the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, which marked the end of an era, in music journalism as well as for the purposes of this dissertation.⁸⁶

One reason why the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* folded was the appearance of another similarly comprehensive scholarly journal, the competition of which the older periodical could not sustain under Rochlitz’s less able successors: Robert Schumann’s *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. Schumann started his journal in 1834 with another three fellow “Davidsbündler”: the

⁸⁴ Warrack and Porter 2001.

⁸⁵ For more on Breitkopf & Härtel’s usage of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, see Sopart 2007.

⁸⁶ For more on the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, see Seidel 2004 and Wallace 2009; for more on Rochlitz’s editorship, see Gersthofer 2004; for more on Brendel’s editorship, see Seidel 2006.

well-known pedagogue and his future father-in-law Friedrich Wieck, as well as Julius Knorr and Ludwig Schunke, both pianists. However, because Wieck was often away chaperoning his daughter across Europe, Knorr ill, and Schunke apparently unable to string a decent clause in writing, it was mostly a singlehanded affair for Schumann, who soon assumed full ownership of the journal.⁸⁷ An important motive in the founding of the *Neue Zeitschrift* was Schumann's dissatisfaction with conservatism and critical indifference, chiefly that of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, edited at that time by the conservative theologian and composer Fink. Schumann therefore made radical, scholarly criticism the centerpiece of his journal, freely admitting his ideological bias in favor of the young and talented (e.g. Berlioz and Chopin), aspiring to inform and educate the wider public about them and against the stagnation of the status quo ("philistinism" was Schumann's word of choice), but at the same time maintaining an almost religious respect for the venerable figures of the present and the past: Mendelssohn, Weber, Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, and J. S. Bach. An additional advantage for Schumann over his competitors at the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* was that he, unlike them, was not an employee of a major music-publishing house, which enabled him to praise or condemn particular virtuosi and composers as he pleased, a privilege he used liberally. Schumann strove to cover not only the musical life of Leipzig, but those of other German and European centers, with the help of a large and constantly changing pool of critics and correspondents.⁸⁸ Although Schumann saw himself as a composer first, he attached much importance to his work in public criticism as well, since the *Neue Zeitschrift* was an increasingly influential arena where he could air his views on music and aesthetics, especially after Fink refused to let his name be so much as mentioned in

⁸⁷ For more information on Schumann's purchase of the *Neue Zeitschrift*, see Kross 1981 and Lebelt 1986.

⁸⁸ For more on Schumann's work in journalistic criticism and running of the *Neue Zeitschrift*, see Plantinga 1973 and Tomori 1997.

the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*.⁸⁹ Schumann had a lifelong interest in contemporary literature and philosophy, especially that of Jean Paul, E. T. A. Hoffmann, W. H. Wackenroder, Ludwig Tieck, A. F. J. Thibaut, as well as Hegel and Schopenhauer.⁹⁰ However, finding himself increasingly stifled as a composer by his editing duties at the *Neue Zeitschrift*, Schumann resigned in 1844; he was briefly succeeded by Oswald Lorenz, who had been acting editor during Schumann's sojourns in Vienna (1838–39) and Russia (1844), and then by Franz Brendel, who bought the journal in 1845 and edited it until his death in 1868. Under Brendel, the *Neue Zeitschrift* increasingly turned into an organ of the “new German” school of Liszt and others, losing some of its original cosmopolitan aesthetic.⁹¹

The major French historical source of the era is the Paris *Revue musicale*, started by François-Joseph Fétis in 1827 and merged with Maurice Schlesinger's *Gazette musicale de Paris* into the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, the most important French music periodical of the nineteenth century. Between the founding of the *Revue musicale* and his death in 1871, Fétis (1784–1871) remained “among the most influential musical figures in continental Europe”⁹² and the supreme authority on all things musical as far as Paris was concerned, in his capacities as professor and librarian of the *École royale de musique de Paris*, director of the Brussels Conservatory, critic, musicologist, composer, choirmaster, and conductor, all of that despite moving to Brussels for good in 1833.⁹³ Practically singlehanded, Fétis edited and wrote most of the contents of the *Revue musicale* between 1827 and 1833, producing a journal of such overall

⁸⁹ Warrack and Porter 2001.

⁹⁰ Brown 1968, pp. 7–20. For more on the philosophical grounding of Schumann's aesthetics and criticism, see Rummenholler 1980, Sponheuer 1980, Kaden 1986, Edler 2001, and Tadday 2007.

⁹¹ Vosteen 2001.

⁹² Wangermée *et al.* 2001.

⁹³ Cloutier 1991, pp. 2–3.

quality that even today, “it is viewed by scholars as a reference work”.⁹⁴ Fétis’s erudition was such that he wrote with authority (though often not without pedantry) on the theory and history of music (especially on “early” music, including sixteenth-century and earlier, his favorite pet subject and something of a pioneering mission in France), on the musical life of Paris and beyond (including concerts and opera productions), and on organology, both concerning old, historical instruments as well as new designs (e.g. those of Érard, Pleyel, and the piano-manufacturers of Vienna and London). Fétis’s extensive personal library included not only a wealth of sources on music (including first-edition copies of some of the music lexica and encyclopedias discussed above, such as Janowka’s *Clavis ad Thesaurum* of 1701, Brossard’s *Dictionnaire* of 1703, and Gerber’s *Lexikon* of 1812–14), but also works by Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Victor Cousin, the founder of the French philosophy of eclecticism, all of whom he listed in an 1838 letter to the Paris publisher Troupenas as formative influences on his own philosophy of music.⁹⁵ Certain aspects of Fétis’s conservatism can probably be traced back to his reverence of Cousin and, via him, of Schelling, such as his teleological conception of history, belief in the ideal essence of beauty hidden in all “true” music, formalism, and a balanced, one might equally say Kantian or Schellingian, view of “true geniuses” or *grands hommes* as exceptional individuals in the service of larger historical forces.⁹⁶

By comparison, the expatriot Prussian publisher Maurice/Moritz Schlesinger (1798–1871), at first Fétis’s competitor and then successor, was a much more down-to-earth figure. Fétis’s move to Brussels, compounded with the sheer burden of producing the *Revue musicale*

⁹⁴ Cloutier 1991, p. 1.

⁹⁵ Ellis 1995, p. 34. For more on Fétis’s intellectual debt to Cousin, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, see Schellhous 1991, pp. 219–34. For more on the contents of Fétis’s rich personal library, see Becquart 1972 and Huys 1972.

⁹⁶ In addition to Katherine Ellis’s excellent work, for more on Fétis and the *Revue musicale* see also Bloom 1972 and 1987, and Dufour 2008.

and his son Edouard's disinterest in the job (despite his concert and opera criticism, which started appearing in the *Revue musicale* from 1831 on),⁹⁷ made Fétis relinquish his journal and editorial duties in 1835 to Schlesinger, who merged the *Revue musicale* with his *Gazette musicale* into one journal, the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*. Fétis continued to write for the *Revue et Gazette*, mostly concert reviews, articles in music history and theory, as well as on the musical life of Brussels, but now he was only one—albeit a prominent one—among many contributors, no fewer than twenty at any given time. Editorial duties, however, were reserved for the pragmatic Schlesinger, who took the journal into a markedly different direction: initially, he had founded the *Gazette musicale* to counter what he saw as the arcane, conservative, and pedantic criticism of Fétis's *Revue musicale* and to champion young Romantic composers such as Liszt and Chopin (in this regard, Schlesinger's positioning *vis-à-vis* Fétis was somewhat similar to that of Schumann *vis-à-vis* Fink), but unlike Schumann, Schlesinger was also a music publisher and partly regarded his journal (like Breitkopf & Härtel did the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*) as an extension of his publishing house, which, of course, had a hand in much of the criticism published in the *Revue et Gazette*. Katherine Ellis writes that “the nature of many reviews [...] is explicable by reference to the commercial interest involved”, whereby “living composers almost inevitably took their place on one of two lists: the ‘sacred-cow list’ or the ‘son-of-a-bitch list’”.⁹⁸ It is perhaps symptomatic of the dubious standing of virtuosity in the critical community of the 1830s Paris that Schlesinger refused to advertize Liszt's music, despite the overall Romantic orientation of the *Revue et Gazette*, possibly due to Liszt's iconic status and excessive popularity as a travelling virtuoso, although he did publish much of Liszt's criticism,

⁹⁷ There is some information on Edouard Fétis in Becquart 1999.

⁹⁸ Ellis 1995, p. 142.

including his famous “Lettre d’un bachelier ès-musique” and infamous “criticism” of Thalberg. However, the Romantic orientation that Schlesinger imposed on the *Revue et Gazette* was dampened by the conservatism of Fétis’s contributions, especially after the Brandus brothers’ takeover in 1846. The Brandus, who owned the journal until its demise in 1880, took it even closer to the cultural *juste milieu* of mid-century France.⁹⁹

The “only serious rival in France to Schlesinger’s *Revue et Gazette musicale* until 1860” was Marie-Pierre-Pascal and Léon Escudier’s *La France musicale*, founded in 1837.¹⁰⁰ Despite their focus on Italian opera (so as to fill a niche that Schlesinger left for them by concentrating on French and German instrumental music), the Escudier brothers’ journal still managed to cover the activities of French and foreign virtuosi as well. *La France musicale* regularly published extended reviews of their published music and performances both in France and beyond, as well as shorter news items related to virtuosi (e.g. provincial and foreign reports, especially from London, concert announcements, etc.), closely following the organization of the *Revue et Gazette*, their main competitors. The Escudiers enlisted the services of some of France’s foremost music critics, including Joseph Ortigue, Castil-Blaze, and composer Adolph Adam, as well as such authors as Balzac and Théophile Gautier. “For its content, its journalistic probing and for the liveliness of its style, *La France musicale* is essential for the study of contemporary music and musical events in Paris and the activity of French musicians abroad”.¹⁰¹

The British counterpart to *La France musicale* and the *Revue et Gazette* was *The Musical World*, the “preeminent nineteenth-century British music journal”, published in London between

⁹⁹ For more on Schlesinger, see Devriès 1980 and Randier-Glenisson 1991. For more on Schlesinger and the Brandus brothers, see Blamont 1999.

¹⁰⁰ Macnutt 2001.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

1836 and 1891.¹⁰² It was founded by London music publisher J. Alfred Novello, who entrusted his friend Charles Cowden Clarke, a London bookseller and publisher, with the editorship of the journal; however, it seems that Clarke's duties were largely performed by Henry John Gauntlett (1805–1876), an important organist and authority on church music. In 1838, the journal was reorganized under an unidentified music critic from the *Atlas*, possibly Edward Holmes (1797–1859). The following year, George Macfarren (1788–1843), father of composer George Alexander Macfarren (1813–1887) was appointed editor. For a short while in 1840, Macfarren was assisted by music theorist Alfred Day (1810–1849), who was replaced by James William Davison (1813–1885). In 1844, Davison bought a 50% stake in the *Musical World* and became its editor, a position he held until his death in 1885. As was the custom in nineteenth-century journalism, a vast majority of articles published in *The Musical World* are unsigned; most are probably by Davison.¹⁰³ Although he occupied a central position in British music criticism, comparable to that of Schumann in German, or Berlioz in French music criticism, Davison had few of Schumann or Berlioz's skills in criticism, formal analysis, or writing. His position (and, by extension, that of *The Musical World*) was shaped by his dogged reverence of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven and the three nineteenth-century composers whom he considered their rightful heirs: Mendelssohn, Spohr, and Sterndale Bennett. On the other hand, he reserved unusual amounts of scorn (though with little comprehension) for Schubert and most of the younger Continental composers, especially Schumann, Chopin, and Liszt. Despite the flaws and idiosyncrasies of Davison's critical writing (a particularly colorful specimen of which is

¹⁰² Kitson 2007, p. ix.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

discussed at the beginning of the following chapter), it shows him as a man of considerable learning, especially in the aesthetics of music, and strong convictions.¹⁰⁴

Its preeminence in Britain notwithstanding, *The Musical World* was certainly not the first British periodical dedicated to music. It was preceded by *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* (1818–28) and *The Harmonicon* (1823–33), the first two English music periodicals to survive for longer than two years. Both journals are also important sources for the present dissertation. *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* was modeled after the *Edinburgh Review* and the Leipzig *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* by its founder and editor-in-chief Richard Mackenzie Bacon (1776–1844), who also wrote most of the articles covering a wide array of topics, including music theory and history, biographies of composers and performers, instruments, performance practice, and more. Also, reviews of British and European concert life and published music occupied an important place in the journal.¹⁰⁵ Its main rival, *The Harmonicon*, was co-founded by the London printer William Clowes, who owned it, and William Ayrton (1777–1858), composer, writer, impresario, co-founder of the London Philharmonic Society, musical director of King’s Theatre, honorary music critic to *The Morning Chronicle* (1813–26) and to *The Examiner* (1837–51). Each issue opened with a “biographical memoir” of a composer or performer, followed by a mixture of feature articles, polemical correspondence, and articles translated from European journals, most often the *Revue musicale* and the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. The journal’s largest regular component was the “Review of Music”, which usually concerned published music, but also involved concert program listings. Another major section was the “Foreign Musical Report”, which brought news

¹⁰⁴ For more information on Davison, see Kitson 1999 and Reid 1984.

¹⁰⁵ Kitson 1989.

and reviews of performances in both major and minor European centers, with especially comprehensive reports from Paris.¹⁰⁶

Before moving on to chapter summaries, a few more lines must be added here concerning the present dissertation's joint treatment of Paris, London, and Leipzig and the major music periodicals edited there. These European centers and the music periodicals they spawned are treated here as though they had participated in the same unified discourse. That is because to a large extent they in fact did, despite a number of inevitable differences, nuances, and idiosyncrasies between them (e.g. a clear bias in favor of native and in-house virtuosi, especially in the *Revue et Gazette*, the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, and *The Musical World*, a penchant for high-brow music analysis, aesthetics, and philosophy in Schumann's *Neue Zeitschrift* and Fétis's *Revue*, the stylistic impact of Romantic literature on Schumann's criticism, etc.). That said, it was already remarked above that the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* had set a standard in its organization and covering of music in Leipzig that other German as well as French and British music periodicals followed. All of the journals studied in this dissertation had correspondents in all of Europe's major centers (Paris, London, Vienna, Berlin, Leipzig, Saint Petersburg, Brussels, Amsterdam, Madrid, Budapest, Prague, among others) and regularly transmitted notices from other music periodicals, especially the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, the *Neue Zeitschrift*, the *Revue et Gazette*, and *The Musical World*. None of them worked in isolation but were, on the contrary, very much a part of an emerging pan-European music-journalist community. It is a part of this dissertation's novel contribution to musicology that it addresses the European critical reception of instrumental virtuosity, represented here by

¹⁰⁶ Snigurowicz 1989. For more information on *The Musical World*'s predecessors and on early-nineteenth-century English music journalism in general, see Langley 1983 and 1989.

the most influential music periodicals edited in the three major centers of European musical life, rather than just the reception of a particular figure (e.g. Liszt) or that of virtuosity in a particular locale (e.g. Paris), as do the studies discussed above. Another feature of its novelty is that it traces the impact of the originally German Idealist philosophy of subjectivity on the aesthetics of music and reception of virtuosity not only in Germany, but also in France and Britain; as we saw in the case of Fétis above, philosophic Idealism may have emerged as a distinctly German development but that scarcely prevented it from crossing the language barrier on the Rhine by the 1830s.

Summaries of Chapters

Chapter One lays out the close links between early-nineteenth-century philosophical conceptions of music and the contemporary thinking on subjectivity, “one’s lived sense of self”, as Linda Martín Alcoff defines it.¹⁰⁷ It is indebted to Andrew Bowie’s crucial insight, discussed above, that those new, romantic conceptions of music served as a utopian model of an essentially free subjectivity, in the face of the mounting political and economic pressures of post-Napoleonic Europe. Therefore, the respective theories and aesthetics of Schelling and Schopenhauer are duly addressed, but Chapter One also complements Bowie’s insights by seeking to explain why there is no such apotheosis of music in Kant and Hegel’s comparatively more optimistic and rationalist reasoning. Juxtaposing Schelling and Schopenhauer on one side with Kant and Hegel on the other will be important so as to show that virtuosity was condemned at least partly because it had

¹⁰⁷ Martín Alcoff 2006, p. 78.

become conceptually obsolete due to its adherence to the older, Enlightened, and Kantian conception of music as performance and resulting incompatibility with the new Romantic and Idealist idea of music as an abstract and disembodied art. The chapter's other main purpose is to establish the conceptual link between music and subjectivity, that is, between philosophical conceptions of music and of what it means to be human, so that the ensuing chapters may document why and how virtuosity was perceived as an attack not only on music (that is, on those philosophic conceptions of it), but also on humanity itself.

Chapter Two is a discussion of the critical reception of virtuosity in performance. Its key topics, which are here discussed in the context of the contemporary critical reception of early- and mid-nineteenth-century instrumental virtuosity for the first time, include the critics' valorization of composition over performance (including virtuosity), the reconceptualization of performance as interpretation (of the musical work, which, again, implicitly privileges composition to performance), the vague demands for "expressivity" in performance and suspicion of "empty" virtuosic technique, the valorization of originality and revulsion at perceived idiosyncrasy, and moralistic condemnations of virtuosos for subjecting music to purposes other than music itself. All of those topics intersect with the philosophical discourse on subjectivity, either directly or via the philosophical conceptions of music discussed above and in Chapter One; it is the purpose of Chapter Two to document and explain those intersections with the evidence found in the primary source.

Chapter Three revisits the issues of moralistic criticism, originality and idiosyncrasy, "expressivity" and "empty" technique, but with regard to the reception of virtuosity in composition, in addition to a set of issues that are pertinent to virtuosic composition only: the critics' overall positions on the aesthetics of musical composition; their valorization of clear

formal over more fluid, programmatic structures, meant to safeguard music's self-referential aesthetic autonomy; the privileging of well-respected old historical genres, such as the sonata, over the new genres of virtuosity (e.g. variations, fantasias, arrangements, and the like), only to be expected given the critics' music-aesthetic preferences; and, lastly, the growing veneration of older composers, especially Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, and J. S. Bach, at the expense of contemporary artists. This chapter's focus on the critical reception of virtuosity in composition is another novel take on the early- and mid-nineteenth-century reception of contemporary instrumental virtuosity that the present study offers.

Finally, Chapter Four brings gender to the fore. Unlike in so many music-history textbooks and courses, "gender" here means not simply the reception of female artists, the virtuose, but also other issues, including: the prevailing hyper-masculine critical discourse on virtuosity and most virtuosi, which raises interesting questions about the critical reception of the few virtuose; the resulting condescending focus on the virtuose's "feminine charms" at the expense of their virtuosic skill in performance and composition, but also the "honorary masculinization" of the few celebrated virtuose who were deemed deserving of it. The chapter ends with a discussion of some surprisingly persistent feminizing tropes in the critical reception of Chopin's virtuosity in performance and composition alike. The somewhat anomalous case of Chopin's reception, as well as the critical reception of allegedly "more masculine" figures, such as Liszt, and that of the virtuose, all go to show that nineteenth-century instrumental virtuosity was a "man's world", much as the subject of contemporary philosophy was always implicitly (and, as in Hegel and Schopenhauer, their huge differences notwithstanding, often also explicitly) male. As it turns out, rather than being entirely disabled by this state of affairs, the few recognized virtuose were able to use it to their advantage, though not without cost, inasmuch

as they were typically reviewed more benevolently than most of their male colleagues; this benevolence, however, often came hand in hand with condescension. Chapter Four documents that line of reception and offers an interpretation of it.

CHAPTER ONE

MUSIC IN PHILOSOPHY AROUND 1800

In 1840–41, Liszt went on a poorly-organized and ultimately disastrous tour of the British Isles, marred by shabby halls, untuned pianos, and other misfortunes. The British press, especially *The Musical World*, covered Liszt’s British sojourn extensively, with a host of mostly negative articles and concert reviews. One of those articles, however, stands out by its sheer size and vitriolic content. In adherence to *The Musical World*’s standard practice, the article was unsigned; but it was most likely written by the journal’s longtime editor, James William Davison, whose somewhat idiosyncratic conservative stances—his idolatry of Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, and their alleged successors Mendelssohn, Spohr, and Sterndale Bennett—were noted in the Introduction. The review ominously begins with a motto attributed to Plato: “Music is something viewless and incorporeal, an all-gracious and a God-like thing”.¹ The author then deals with Liszt’s performance in a single sentence: “Viewed, then, as a display of pianoforte-playing, and putting *music* out of the question, it was little short of a miracle” (emphasis original).

That compact sentence already reveals two symptoms of Davison’s (and not just his) conception of music and musical performance, which will be relevant for the rest of this chapter: first, his “Platonic” view of music as an entirely abstract and disembodied category (“viewless and *incorporeal*”), apparently divorced from its bodily medium (that is, sound) and second, a view of musical performance as something that does not belong and is not at all relevant to

¹ [Unsigned], “Liszt’s Pianoforte Recitals”, *The Musical World* [henceforward *MW*], 11 June 1840, p. 361. Full bibliographic references to these primary-source articles are found in Appendix III.

music thus Platonically conceived (“a display of pianoforte-playing, and putting *music* out of the question”). Further down, Davison elaborates on these two matters:

The music of which Plato speaks in the motto of our journal [...] is not the *sound* of instruments or voices;—it is that system of ideality which, as a pure emanation of mind, is rendered generally demonstrable by the appliances of mechanism, it matters not whether vocal or instrumental.²

Music, therefore, as “a pure emanation of mind”, exists serenely all by itself, in its own intellectual and metaphysical domain, without any need to manifest itself sensuously, through sound; any such manifestation is tolerable only as a supplement, without any effect on the abstract, intellectual essence of music. The reviewer elaborates on the respective merits of performance and composition as well:

[W]hile playing cannot exist without music of some sort, music may be created and remain in being without the help of playing of any kind. The symphonies of Beethoven and Mozart are written creations of genius which no one can un-write or annihilate;—to those who know music *as a language*, their beauties are as evident on the pages of their scores, as the best efforts of the Philharmonic or any other band would make them. To the general public, or what may be termed the mass of *unassisted ear*, performance is requisite for musical impression; but to the artist’s mind, its importance is but equivalent to the service rendered by means of the stage to the plays of Shakespeare; by it, ideal beauties are not *created*, but merely offered to the senses through widened and altered channels.³

In light of Davison’s assertion that “music may be created and remain in being without the help of playing of any kind”, perhaps musical improvisation, still a staple of every virtuosic recital, had slipped his mind; but maybe he would have retorted that improvisation is precisely not music. Be that as it may, music—abstract and intellectual—comes first and musical performance only later, if at all, for the sake of the uneducated masses. Music is the creative art, performance only reproductive.

² “Liszt’s Pianoforte Recitals”, p. 362.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 361–62.

Virtuosity's sin, in the reviewer's understanding, is that it reverses the "natural" order of things: as a kind of performance put on steroids, performance out of control, virtuosity usurps the place of music, dangerously diverting the listener's attention from the music onto itself:

[O]n *music*, the cultivation and encouragement of this kind of semi-miraculous handicraft exerts a most baneful effect. [...] it envelops the essentials of art in a string of false positions; it enslaves the understanding to the ear—it draws attention from the composer to the player—from music to its performance: it places the last first, and the first, last.⁴

Regarding the quotation above, one should also note the carefully implied dichotomy between the *art* of music and the "semi-miraculous handicraft" of virtuosity. Not only does virtuosity put performance first and music second, but it also "enslaves the understanding to the ear", in other words the mind to the senses. But its greatest iniquity is even more serious:

The feeling [Liszt] excites is what we term *animal* astonishment. [...] At best, it is but a state of physical enjoyment—great, doubtless, because previously unproved; but neither kith nor kin in the remotest degree to those feelings of love, reverence—nay, almost of devotion, which lie at the command of fine music. [...] who—not being rightly musical at heart—would trouble himself to give the *thoughtful* listening which they require, to the grand compositions of Mendelssohn, or his English type, Sterndale Bennett, while he can be tickled into animal spirits by the whimsical evolutions of Liszt?⁵

Therefore, no less than the listener's human identity is in danger, all that due to virtuosity and its reversal of the "natural" hierarchy between music and musical performance, between the mind and the senses. Incidentally, the dutiful mentioning of the "grand compositions" of Mendelssohn and Sterndale Bennett may be seen as a telltale mark of Davison's authorship. One might also note the interesting implication Davison makes towards the end of the quoted passage, that animality might be more attractive and alluring than humanity, given how easy he apparently believes humans would degenerate into animals, if only given a chance, by means of overexposure to virtuosity.

⁴ "Liszt's Pianoforte Recitals", p. 361.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 363–64.

Clearly then, to mid-nineteenth-century critics such as Davison, virtuosity and philosophic conceptions of music mattered much more than one might expect them to do to a twenty-first-century colleague. It will be worthwhile here to summarize Davison's position (which he shared with many of his colleagues, as subsequent chapters will show) by listing his key claims:

1. Music is an entirely abstract, disembodied, intellectual art, independent of performance; music exists for the mind, whereas performance is only there to communicate music to the senses of those who are not intellectual enough to be able to experience music without hearing it.
2. Virtuosity is incompatible with, and therefore also dangerous to, music thus conceived, because it diverts the listener's attention away from the abstract structure of music to its bodily sounding in performance.
3. Therefore, virtuosity also threatens the listener's human identity.

The question is, especially regarding the final claim: how and why does virtuosity threaten the listener's human identity? Answering that question will take us back to this dissertation's main claim: that virtuosity was perceived as such a grave threat, because it was deemed incompatible with early-nineteenth-century philosophical conceptions of music as autonomous, abstract, and incorporeal (such as Davison's), which also symbolized a similar view of the human subject as free and *more* than "just" its perishable body. With its bodily focus on performance, virtuosity was manifestly at odds with conceptions of music such as Davison's; worse still, it pointed to performance as an irreducibly corporeal aspect of music. And since, as we saw in the Introduction, the conception of music as autonomous, abstract, and incorporeal symbolized a similar conception of the human subject, to reveal such an idea of music as untenable, which is

what virtuosity, with its focus on performativity, effectively did, at the same time meant an attack on the autonomous human subject as well.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how and why music enters philosophical discourse on subjectivity—how, as Bowie puts it, “what is said about music, including by philosophers, does have substantial effects on the practice of music”.⁶ This part of the story must be told so that the remaining chapters may show in detail how and why virtuosity was perceived as such a threat to music *and* humanity; in other words, how a number of individual aspects of the critical reception of virtuosity between 1815 and 1850 keep returning to the question of human subjectivity, either directly (since some virtuosi, as shown in Chapter Two, were seen as embodying free, bourgeois subjectivity, like Liszt, while others, like Paganini, were dreaded as a threat to it), or via Platonic conceptions of music such as Davison’s, themselves symbolic of free subjectivity. As it was argued above and will be further argued below, a threat to such a conception of music at the same time meant an attack on the conception of human subjectivity that was symbolized by it. The chapter will now proceed with a discussion of the ascendancy of music in German post-Kantian thought, focusing on Schelling and Schopenhauer, followed by discussions of the substantially lower positioning of music in the respective aesthetics of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. The following section on Schelling and Schopenhauer is largely based on Bowie’s reading of the status of music and the condition of the subject in those two thinkers, discussed in the Introduction above. In a departure from Bowie, the discussions of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, are there to complement Bowie’s reading of Schelling and Schopenhauer and further to corroborate the link between music and human subjectivity, so that the ensuing chapters may focus on the critical reception of virtuosity in light of the proposed link. Another reason to

⁶ Bowie 2007, p. 12.

address Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, along with Schelling and Schopenhauer, in the context of this dissertation is to document the changes that simultaneously occurred in aesthetics and the philosophy of subjectivity between the thinking of the older, rationalist philosophers and that of their younger colleagues. In a nutshell, as Bowie shows, the post-Kantian generation's growing suspicion of the bourgeois Enlightenment subject, "free, rational, independent, reflective, [and] self-determining",⁷ conditioned them to re-conceptualize music into a utopian model of free subjectivity, as abstract, disembodied, and autonomous from performance and all other concerns, which enabled its meteoric rise in the hierarchy of the arts. In turn, those developments in aesthetics made virtuosity, *qua* bodily performance *par excellence*, increasingly suspect and ultimately unacceptable in the eyes of contemporary music critics. To put it another way, this and the ensuing two chapters will show that virtuosity of the kind practiced by Liszt and his contemporaries grew obsolete because it clung to the older, Enlightened, and very much Kantian and Hegelian conception of music as a bodily activity inseparable from performance. That is why the present chapter is not simply chronologically organized: the goal is to highlight the contrast between the conceptions of music and subjectivity advanced by the early Romantics, Schelling, and Schopenhauer on one side and those of the more rationalist Kant, Fichte, and Hegel on the other. At present, we will begin by focusing on the links between early-nineteenth-century music aesthetics and subjectivity. It will be necessary to summarize each major thinker's key positions, even when they are well-known, before interpreting them in light of the proposed link between music and subjectivity.

⁷ Pippin 2005, p. 5.

The Ascendancy of Music, the Subjected Subject, and Reason in Retreat:

The Early German Romantics, Schelling, and Schopenhauer

Around 1800, music “becomes a ‘philosopher’s art’”.⁸ During the nineteenth century, music “becomes more and more overtly linked to philosophical, ideological, and political controversies that influence modern social and historical developments”.⁹ In a few short decades, between the 1770s and the 1820s, music, and especially instrumental music, traversed the path between Johann Georg Sulzer’s “pleasant nonsense” and Kant’s “agreeable” (rather than fine) art,¹⁰ to E. T. A. Hoffmann’s “most romantic of the arts”,¹¹ Schelling’s “primal rhythm of nature and of the universe itself”,¹² and Schopenhauer’s “*copy of the will itself*”.¹³ In Andrew Bowie’s words, those are “admittedly hyperbolic, but instructive, assessments of the unique significance of music”.¹⁴ They will be instructive for us, too, especially in Chapter Three, which will document their echoes in contemporary music criticism; for instance, Robert Schumann’s celebration of music’s “higher poetic freedom, which no other art has equaled”,¹⁵ as well as similar views by some of the major contemporary thinkers, such as Wackenroder, Novalis, and Fichte, published by Schumann’s conservative archrival G. W. Fink in his *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. The massive improvement of music’s standing with critics and philosophers alike was well captured

⁸ Bujić 1988, p. 3. Useful and informative summaries of various philosophic discourses on music are found in Bowman 1998.

⁹ Bowie 2007, p. 166.

¹⁰ Kant 1973, §§ 52–54.

¹¹ Charlton 1989, p. 96.

¹² Schelling 1989, p. 17.

¹³ Schopenhauer 1891, Vol. I, p. 331.

¹⁴ Bowie 2007, p. 140.

¹⁵ Eusebius [Robert Schumann], “Die Davidsbündler. I. Hummel’s Pianofortestudien. 1.”, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* [henceforward *NZM*], 5 June 1834, p. 74: “Bei der Blitzesschnelle der Entwicklung der Musik zur höhern poetischen Freiheit, wie keine andere Kunst ein Beispiel aufstellen kann, muß es wohl vorkommen, daß selbst das Bessere selten länger als vielleicht ein Jahrzehend im Munde der Mitwelt lebt”.

by an anonymous English journalist, who in an 1846 issue of *The Musical World* praised the Germans for advancing music from “mere frivolous, eartickling amusement [...] to the dignity of a powerful element of civilization”, owing to their unspecified “metaphysical studies”.¹⁶ It should be added here that the thinkers who undertook those “metaphysical studies”, especially Schopenhauer, Schelling, Hoffmann and his early German Romantic contemporaries, spoke not so much of the practice of music, that is, of composition or performance, of any specific repertoires, or genres; rather, like Davison above, they spoke of *Tonkunst*, the art of music as an abstract and intellectual category, with philosophical and metaphysical import. Throughout this dissertation, we will repeatedly return to the terminological and ideological binary between *Tonkunst* and music *qua* practice.

For most nineteenth-century thinkers, only instrumental music could faithfully embody *Tonkunst*. Therefore, *Tonkunst* was by default instrumental, “pure” of words and of every other non-musical admixture—an abstract and autonomous configuration of wordless tones, which may or may not be given their sonic manifestation in performance. Thus E. T. A. Hoffmann asserts:

When music is spoken of as an independent art the term can properly apply only to instrumental music, which scorns all aid, all admixture of other arts, and gives pure expression to its peculiar artistic nature.¹⁷

An important factor that facilitated this apotheosis of instrumental music was the replacement of morally instructive mimesis, that is, the imitation or representation of nature as the main purpose

¹⁶ H. G., “Letters from Vienna”, *The Musical World* [henceforward *The Musical World*], 21 March 1846, pp. 132–33.

¹⁷ Charlton 1989, p. 236. Stephen Rumph interprets Hoffmann’s notion of the aesthetic autonomy of music as symbolic of the German desire for emancipation and unification in the midst of pressure from Napoleonic France; see Rumph 1995.

of art in the aesthetics of the Enlightenment, with expression for expression's sake.¹⁸ In due course, we will see that this paradigm shift played a prominent part in the critical reception of virtuosity in performance and composition alike, in the form of constantly reiterated demands for “expression” and “expressivity”, but without clear definitions of those terms.¹⁹ It is tempting to surmise that those definitions were withheld on purpose, so as to preserve a recondite, ineffable, and irreducibly *human* core in musical performance and composition alike. In other words, whereas Sulzer, Kant, his spiritual father Rousseau,²⁰ the Encyclopedists Batteux, d’Alembert, and Diderot had supposed music to imitate or *represent* feelings (or affects), their younger colleagues around 1800 saw *expression* as its main task—the expression of what is otherwise ineffable. Thus according to Hoffmann again, music freed from words “reveals to man an unknown realm, a world quite separate from the outer sensual world surrounding him, a world in which he leaves behind all feelings circumscribed by intellect in order to embrace the inexpressible”.²¹ Similarly, Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773–1798) extols “the latest, highest triumph of musical instruments: [...] those divine, magnificent symphonic pieces (brought forth by inspired spirits), in which not one individual emotion is portrayed, but an entire world, an entire drama of human emotions, is poured forth”.²² Such music is

the most marvelous of [the arts], because it portrays human feelings in a superhuman way, because it shows us all the emotions of our soul above our heads in incorporeal

¹⁸ Neubauer 1986 is a very good discussion of this paradigm shift. Lippman 1992 contains a good summary on pp. 85–91. For more information, see Grimm 1993 and Morrow 1997, especially pp. 66–78. Andrew Bowie usefully situates the replacement of mimesis with expression in music and the arts, as well as the subsequent valorization of instrumental music in philosophy, within the late eighteenth century’s distrust of the mimetic faculties of language, first observed in Kant’s contemporary and critic Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788) and later elaborated by Herder and others; see Bowie 2007, pp. 53ff.

¹⁹ Defining expression in music has scarcely grown easier since the days of Schumann and Fétis. For instance, Andrew Bowie notes that it is “trivially true [...] that music can ‘express’ everyday emotions. However, it is actually very hard to give the word ‘express’ a really productive sense”; see Bowie 2007, p. 27.

²⁰ Schneewind 1992 contains a detailed discussion of Rousseau’s influence on Kant.

²¹ Charlton 1989, p. 236.

²² Lippman 1986–90, p. 26.

form, clothed in golden clouds of airy harmonies,—because it speaks a language which we do not know in our ordinary life, which we have learned, we do not know where and how, and which one would consider to be solely the language of angels.²³

Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) likewise privileges instrumental music, because music “must have the freedom to speak alone [...] Without words, merely through and in itself, music has shaped itself into an art of *its* kind”.²⁴

A related factor, equally important to the rise of instrumental music, was the notion of the aesthetic autonomy of art that was becoming dominant around this time and played, as we will see below, an important part in the critical reception of virtuosic music.²⁵ In Susan Meld Shell’s eloquent definition, autonomy is “the imposition of a law on one’s authority and out of one’s own (rational) resources”,²⁶ in other words, self-rule (literally), conducting oneself by rules of one’s own devising. In the case of music and the other arts, (aesthetic) autonomy means that they are subject only to their own rules (which make up the domain of aesthetics), exist only for themselves, and refer only to themselves. Andrew Bowie defines the aesthetic autonomy of art as “the idea that works of art entail freely produced rules which do not apply to any other natural object or human product”.²⁷ In concrete terms, aesthetic autonomy means that art is no longer obliged to serve any extraneous purposes, such as the imitation or representation of nature (as in the aesthetics of the Enlightenment), or moral instruction (as in Kant—see below), or, much worse, entertainment and material gain (as in virtuosity, according to Davison and others—see Chapters Two and Three), but is simply its own purpose, exists only for itself, and refers only to itself—much like God or, in certain strands of ethics such as Kant’s, like the human subject.

²³ Lippman 1986–90, p. 13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁵ One of the most helpful discussions of the problem as it relates to music can be found in Dahlhaus 1993.

²⁶ Meld Shell 2009, p. 2.

²⁷ Bowie 2003, p. 2.

Chapter Three in particular addresses the regulative impact of the notion of aesthetic autonomy on the critical reception of virtuosic music, in terms of the critics' valorization of non-programmatic (i.e., "absolute") music, well-established historical genres such as the fugue and the sonata, and strict formal procedures. Aesthetically autonomous art is thus no longer required to represent nature or morality or anything at all (except itself), but instead to *express*, or to be *expressive* of, its own interiority, again much like the liberal idea of the human subject. In Terry Eagleton's eloquent summary:

[W]e perceive the [aesthetically autonomous art] object as though it were a kind of subject, exhibiting the kind of unity, purposiveness and self-determination that we display ourselves. In this way, we sense a delightful conformity of the world to our own imaginative and intellectual faculties, almost as though the place were mysteriously designed to suit our ends. The object is lifted out of the web of practical functions in which it is routinely enmeshed, and endowed instead with something of the freedom and autonomy of a fellow human. By virtue of this crypto-subjectivity, the thing seems to speak meaningfully to those who perceive it, stirring in them the pious hope that Nature is not entirely indifferent to their needs.²⁸

It is around this proximity of the romantic view of art around 1800 to the liberal conception of the subject that Andrew Bowie centers his reading of the rise of the aesthetic autonomy of art.²⁹ Reconceived as autonomous, the work of art "thus becomes a utopian symbol of the realisation of freedom", Bowie writes; "in it we can see or hear an image of what the world could be like if freedom were realised in it".³⁰ Bowie focuses on the German early romantics (Schelling, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Novalis, Hölderlin, among others) and Schopenhauer, because those thinkers, on the one hand, attached special significance to the aesthetic autonomy of the arts (especially instrumental music) and, on the other, posited the subject as essentially

²⁸ Eagleton 2009, p. 127. The quoted passage is especially well-suited to some of Kant's and Hegel's pronouncements on the arts; they are both discussed below.

²⁹ Especially useful discussions of subjectivity are found in Bowie 2003 and 2003a, Carr 1999, Cascardi 1992, De Laurentiis 2005, Ferguson 2002, Frank 1997, Hall 2004, Korsgaard 2009, Seigel 2005, Strozier 2002, and Sturms and Ameriks 1995.

³⁰ Bowie 2003, p. 57.

fragmented and unfree (especially Schopenhauer and, to a lesser degree, Schelling). In Bowie's interpretation, Schopenhauer, Schelling (more on both below) and others put so much weight on the aesthetic autonomy of art precisely because they conceived of the human subject as essentially unfree; in other words, they constructed the domain of the aesthetic autonomy of the arts as a refuge from their own disheartening conceptions of the subject. One should also note that this was a time of increased pressure on the free subject of the Enlightenment, not only in philosophy, but also in politics, following Napoleon's final defeat and the restoration of repressive monarchical regimes in France and throughout Central Europe, as well as in economy, with the rise of early capitalism, rapid urbanization and industrialization, and the imposition of the industrial division of labor.³¹ Thus focusing more on German politics than on philosophy, J. M. Bernstein makes his compelling claim that "the discourse of aesthetics is a proto-political discourse standing in for and marking the absence of a truly political domain in modern, enlightened societies".³² Like Bowie, Bernstein focuses on those societies that, again not coincidentally, featured the greatest "absence of a truly political domain" *and* the most far-reaching thinking on aesthetics: the kingdoms and principalities of pre- and (especially) post-Napoleonic Germany. Again, in Germany, as well as in France and Britain, political oppression went hand in hand with the economic oppression and exploitation of early capitalism, which highlighted the subject's ensnarement not only to the easily identifiable state apparatus, but also to the forces of the market, naturalized by means of the liberal bourgeois ideology, depersonalized, and thus made to seem inexorable. This was also the socio-economic context in which virtuosi had to operate. In due course, we will see what kind of impact virtuosi's necessary

³¹ Useful discussions of these historical social factors and their impact on the contemporary philosophy of subjectivity are found in Cascardi 1992, pp. 42–46 and Seigel 2005, pp. 361–62.

³² Bernstein 1992, p. 3.

reliance on the market had on their critical reception. To earn their living in early-capitalist societies, virtuosi had to deal in the one commodity that supposedly transcended the market and had inherent rather than merely exchange value—the aesthetically autonomous art of music. The following two chapters document how this shaped their critical reception, with charges of “manufacturing” and “prostituting” the art of music.³³

Perhaps no other art could fulfill the demands of aesthetic autonomy better than instrumental music. Its limited ability to represent (that is, to “imitate”) specific concepts, which devalued it in the eyes of Enlightenment aesthetics, now becomes instrumental music’s greatest advantage: more than any other art, instrumental music appears to represent and refer only to itself, rather than extraneous objects, as in the visual arts, or concepts, as in vocal music and literature.³⁴ Or, if instrumental music does communicate anything, it is something metaphysical, something that otherwise could not be communicated. Andrew Bowie thus defines aesthetic autonomy as “the idea that what is conveyed by the work of art could not be conveyed by anything else”.³⁵ To a large number of thinkers around 1800 it seemed that no other art could fit the notion better than instrumental music: wordless, intangible, and invisible, instrumental music does appear to refer, strictly speaking, only to itself, as an abstract configuration of tones. As such, it has a unique “potential to sustain aesthetic autonomy via its non-representational

³³ For instance, see Carl Gollmick, “Das heutige Virtuosenwesen.”, *NZM*, 2 December 1842, pp. 183–85 and F. Liszt, “Lettre d’un bachelier ès-musique”, *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* [henceforward *RGMP*], 16 July 1837, p. 340, both discussed at length in Chapters Two and Three.

³⁴ Bowie 2007, p. 172: “The fact that music is largely non-referential and non-representational, which constitutes its chief deficiency for some thinkers, becomes for others what is most essential about it”.

³⁵ Bowie 2003, pp. 35–36. In Bowie 2007, he further elaborates on the perceived power of art, especially music, to convey what otherwise could not be conveyed, introducing the subtle but important distinction between “ineffable” and “unsayable”: “A gesture, a musical phrase, or a dance may articulate something unsayable, without it being ineffable”; see p. 14. Therefore it is not as though music—paradoxically—communicated what cannot be communicated, but rather that music communicates what *otherwise* could not be communicated.

character”.³⁶ And if the object of musical expression might not be pinned down in language, but only *expressed* in music, so much the better for music, its exclusivity and autonomy. Instrumental music comes to the fore thanks to the remoteness of its medium—non-verbal sound—from language and the visible world. As for expression, it is “both something music ‘has’ and ‘does’”, as Wayne Bowman aptly put it—music is expressive, but only of itself and/or of what is otherwise inexpressible, which reaffirms its autonomy and becomes its greatest virtue.³⁷ To put that elusive concept of expressivity to work in the *practice* of instrumental music was every good virtuoso’s job, according to most nineteenth-century critics of contemporary virtuosity. It was no mean task, but as that body of criticism suggest, keeping the critics satisfied was even harder. The question that many of them asked and that we will have to ask in the following chapters as well, was how much and whether virtuosity could at all fulfill the exacting demands of “expressivity” in instrumental music.³⁸

A philosopher who does seem to have had a clear idea of what exactly music should express was Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854). He accorded music a particularly exalted role. As we saw above, for him music was “nothing other than the primal rhythm of nature and of the universe itself, which by means of this art breaks through into the world of representation”.³⁹ Furthermore,

music portrays the form of the movements of the cosmic bodies, the pure *form* as such, liberated from the object or from matter. To that extent, music is the art that divests itself to the highest degree of corporeality by portraying *pure* movement as such, separated from the object, and by being carried by invisible, almost spiritual wings.⁴⁰

³⁶ Bowie 2003, p. 67.

³⁷ Bowman 1998, p. 128.

³⁸ See a number of reviews discussed in the respective sections on expression in Chapters Two and Three.

³⁹ Schelling 1989, p. 31.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Those conversant with ancient Greek and medieval conceptions of music will recognize clear echoes of Pythagoras's and Boethius's harmony of the spheres doctrine. As important, though, are overtones of a formalist music aesthetic: "music portrays [...] the *pure* form as such" and "divests itself to the highest degree of corporeality by portraying *pure* movement as such". That suspicion of the corporeal and focus on music as abstract, disembodied form made virtuosity, as a special type of performance, doubly suspect; such a conception of music was only to be expected as an offshoot of the perceived autonomy and self-referentiality of instrumental music.⁴¹ Around the middle of the century, it was to gain one of its most ardent and eloquent advocates, Eduard Hanslick.⁴² As for Schelling, though, music is pure form and much more than that: it is foremost among the arts, the most pertinent manifestation of art, and "an emanation of the absolute", that is, God,⁴³ since the universe "*is formed in God as an absolute work of art*"⁴⁴ and God is the "*immediate cause of all art*" (emphasis in the original).⁴⁵ For Schelling then, music comes from God and symbolizes the world itself: though seemingly an abstract, meaningless configuration of tones and timbres, music expresses meanings that could not be expressed in any other sensuous way. In Andrew Bowie's phrase, it "gives access to what is inaccessible to conceptual thinking".⁴⁶

In the contrastingly godless philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) music plays a comparably important role. For Schopenhauer, music "is as *direct* an objectification and

⁴¹ In Chapter Three in particular, see the reviews discussed in the section on the denigration of performance in favor of composition.

⁴² Regarding Hanslick's and other similarly formalist views of music, see the discussion of why the notion of "pure form" may not be conceptually tenable in Bowie 2007, p. 15. For a very interesting account of Idealist philosophy's fortunes in the nine editions that Hanslick produced of his *magnum opus*, see Bonds 1997, pp. 413–20.

⁴³ Schelling 1989, p. 19.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴⁶ Bowie 2007, p. 178.

copy of the *will* as the whole world itself”.⁴⁷ The Will is the impersonal, incorporeal, and irrational force that Schopenhauer situates at the center of his philosophy; it is the only real, noumenal existence, whereas everything else is merely its phenomenal manifestation or “representation”, “objectification and copy”.⁴⁸ In his excellent study of Schopenhauer’s aesthetics and subjectivity, Thomas Lütkeimeier asserts that “the true heart of Schopenhauer’s philosophy is to be seen in Schopenhauer’s aesthetics”,⁴⁹ because for Schopenhauer, the arts are the only medium through which people may, by means of entirely pure, disinterested contemplation, cognize what he calls “Platonic Ideas”: the objective, timeless essences of things surrounding them, rather than those mere objects in their illusory individuality (in sculpture, for instance, the ideal beauty of human anatomy as opposed to the mortal, fleshly beauty of specific human bodies):

[Art] repeats or reproduces the eternal Ideas grasped through pure contemplation, the essential and abiding in all the phenomena of the world [...] Its one source is the knowledge of Ideas; its one aim the communication of this knowledge.⁵⁰

[I]ts aim is the facilitating of the knowledge of the Ideas of the world (in the Platonic sense, the only one which I recognise for the word Idea).⁵¹

Music, however, is a special case among the arts, because according to Schopenhauer, it communicates not the Platonic Ideas (since it is not representational, like the other arts), but is a direct copy of the Will itself: “Music is thus by no means like the other arts, the copy of the Ideas, but the *copy of the will itself*, whose objectivity the Ideas are”.⁵² Thus music’s non-

⁴⁷ Schopenhauer 1891, Vol. I, p. 333.

⁴⁸ For general discussions of Schopenhauer, see Jacquette 2005 and Wicks 2008.

⁴⁹ Lütkeimeier 2001, p. 8.

⁵⁰ Schopenhauer 1891, Vol. I, p. 239.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 179.

⁵² Schopenhauer 1891, Vol. I, p. 333. Schopenhauer published the first edition of *The World as Will and Representation* in 1818, by which time Beethoven had published all but the last of his symphonies, and the second edition in 1844, by which time Wagner’s *Der fliegende Holländer* had been premièred in Dresden. And yet, the only composer who receives unequivocal praise in *The World as Will and Representation* is Rossini; see Schopenhauer 1891, Vol. I, p. 336. Edward Lippman elegantly summarizes the seeming discrepancy: “the music to which

referentiality (or, rather, self-referentiality), which had consigned it to its lowly status in Kant (more on whom below), has now raised it to the summit of Schopenhauer's hierarchy of the arts.⁵³ Schopenhauer then arrives at a radically abstract, disembodied idea of music, similar to those of Schelling, the early Romantics, Davison and many of the critics discussed in Chapters Two and Three: "music also, since it passes over the Ideas, is entirely independent of the phenomenal world, ignores it altogether, could to a certain extent exist if there was no world at all, which cannot be said of the other arts".⁵⁴

Andrew Bowie interprets Schopenhauer's valorization of the arts and especially music "as the only means of temporarily escaping the fundamentally futile nature of reality.

Art's essential role is therefore not to enlighten us about ourselves,⁵⁵ in order to make possible new ways of dealing with the world, but rather to enable us to *escape* what we already intuitively know about the irredeemable nature of what we are.⁵⁶

That "irredeemable nature of what we are" is the Schopenhauerian subject's total lack of freedom, since it is, like everything else, no more than a manifestation or effect of the Will, which determines it entirely:

During life the will of man is without freedom: his action takes place with necessity upon the basis of his unalterable character in the chain of motives.⁵⁷

[T]he individual, the person, is not will as a thing-in-itself, but is a *phenomenon* of the will, is already determined as such, and has come under the form of the phenomenal [...].⁵⁸

Schopenhauer actually looked was a much less convincing expression of his theory than that of later composers"; see Lippman 1986–90, p. 66.

⁵³ One should be mindful, though, of objections such as the following: "The appeal of Schopenhauer's position would seem to lie in its elevation of music to real philosophical dignity. In many respects, however, he does precisely the opposite, subordinating music to the limiting effects of a highly contentious metaphysical vision"; see Bowie 2007, p. 200.

⁵⁴ Schopenhauer 1891, Vol. I, p. 333.

⁵⁵ As it is in Kant and Hegel, more on whom below.

⁵⁶ Bowie 2003, p. 262.

⁵⁷ Schopenhauer 1891, Vol. III, p. 351.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 146–47.

Robert Pippin's summary of "much of the tone of post-Hegelian European thought and culture" in terms of its "profound suspicion about that basic philosophical claim of 'bourgeois' philosophy [...], the notion central to the self-understanding and legitimation of the bourgeois form of life: the free, rational, independent, reflective, self-determining subject", applies to Schopenhauer as much as it does to the later thinkers in Pippin's focus, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud.⁵⁹ Since the Schopenhauerian subject is entirely determined by the Will, its life transpires in a meaningless succession of torment driven by want and only brief and occasional respite in ennui, brought on by (temporary) satisfaction: "essential to all life is suffering", Schopenhauer writes; "the brevity of life, which is so constantly lamented, may be the best quality it possesses".⁶⁰ Bowie then logically concludes:

Unable to tolerate the consequences of such a view, which just promises a life of endlessly renewed dissatisfaction, of the kind inherent in the very nature of the Will, Schopenhauer seeks a way of transcending the Will that is based on aesthetic contemplation.⁶¹

The "whole point of these contentions is to arrive at a philosophical attitude in which the torment to which our dependence on the Will gives rise can be avoided".⁶² Similarly, Thomas Lütke-meier concludes that for Schopenhauer, "Art is the only way to freedom, and this is the freedom of the pure subject of knowledge".⁶³ However, it must be remembered that according to Schopenhauer and, though not in so many words, to Davison and many of his colleagues, only *Tonkunst*, music conceived as an abstract, disembodied, and self-referential art, autonomous from performance

⁵⁹ Pippin 2005, p. 5. Cf. Bowie 2007, pp. 34ff: "Modernity has also revealed the fundamental fragility of the subject". Also, Bowie maintains that "the developments with regard to music relate to the wider crisis concerning the status of philosophy which follows the decline of Hegelianism from the 1840s onwards"; see Bowie 2007, p. 168.

⁶⁰ Schopenhauer 1891, Vol. I, pp. 401 and 419.

⁶¹ Bowie 2003, p. 263.

⁶² Bowie 2007, p. 197.

⁶³ Lütke-meier 2001, p. 152.

and all other concerns, had the power to lead the subject to aesthetic contemplation and via it, to freedom. And the following chapters will show that most contemporary critics deemed virtuosity, with its troubling grounding in society and the performing body, hostile to such a conception of music.

It is indeed true that Schopenhauer allows for the possibility of experiencing freedom from the Will—however briefly and ephemerally—in the act of aesthetic contemplation, pure of every interest:

[T]hat which we might otherwise call the most beautiful part of life, its purest joy, as it were because it lifts us out of real existence and transforms us into disinterested spectators of it—that is, pure knowledge, which is foreign to all willing, the pleasure of the beautiful, the true delight in art.⁶⁴

The subject who achieves disinterested aesthetic contemplation of art briefly overcomes his pointless interests dictated by the Will and becomes a *genius*, the pure subject of knowledge. However, the subject thereby becomes not a free subject, *pace* Bowie, but instead loses his very subjectivity, temporarily approaching death, in Schopenhauer’s philosophy the only genuine emancipation from the Will:⁶⁵ “genius is the power of leaving one’s interests, wishes, and aims entirely out of sight, thus of entirely renouncing one’s own personality for a time, so as to remain *pure knowing subject*, clear vision of the world”.⁶⁶ That is why Lütke-meier correctly points that the subject’s freedom won in the act of aesthetic contemplation is only a freedom from its own “self, from subjectivity”.⁶⁷ For Dale Jacquette, Schopenhauer’s emancipation in aesthetic contemplation comes close to mere escapism:

⁶⁴ Schopenhauer 1891, Vol. I, p. 405.

⁶⁵ Elsewhere, Bowie rightly notes that for Schopenhauer, “only death gives real freedom, by delivering one from individuation altogether”; real freedom “lies in the escape from transient individuated being”; see Bowie 2007, pp. 199 and 201.

⁶⁶ Schopenhauer 1891, Vol. I, p. 241.

⁶⁷ Lütke-meier 2001, p. 152.

It is not quite aesthetic escapism that Schopenhauer finds most valuable in the enjoyment of art, but something that is not far afield. He emphasizes the role of memory and aesthetic amnesia that occurs through the loss of self in the complete absorption in a work of art or scene of nature.⁶⁸

In aesthetic contemplation, then, the subject achieves no personal freedom of the kind that might spur it to activity and translate into a political gain. For Schopenhauer, *pace* Bowie,⁶⁹ the aesthetic autonomy of art is neither a model of free subjectivity (utopian or not), nor a sanctuary for Schopenhauer's subject who is entirely enslaved to the Will. Schopenhauer is adamant that the subject cannot attain freedom *and* remain a subject. Rather, it may only partake of freedom in aesthetic contemplation, but that freedom is that of the Will, the only essential freedom that Schopenhauer allows. And the subject may only partake of it by communing with the Will, by losing itself, or, as it were, by transcending its own *subjection*.

Like most German thinkers of the post-Kantian generation, Schopenhauer was largely motivated by the desire to bridge the Kantian gap between the noumenal and the phenomenal, between reality as it really is and the human subject's perception of it. For that reason, he simply evacuated the noumenal of all of its Kantian accoutrements, such as transcendental freedom, and supplanted them with the irrational and impersonal Will, the only noumenal existence in his philosophy. In this, Schopenhauer claimed to be merely following the implications of Kant's own thought down to their logical consequences.⁷⁰ Motivated by the same desire, Schelling, however, put at the center of his metaphysics God, or the Absolute, to guarantee a rational,

⁶⁸ Jacquette 2005, p. 164.

⁶⁹ Despite his claims about the emancipatory role of aesthetic contemplation in Schopenhauer's philosophy forwarded in *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, Bowie elsewhere nicely captures the irony of such an emancipation: "On the one hand, then, music *qua* aesthetic experience temporarily redeems one from the fundamental lack [of freedom] in which life consists; on the other hand, music does this while expressing precisely what [i.e., the Will] makes life a torment"; see Bowie 2001, p. 53.

⁷⁰ For more on bridging the Kantian gap as the common driving force of German post-Kantian philosophy, see Seigel 2005, pp. 385ff.

noumenal unity of the world: “By virtue of his idea, God is immediately the absolute *All*. [...] the absolute All follows immediately from the idea of God”.⁷¹ And yet, much like Schopenhauer, Schelling accorded a similarly high position to the arts and especially to music, in his philosophy: thus God is the “*immediate cause of all art* [...] and the final possibility of all art; he himself is the source of all beauty”; art “is itself an emanation of the absolute”.⁷² Thus art, and especially music, understood as a strictly abstract, non-representational, and self-referential art, is the only medium through which God, otherwise ineffable, chooses to manifest Himself to humans, much like Schopenhauer’s Will does. That is why Schelling, in line with Schopenhauer and contrary to Kant and Hegel (more on whom below), values art even more than he does philosophy:

[A]rt is at once the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy, which ever and again continues to speak to us of what philosophy cannot depict in external form, namely the unconscious element in acting and producing, and its original identity with the conscious. Art is paramount to the philosopher, precisely because it opens to him, as it were, the holy of holies, where burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart. [...]

Philosophy attains, indeed, to the highest, but it brings to this summit only, so to say, the fraction of a man. Art brings *the whole man*, as he is, to that point, namely to a knowledge of the highest, and this is what underlies the eternal difference and the marvel of art.⁷³

Schelling, then, gives precedence to God’s self-manifestation through art over the limited cognitive powers of human reason, always tainted by interest, and thus, paradoxically, comes closer to Schopenhauer’s (irreligious) irrationalism than he does to Hegel and Kant’s (religious) rationalism, discussed below.

⁷¹ Schelling 1989, pp. 23–24. For an excellent study of Schelling’s philosophy, see Bowie 1993.

⁷² Schelling 1989, pp. 19–32.

⁷³ Schelling 1978, pp. 231–32.

The quotation above brings us to another important point of contact between Schelling and Schopenhauer: the conception of the subject as unfree, fragmented, and severely limited in terms of its cognitive powers. The Schellingian subject, whom Schelling simply calls “the self”, emerges in the act of its own self-intuition; it is therefore always-already split between its intuiting and intuited self:

The concept of the self arises through the act of self-consciousness, and thus *apart* from this act the self is nothing; its whole reality depends solely on this act, and *it is itself nothing other than this act*. Thus the self can only be presented *qua act* as such, and is otherwise nothing.⁷⁴

The self comes into being by splitting into the intuiting and the intuited self, precisely in the act of its self-formation; it can only emerge and exist as inherently split. That is why the Schellingian self can never be self-identical—“that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart”.⁷⁵

While the atheist Schopenhauer was happy to lend even less substance to his conception of the subject and leave it in the tormented irrationality of its pointless existence, Schelling chose to rely on God, or the Absolute, as the ultimate guarantor of the underlying unity and reason of the existence of everything: “*God is immediately the absolute All*”. That absolute All is the starting point, as well as the telos, of the Schellingian subject’s constant striving for self-completion. However, Schelling’s God is beyond the limits of human cognition, even beyond that of philosophers; hence the importance that Schelling attaches to art and especially to music,

⁷⁴ Schelling 1978, p. 25.

⁷⁵ In this regard, Schelling’s conception of the subject is somewhat comparable to Jacques Lacan’s account of subject-formation, more precisely to its “mirror-phase”, whereby the subject achieves the necessary illusion of its unity and coherence by relinquishing parts of its own self—Lacan’s *objets petits a*. It should be noted that Schelling was by no means the only thinker of his generation to conceive of the subject as inherently split. Friedrich Hölderlin, for instance, similarly saw the emergence of consciousness in an “original separation” of subject and object and, again just like Schelling, posited the aesthetic as the only way (outside madness) that this incomplete subject, split off from a part of its own self, might catch a glimpse of its otherwise lost primordial fullness; see Bowie 2003, pp. 83–87.

the only autonomous and self-referential art, as the medium through which God manifests itself to humans. Only art has the capacity “to pacify our endless striving, and likewise to resolve the final and uttermost contradiction within us. [...]

The work of art reflects to us the identity of the conscious and unconscious activities. [...] The work of art merely reflects to me what is otherwise not reflected by anything, namely that absolutely identical which has already divided itself even in the self. Hence, that which the philosopher allows to be divided even in the primary act of consciousness, and which would otherwise be inaccessible to any intuition, comes, through the miracle of art, to be radiated back from the products thereof.⁷⁶

A successful work of art, or, better yet, a successful, coherently structured work of music, referring to nothing but itself, represents the ideal unity of the subject before its founding split, that is, the otherwise unknowable underlying unity of God. Schelling posits the work of art as the only available model of the ideal, self-identical subject, before it splits itself in the act of its self-intuition, whereby it comes into being, thereafter always divided between the intuiting and the intuited self. Again, as with Schopenhauer, we must be reminded that Schelling entrusts music and the arts with their exalted roles only insofar as they conform to his conception of art as disembodied and aesthetically autonomous. To what extent virtuosity conformed to such a conception of art was the concern of many nineteenth-century music critics, such as Davison, discussed above. It will also be our concern in the chapters that follow.

⁷⁶ Schelling 1978, pp. 222–30. In Bowie 2007, Andrew Bowie posits a wider role for longing, which he uses interchangeably with striving, in Romantic philosophy: “Rather than having a vague, merely affective status, longing plays a central epistemological and ontological role in Romantic philosophy. It has to do with the idea that the motivation of philosophical thinking is the desire to attain something which can never be present, but which yet demands to be attained”; see Bowie 2007, pp. 92–93. For more on the concept of endless striving in Schelling and other post-Kantian thinkers, see Bowie 1993, pp. 51ff.

Transcendental Freedom and the “Agreeable Art” of Music: Kant and Fichte

Their differences notwithstanding, Schelling and Schopenhauer shared something of the same motivation: to bridge the gap between noumenal and phenomenal reality created by Kant, the driving force of much of nineteenth-century German philosophy. Kant posited the noumenal reality of the world—the world, including the subject, “as it really is”—as entirely unknowable to the human mind; according to Kant, what the subject does perceive is only phenomenal reality, not the world as it really is but only as it appears to the subject, processed by the subject’s senses and mental faculties. As we saw above, Schelling resorted to God, whereas the atheist and irrationalist Schopenhauer simply evacuated the noumenal of all but the irrational and impersonal Will, insisting on its inaccessibility to the subject, except in the subject’s loss of itself, temporary in aesthetic contemplation and permanent in death. Like Fichte before him (more on whom below), Schopenhauer claimed that he alone remained faithful to Kant’s thought, even more faithful than Kant himself, inasmuch as he left the noumenal (that is, the Will) completely unknowable to the subject. However, Kant was, of course, neither atheist nor irrationalist: while he did stay away from church (both in his philosophy and daily life),⁷⁷ Kant did believe in the power of reason to demonstrate certain truths about noumenal reality, including the existence of God, relying, however, on reason only. For Kant, another such important noumenal truth—perhaps even more important—was the transcendental freedom of the subject.⁷⁸ This is where it most clearly emerges how far Kant’s nineteenth-century successors strayed from his conception of the subject and, by extension, from his aesthetics, which in turn

⁷⁷ For more general information on Kant’s life and thought, see Walker 1999 and Ward 2006.

⁷⁸ For general studies in Kant’s epistemology, see Henrich 1992 and Keller 1999.

conditioned the increasingly hostile critical reception of virtuosity throughout the century. Due to his rationalist confidence in the freedom of the subject, Kant posited only a relative notion of aesthetic autonomy, relative because posited not for its own sake, but for that of advancing his agenda in ethics. Kant's position on music was further affected by his traditional view of it as a mimetic art inseparable from performance, a view that was soon to become obsolete, as we saw in Davison, the early German Romantics, Schelling, and Schopenhauer above, and as we will see in Hegel below and in much of nineteenth-century criticism of virtuosity, discussed in the following two chapters.⁷⁹

“Freedom actually exists”, Kant asserts at the opening of the second *Critique*; it “is the only one of all the ideas of the speculative reason of which we *know* the possibility *a priori*”.⁸⁰ However, this is only transcendental, noumenal freedom, not Schopenhauer's phenomenal freedom of simply doing whatever one pleases. For Kant, the latter kind of freedom would be no freedom at all, no autonomy but mere heteronomy, that is, no self-rule but blind obedience to one's natural needs, urges, passions, and the like. In other words, Kant is forced to acknowledge that the subject in its phenomenal existence cannot be free from causality *qua* its natural needs, drives, urges, passions, and the like, but insists that the subject is still free, that is, transcendently free, where it really matters: in its noumenal existence. As Andrew Bowie puts it, the Kantian subject thus seems “to exist in two distinct realms”, as a sensuous being “determined by the laws of nature [...] in the realm of appearance” and, at the same time, as a “free agent” in reality as it really is.⁸¹ Both Bowie and Anthony Cascardi go so far as to see the preservation of the Kantian subject's (transcendental) freedom as Kant's main motive for

⁷⁹ In particular, see the nineteenth-century critics' pronouncements on music aesthetics, discussed at the beginning of Chapter Three.

⁸⁰ Kant 1996, pp. 14–15.

⁸¹ Bowie 2003a, p. 18.

introducing the noumenal-phenomenal duality in the first place.⁸² Cascardi thus writes: “the idea of a duality of worlds is necessary in order to guarantee the subject’s transcendental freedom in light of the reign of causality over empirical events”.⁸³ The Kantian duality conveniently allows us to “conceive of ourselves as transcendently free while acknowledging the existence of a thoroughgoing natural determinism in the spatio-temporal world”.⁸⁴

Situating freedom in the noumenal means lending it real existence in the world “as it really is”; however, the downside of such existence is that, being noumenal, it is not at all cognizable to the human mind. And yet, Kant asserts, it “is the only one of all ideas of the speculative reason of which we *know* the possibility *a priori*”. How? It is important to note that Kant writes that “we *know* the *possibility*” of freedom, which is not the same as knowing freedom itself. According to Kant, we know the *possibility* of freedom vicariously, by reference to our moral consciousness. The subject’s moral consciousness, which Kant here takes for granted, means that the subject knows what she ought to do and has the power to impose such a course of action on herself even if it contravenes her own immediate interests. This is Kant’s famous “categorical imperative”.⁸⁵ The subject then must be in some sense *free* to choose whether to act morally or not. This freedom of choice “means only freedom from natural necessity, not absolute freedom, for the moral law is itself a constraint”.⁸⁶ Rather than a limiting factor on freedom, moral constraint is inherent to the Kantian conception of freedom, as its defining characteristic and condition: the fact that moral consciousness exists means that

⁸² Bowie 2003a, p. 17: “If the laws of nature were properties of the object world ‘in itself’ they would also apply to ourselves in every respect. In such a view the world, including ourselves, would become a deterministic machine and human responsibility would be an illusion”.

⁸³ Cascardi 1992, p. 20.

⁸⁴ Ward 2006, p. 174.

⁸⁵ Kant 1996, p. 46: “Act so that the maxim of thy will always holds good as a principle of universal legislation”, in other words, act only as you would like everyone else to act. For more on the categorical imperative and Kant’s ethics in general, see Henrich 1992, Schneewind 1992, and Meld Shell 2009.

⁸⁶ Strozier 2002, p. 251.

freedom must exist, too, without which there could not be any moral consciousness in the first place.

It is noteworthy that although Kant here takes the subject's moral consciousness for granted, elsewhere he still posits it as a hypothesis in need of rational demonstration. Thus in the second *Critique* he writes that its purpose is "to show that *there is pure practical reason*".⁸⁷ So, on the one hand, the unquestioned existence of moral consciousness is taken as evidence of freedom, because moral consciousness would be impossible without it: to make a moral choice, one must first have the freedom to choose otherwise; "Ought implies freedom",⁸⁸ the latter "being the condition of the possibility of action on the basis of this imperative".⁸⁹ On the other hand, to justify any ethics ("to show that *there is pure practical reason*"), freedom itself must be presumed as an axiom, for reasons just discussed. Therefore, we have two assertions, one, that there is freedom and the other, that there is ethics, each of which receives its legitimacy only from the other, without a third, axiomatic claim that might legitimize them both. Interpreting the problem, Andrew Ward reverts to the noumenal-phenomenal duality, the cornerstone of Kant's philosophy:

By analysing our concept of duty, or moral obligation, [Kant] will maintain not only that moral agency presupposes transcendental freedom, but that its existence is *proved* by our moral experience. His proof [...] does not conflict with his strictures on the use of theoretical reason. What it does require, as he well appreciated, is that we view his moral philosophy as an integral part, perhaps the culminating part, of his Copernican revolution.⁹⁰

In other words, only a transcendental (that is, noumenal) conception of freedom may be both *inferred* from the phenomenal existence of moral consciousness (which Kant takes for granted)

⁸⁷ Kant 1996, p. 13.

⁸⁸ Williams 1997, p. 32.

⁸⁹ Allison 1995, p. 17.

⁹⁰ Ward 2006, pp. 141–42.

and proven by reference to that phenomenal existence. But there is another phenomenal category in Kant that might be used to account for both freedom and morality: aesthetic judgment, the topic of his third *Critique*.

“Like the work of art”, Terry Eagleton writes, “morality or practical reason is autonomous and self-grounding”.⁹¹ Because the aesthetic judgment of art “embodies an analogy with the free but rule-governed activity characteristic of the moral”,⁹² Kant offers it as a sensuous model of both freedom and morality.⁹³ Such a sensuous model is necessary, Kant argues, because the mind needs one, since humans are neither exclusively rational (as God is), nor entirely dominated by their sensuous nature (as animals are); therefore, strictly rational deductions of freedom and morality (such as Kant’s) are for most people not compelling enough and need some kind of sensuous representation as a supplement.⁹⁴ The aesthetic judgment thus “makes, as it were, the transition from the charm of sense to habitual moral interest possible without too violent a leap”.⁹⁵ Kant makes the aesthetic judgment approximate his conceptions of freedom and morality by specifying two conditions that it must fulfill: first, that it be “disinterested” that is, free of any interest on the judging subject’s part: “it must please apart from all interest”,⁹⁶ and second, that it likewise be “conceptless”: “delight in the beautiful is such as does not presuppose any concept”.⁹⁷ The first condition means that the judging subject must appreciate the object as beautiful in its own right, without an interest in appropriating or

⁹¹ Eagleton 2009, p. 113.

⁹² Kemal 1997, p. 140.

⁹³ Particularly useful studies of the Kantian aesthetic include Gasché 2003, Guyer 2006, Henrich 1992, Japaridze 2000, Kemal 1997, Kirwan 2006, Kukla 2002, Savile 2006, Meld Shell 2009, and Wenzel 2005.

⁹⁴ Friedrich Schiller made a comparable argument about the necessity of the aesthetic as a guarantor of balance between the human subject’s “sensuous” and “formal” drives, preventing humans from degenerating into overtly cerebral creatures bereft of feelings, as well as keeping them from relapsing into the condition of animals, entirely determined by their sensuous needs and desires; see Bowman 1998, pp. 91–94.

⁹⁵ Kant 1973, § 59.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, § 29.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, § 16.

otherwise violating it, a stipulation that, as we saw above, Schopenhauer adapted to his own purposes. The second condition follows from the first, inasmuch as Kant asserts that no judgment based on a concept (that of, say, morality) can be disinterested (which would disqualify even moral judgments, since they, too, are made with an interest, albeit a noble one, in morality). Autonomous and free of all interest, the aesthetic judgment approximates the transcendental freedom of the human subject. The object of aesthetic judgment, be it nature or a work of art, is likewise treated as autonomous, beautiful, and worthy in its own right; the aesthetic judgment is a sensuous model of morality inasmuch as it teaches humans to appreciate not only nature and art as autonomous, beautiful, and worthy in themselves, but also other people. That is why “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good”—it “prepares us to love something, even nature, apart from any interest”.⁹⁸ In *The Fate of Art*, J. M. Bernstein accuses Kant that he sowed the seeds of the modernist alienation of art from society, by divorcing it from ethics;⁹⁹ however, Bernstein’s charge is less than fair, since Kant posits the aesthetic judgment precisely as a tool of moral instruction. While it is true that a defining characteristic of Romantic aesthetics is its “absence of social considerations”, as Edward Lippman puts it,¹⁰⁰ that disinterest in the social applies much more to Schelling and Schopenhauer than it does to Kant, with his endeavor to posit the aesthetic as a bodily ground of morality.

⁹⁸ Kant 1973, §§ 29 and 59.

⁹⁹ Bernstein 1992, p. 5: “There is one moment in this story of art’s alienation from truth and its attempt to overcome that alienation that is of special significance: it is Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*. The significance of Kant’s work is twofold. On the one hand, it is Kant’s third *Critique* that attempts to generate, to carve out and constitute, the domain of the aesthetic in its wholly modern signification. In securing an autonomous domain of aesthetic judgement, a domain with its own norms, language and set of practices, Kant was simultaneously securing the independence of the domains of cognition and moral worth from aesthetic interference”.

¹⁰⁰ Lippman 1992, p. 207: “A final characteristic of Romantic aesthetics is the absence of social considerations: the musical experience is that of an individual who is alone or withdrawn, related only to music and to the world it reveals”.

Now one might have expected music, especially instrumental music, to fare well against Kant's demands of disinterestedness and conceptlessness. Instrumental music's adherence to the latter demand is especially obvious. In fact, Kant's pronouncements make it clear that by *Tonkunst* he does actually mean contemporary instrumental music only. He mentions it early on in the third *Critique*, as a prime example of "free beauty" bereft of all "intrinsic meaning" and representing "nothing—no Object under a definite concept".¹⁰¹ He further notes music's autonomy and self-referentiality, resulting from its divorce from all (verbal) representation:

[T]he art of tone wields the full force of this language [i.e. the language of "mere sensations without concepts"] wholly on its own account, namely, as a language of the affections, and in this way, according to the law of association, universally communicates the aesthetic ideas that are naturally combined therewith.¹⁰²

And in its conceptless imitation of feelings, music, according to Kant, comes second only to poetry:

After poetry, *if we take charm and mental stimulation into account*, I would give the next place to that art which comes nearer to any other art of speech, and admits of very natural union with it, namely the art of *tone*. For though it speaks by means of mere sensations without concepts, and so does not, like poetry, leave behind it any food for reflection, still it moves the mind more diversely, and, although with transient, still with intenser effect. It is certainly, however, more a matter of enjoyment than of culture—the play of thought incidentally excited by it being merely the effect of a more or less mechanical association—and it possesses less worth in the eyes of reason than any other of the fine arts.¹⁰³

It was probably passages like these that prompted Wayne Bowman to see in Kant's aesthetics the "seeds" of music's future apotheosis.¹⁰⁴ But although the quotation above does nominally place music right below poetry, the worthiest of the arts as far as Kant was concerned, it already hints at the truly low position to which Kant finally consigns music, "more a matter of enjoyment than

¹⁰¹ Kant 1973, § 16.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, § 53.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Bowman 1998, p. 76.

of culture”, which “possesses less worth in the eyes of reason than any other of the fine arts”.

The rest of the paragraph spells it out:

If, on the other hand, we estimate the worth of the fine arts by the culture they supply to the mind, and adopt for our standard the expansion of the faculties whose confluence, in judgement, is necessary for cognition, music, then, since it plays merely with sensations, has the lowest place among the fine arts—just as it has perhaps the highest among those valued at the same time for their agreeableness. Looked at in this light it is far excelled by the formative arts. [...] The two kinds of art pursue completely different courses. Music advances from sensations to indefinite ideas: formative art from definite ideas to sensations. The latter gives a *lasting* impression, the former one that is only *fleeting*. The former sensations imagination can recall and agreeably entertain itself with, while the latter either vanish entirely, or else, if involuntarily repeated by the imagination, are more annoying to us than agreeable. Over and above all this, music has a certain lack of urbanity about it. For owing chiefly to the character of its instruments, it scatters its influence abroad to an uncalled-for extent [...], and thus, as it were, becomes obtrusive and deprives others, outside the musical circle, of their freedom. This is a thing that the arts that address to the eye do not do, for if one is not disposed to give admittance to their impressions, one has only to look the other way.¹⁰⁵

Again, it must be noted with surprise that music fares so badly in Kant’s appreciation, given how well it conforms to his conception of the aesthetic judgment, which Kant notes himself, when he writes that music “speaks by means of mere sensations without concepts”.¹⁰⁶ Not only does Kant rank music as the lowest of the fine arts, but he is even prepared to relegate it to the domain of the “agreeable” arts, crafts, skills, and the like.

Wayne Bowman identifies three general reasons for the lowly status of music in Kant’s aesthetics:

Music may be conceptless, but it is also transient and fleeting, which fact undermines the formal relationships on which the experience of pure beauty relies. As well, music is too

¹⁰⁵ Kant 1973, § 53.

¹⁰⁶ Wayne Bowman points to the seeming incongruity in similar terms: “By declaring beauty’s freedom from conceptual and sensual determination, Kant sought to establish the autonomy of aesthetic judgments—to show that judgments of beauty were free in ways that those in other experiential domains were not. Although this claim to autonomy is a matter of some moment for the arts, it is not without its costs, particularly in music’s case. Although music (particularly wordless, instrumental music) might have been expected to fare extraordinarily well against the criterion of conceptlessness, for instance, that is not quite how Kant saw things”; see Bowman 1998, p. 84.

active and changeable to be properly disinterested. Apparently, music appeals not quite enough to the mind, and rather too much to sense.¹⁰⁷

It is that final sentence that holds the key. Like his slightly older contemporary Sulzer and most eighteenth-century thinkers, Kant viewed music as inseparable from musical performance and the practice of music—hence epithets such as “transient”, “fleeting”, and the like. Unlike his younger contemporaries and successors, such as E. T. A. Hoffmann, Wackenroder, Herder, Schelling, Schopenhauer, and Hegel (more on whom below), Kant apparently did not think there was any more to wordless music than its sounding, that music could be an abstract art, quite independent of performance, the way a Schiller play might be read as an artwork independent from any theatric staging. As was argued above and will be further argued below, the subsequent divorce of music from the body (*qua* sound) and performance was to enable the early German Romantics (E. T. A. Hoffmann and others), Schelling, Schopenhauer, and Hegel to make much more ambitious metaphysical claims on music’s behalf. When it came to virtuosity, its main problem for its nineteenth-century critics was that it appeared to cling to this Kantian idea of music as an irreducibly bodily practice inseparable from performance. Indeed, virtuosity did not just cling to that old, Kantian conception of music, but furthermore, in the eyes of its critics, it laid undue stress on musical performance at the expense of the abstract and disembodied art of music. That Kant indeed saw music as inseparable from its physical, that is, bodily, manifestation in sound is further suggested by his lumping it together with laughter, music and laughter being “two kinds of play with aesthetic ideas, or even with representations of the understanding, by which, all said and done, nothing is thought”, although he does praise the salubrious effects of music and laughter on the body, by “stirring the intestines and the

¹⁰⁷ Bowman 1998, p. 84.

diaphragm”.¹⁰⁸ A “kind of play with aesthetic ideas [...] by which, all said and done, nothing is thought” is not far from Sulzer’s characterization of instrumental music as “pleasant nonsense”. The rationalist Kant did not think instrumental music could mean anything apart from itself.

Furthermore, for Kant music is still a “language of the affections”,¹⁰⁹ that is, Kant still sees mimesis as the main purpose of all art, whereby music is at once put in an inferior position to literature and the visual arts due to its essentially non-referential and non-representational character. Finally, it seems plausible that Kant just was not much of a musically inclined person: it is unclear, for instance, why a work of music such as Haydn’s “Oxford” or Mozart’s “Jupiter” symphony, both composed shortly before the publication of the *Critique of Judgment*, might not leave a “lasting” but only a “fleeting” impression, and why the sensations of such music “if involuntarily repeated by the imagination, are more annoying to us than agreeable”. Kant’s final reproach to music, its intrusiveness due to its medium and the anatomy of the ear, is perhaps easiest to understand, though most of us probably do not experience it as “a certain lack of urbanity” on music’s part.¹¹⁰ It is tempting to speculate that, had he been concerned by it, virtuosity might not trouble Kant, since he regarded performance (which includes virtuosity) as inseparable from music anyway; it is equally tempting to speculate further that, had his denigrating view of music stayed current in the nineteenth century, virtuosity would have had a rather different reception history.

Although Kant does not offer it himself, there might be another, more roundabout reason for the peripheral position of music in his aesthetics: the condition of the Kantian subject. As we

¹⁰⁸ Kant 1973, § 53.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ For more detailed accounts of Kant’s conception and assessment of music, see Fricke 2003, Parret 1998, Schubert 1975, Seidel 1988, and Weatherston 1996. For more on the historical context in which Kant experienced and conceptualized music, see especially Tettlebaum 2004.

saw above, that subject is free: noumenally, transcendently, and essentially free; it is neither inherently split, as Schelling's subject is, nor is it a mere slave to an extraneous irrational force, like its Schopenhauerian counterpart. Therefore Kant has simply no such need for music, as the two younger philosophers have, in Bowie's interpretation discussed above: unlike Schelling, Kant does not need music to represent the primordial unity of the subject, nor does he need it as a temporary escape from the sorry state of the Schopenhauerian subject. In his *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, Bowie focuses away from Kant, presumably because music plays no vital role in Kant's philosophy;¹¹¹ but the reason for that is precisely Kant's confidence in free subjectivity, which would actually corroborate Bowie's readings of Schelling and Schopenhauer. For Kant's subject is already essentially, transcendently free; it has no need for music to help it transcend itself in aesthetic contemplation (as in Schopenhauer), or catch a glimpse of its primordial unity (as in Schelling), because the Kantian subject never lost it in the first place. Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, the *absence* of romanticist metaphysical claims on behalf of music and the *absence* of skepticism regarding the free subject of the Enlightenment in Kant only speak in favor of positing links between music and subjectivity, as Bowie does concerning Schelling and Schopenhauer. Furthermore, regarding the related issue of aesthetic autonomy, despite Kant's insistence on the autonomy of the aesthetic judgment, it is debatable just how autonomous and in what way the Kantian aesthetic is. For one thing, it is certainly not autonomous in the same way as it is in Schopenhauer—in the unique case of music, as a direct copy of the noumenal itself,

¹¹¹ But do see “What Kant said about music, and what he could have said” in Chapter 3: Rhythm and Romanticism of his *Music, Philosophy and Modernity* (Bowie 2007), pp. 79–90, published four years after *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*. There, Bowie makes a spirited argument that music actually underlies all of Kant's epistemology as laid out in the first *Critique*, even though Kant mentions music only in the third *Critique* and there, as we saw, not very positively. Here is Bowie's conclusion from 2007: “If it is accepted [...] that pre-conceptual [i.e., pre-linguistic] feeling is a fundamental factor in the genesis of human forms of articulation [as it must be, unless one accepts the dogma of the divine origin of language], there are reasons for suggesting that music [...] is inseparable from other forms of intelligibility”, p. 90.

which is the only true site of autonomy in Schopenhauer's system—or in Schelling, emanating from God or the “Absolute All”, because Kant introduces the autonomy of the aesthetic judgment only as an instructive tool in morality, which is his main concern. The aesthetic is there not for its own sake, but to teach us to appreciate other human beings just as we appreciate natural and artistic beauty, as ends in themselves.¹¹²

Another sign that the autonomy of the Kantian aesthetic judgment is posited not for its own but for the sake of upholding the subject's moral consciousness is the *sensus communis*, Kant's idea of common sense, which must be briefly summarized here, before explaining how it qualifies Kant's conception of aesthetic autonomy. According to Kant, although particular aesthetic judgments are strictly autonomous and subjective, they are nevertheless supposed to be shared by all. This is what Kant somewhat paradoxically calls “subjective universality”:

[T]he judgement of taste [...] must involve a claim to validity for all men, and must do so apart from universality attached to Objects, i.e. there must be coupled with it a claim to subjective universality. [...] The *beautiful* is that which, apart from a concept, pleases universally.¹¹³

That is why the judging subject, “when he puts a thing on a pedestal and calls it beautiful, he demands the same delight from others”; the subject “speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things” and not merely of the aesthetic judgment.¹¹⁴ Precisely because the aesthetic judgment is disinterested and conceptless, the judging subject suspects that it must be an inherent property of the object that causes her to judge it as beautiful.¹¹⁵ And since the subject's judgment depends

¹¹² For more on the ethical import of Kant's aesthetics, see Guyer 2006 and Henrich 1992.

¹¹³ Kant 1973, §§ 6–7.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, § 7.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, § 6: “For where any one is conscious that his delight in an object is with him independent of interest, it is inevitable that he should look on the object as one containing a ground of delight for all men. For, since the delight is not based on any inclination of the Subject (or on any other deliberate interest), but the Subject feels himself completely *free* in respect of the liking which he accords to the object, he can find as reason for his delight no personal conditions to which his own subjective self might alone be party”.

neither on an interest nor on a concept exclusive to the subject, she rightfully expects other subjects to share her judgment.¹¹⁶ But since her judgment rests neither on interest nor concept, there must be a sense that all judging subjects share, to be able to appreciate the (supposed) inherent beauty of the object of judgment—that shared sense is the *sensus communis*: “The judgement of taste, therefore, depends on our presupposing the existence of a common sense”.¹¹⁷

The *sensus communis* qualifies Kant’s conception of aesthetic autonomy because it seeks to socialize, that is, universalize it. Strictly speaking, the aesthetic is absolutely autonomous only if it is entirely subjective. But by means of the *sensus communis* Kant seeks to universalize it, to make all subjects conform to it. Ross Wilson interprets the *sensus communis* as Kant’s way “to designate the bare minimum of what is required from anyone who claims to be a human being”, in other words, the lowest common denominator of humanity;¹¹⁸ the concepts of the *sensus communis* and aesthetic judgment, whereby human beings may enjoy sensuous beauty without wishing to appropriate it, are what distinguishes the human from a purely rational being (that is, God), as well as from animals.¹¹⁹ Indeed, there is a place in the third *Critique* where Kant seemingly contradicts himself, by allowing that the subjective universality of the aesthetic judgment, which he initially defines as conceptless, may in fact rest on the *concept* of “the supersensible substrate of humanity”.¹²⁰ Be that as it may, the *sensus communis* (or Kant’s “supersensible substrate”) reveals that the aesthetic judgment is not a strictly subjective,

¹¹⁶ Kant 1973, § 6: “Hence he must regard it as resting on what he may also presuppose in every other person; and therefore he must believe that he has reason for demanding a similar delight from every one”.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, § 19. For more substantial discussions of the *sensus communis*, see Japaridze 2000 and Wilson 2007.

¹¹⁸ Wilson 2007, p. 179.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹²⁰ Kant 1973, § 57: “The judgement of taste does depend upon a concept [...], but one from which nothing can be cognized in respect of the Object, and nothing proved, because it is in itself indeterminable and useless for knowledge. Yet by means of this very concept it acquires at the same time validity for every one [...]: because its determining ground lies, perhaps, in the concept of what may be regarded as the supersensible substrate of humanity”.

autonomous affair, but more of a social or at least an inter-subjective one,¹²¹ just as Kant's understanding of morality is inherently inter-personal (appreciating others as ends in themselves and acting only in such a way as one would like others to act). "Intersubjectivity is crucial on all levels of Kant's theory", Georg Mohr asserts; therefore, freedom, morality, and aesthetic judgment are likewise all "essentially interpersonal".¹²²

In his compelling reading of the Kantian aesthetic, Terry Eagleton interprets the *sensus communis* as an ideological bid to produce a more solid community, held together not by the always fallible means of simple coercion, but by means of a deeper union, the *sensus communis*, predicated on the conceptless, natural, and therefore seemingly incontrovertible ground of the aesthetic, that is, of the body and its senses.¹²³ Along similar lines, Andrew Bowie interprets the *sensus communis* as Kant's rationalist replacement for theology (i.e., religion), as the metaphysical ground of morality: the *sensus communis* is there "to establish what is necessarily the case for everyone who counts as a rational being, now that theological foundations can no

¹²¹ Salim Kemal goes so far as to assert that the subject's aesthetic judgment is only valid if other judging subjects concur with it: "In effect Kant's theory points to a mutual dependence between the subject and community. Neither gains serious employment without the other. [...] This account of the activity of judging subtends a conception of the subject. If judgements are subjective and autonomous but need confirmation, then the individuals who make such judgements will find their behaviour constrained by these expectations. [...] the judgement's constitution of the subject must satisfy the requirements of intersubjectivity, in which the subject's autonomous decisions gain validity from the community. In this respect, individuals are not sovereign subjects, but are always 'suitor[s] for agreement' from others. Their autonomy is warranted only in being confirmed by others"; Kemal 1997, p. 123. Rebecca Kukla similarly concludes that if aesthetic judgments "are to be anything more than arbitrary subjective pleasures, they need some other tribunal of accountability, and the common aesthetic sense of the human community, presupposed by each judgment of taste, serves as this tribunal"; Kukla 2002, pp. 13–14. But it is debatable whether one should go that far. While it is true that intersubjectivity often comes up in Kant's explanations of morality (for instance, in the categorical imperative and in his use of aesthetic judgment as a tool to teach us to appreciate others as "ends in themselves", just as we appreciate works of art), Kant's morality is, like the work of art, meant to be autonomous and grounded in the noumenal existence of transcendental freedom. Besides, although Kant does stipulate that the judging subject, based on the presupposed *sensus communis*, is right to demand that others concur with his judgment, he does not go so far as to suggest that the judgment would otherwise be invalid.

¹²² Mohr 1995, p. 38.

¹²³ Eagleton 1990, pp. 70–101.

longer be invoked".¹²⁴ Simply speaking, the *sensus communis* is there to prevent the society of subjects aware of their transcendental freedom from falling apart. Now although Bowie does not make the same conclusion, Kant's *relative* autonomy of the aesthetic judgment, relative because introduced not for its own sake but only to uphold society and universalized in the *sensus communis* for the sake of morality,¹²⁵ along with the transcendental freedom of the Kantian subject and his disinterest in music, might serve to corroborate the links that Bowie draws between music and subjectivity in his interpretations of Schelling and Schopenhauer: precisely because Kant's subject is (transcendentally) free, unlike Schopenhauer's, who is always controlled by the Will (except when it transcends itself and temporarily loses its subjectivity in aesthetic contemplation) and unlike Schelling's, who always remains inherently split and therefore in endless longing for its lost self-unity, Kant has no need for absolute aesthetic autonomy, including that of music. Art is certainly significant for Kant, but not *in se*, as it is for Schelling and Schopenhauer; it is significant only insofar as it symbolizes (transcendental) freedom and morality.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Bowie 2003, p. 18. For more on the moralist import of the *sensus communis*, see also Bowie 2007, p. 85. Elsewhere in the same volume (pp. 49ff), Bowie makes a similar argument regarding the late-eighteenth-century rejection of the traditional theological dogma of the divine origin of language and its purely representational function. While Kant did not profess such misgivings about language, it is tempting to see his replacement of theology with his moralist aesthetics as a harbinger of the later nineteenth-century replacement of Christianity with *Kunstreligion*, although Kant himself, with his trust in reason and moralist (and therefore not strictly aesthetic) interest in art, would probably not stand for such a blend of art and religion. Edward Lippman nicely summarizes the experience of *Kunstreligion* in music: "Very much as a devout monk might experience the religious world of revelation, the reverent listener is put in touch with the metaphysical world of music. The religious and metaphysical experiences are often literally combined, but a symphony in itself represents a kind of religious experience; art becomes a religion". See Lippman 1992, p. 207.

¹²⁵ Wenzel 2005, p. 103: "Only after having shown that beauty can stand on its own feet does he draw connections between morality and beauty. Only in this way is it possible to see how beauty can give support to morality". Wenzel presents a compelling case that Kant posited an autonomous aesthetic judgment not for its own sake, but only to construct a sensuous model of (transcendental) freedom and morality.

¹²⁶ Salim Kemal concludes that for Kant, the symbolic relation between fine art and moral good "identifies the significance of fine art"; see Kemal, 1997, pp. 141ff.

Had nineteenth-century critics of virtuosity shared Kant's trust in transcendental freedom and rationalist conception of music as a mimetic and irreducibly sensuous art of performance, they might not have worried about virtuosity so much. But by the 1820s, the notion of the subject's transcendental freedom was already growing less and less believable, in philosophy, politics, and economy alike. The Romantic reconceptualization of music as free had therefore come to symbolize the increasingly untenable notion of a transcendently free subject, only to come under a perceived attack from virtuosity itself. To return once more to Kant, one might even go so far as to suppose that Kant would attach no significance to aesthetics and the arts, if only his subject were capable of reaching absolute knowledge, that is, knowledge of the noumenal, including its transcendental freedom as the ground of morality. Indeed, when, in Hegel, the subject does reach absolute knowledge, aesthetics and the arts will precisely cease to matter.

But before considering Hegel, it might be worthwhile to look briefly at Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), one of Kant's major early self-proclaimed followers, because Fichte professed the same confidence in the transcendental freedom of the subject, but did not posit such a vital role for the aesthetic, as Kant did. Just as Kant arguably did not posit an absolute conception of aesthetic autonomy because of the freedom he accorded to his conception of the subject, so Fichte sidestepped the aesthetic because in his philosophy there was even less need for it. With Schelling and Schopenhauer, Fichte shared the desire to overcome the radical dualism of Kant's philosophy.¹²⁷ Like Kant, Fichte also insists on the existence of absolute freedom:

¹²⁷ Useful summaries of Fichte's thought are found in DiGiovanni and Harris 2000 and Henrich 2003.

Freedom is [...] the ultimate ground and the first condition of all being and of all consciousness.¹²⁸

Everything that can exist exists only in conjunction with and by means of absolute freedom. Without absolute freedom there is nothing. [...]

Freedom is therefore the ultimate ground and the first *condition* of all being and of all consciousness.¹²⁹

Still following Kant, Fichte locates the only phenomenal manifestation of absolute freedom in morality, that is, in the self-limitation that the subject, whom he calls “the I”, freely imposes upon itself: “‘I am a person’; this means that I am limited. This limitation is a duty, and individuality consists in being limited in consequence of duty”.¹³⁰

Where Fichte departs from Kant, however, is his qualification that the subject acts in this self-limiting way not directly out of an inborn moral consciousness, but only at the “summons” of the “not-I”—the domain of others that the I itself posits, in order to delimit itself: “this task of limiting oneself is a summons to engage in a free activity (for it does not appear to come from the individual; instead, it appears to come from a *rational being outside of us*)”.¹³¹ But Fichte is “generally known as the philosopher of a subject whose power [...] is wholly contained within itself, as *causa sui*”,¹³² because that “*rational being outside of us*” really only comes from within the I itself, whose existence then transpires in an endless, repetitive striving to appropriate the not-I; in this endless cycle, the I creates the not-I out of itself, realizes that the not-I is only an alienated part of itself and re-appropriates it, only to repeat the cycle again and again. Fichte’s radical subjectivism, whereby the subject gives rise not only to itself, but also to the other, is his proposed solution for bridging the Kantian gap between the noumenal and the phenomenal.¹³³

¹²⁸ Fichte 1992, p. 68.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 142–46.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 437.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹³² Bowie 1997, p. xxi.

¹³³ Bowie 2007, p. 91.

That is why Fichte may somewhat cryptically claim that “Nature in its entirety is a product of the imagination”¹³⁴ and that “I am nothing but a product of my own pure thinking”.¹³⁵ The endless striving of Fichte’s I after its own completion may indeed remind one of the Schellingian subject’s similar condition, but only at first sight, for the differences outweigh the similarities. Crucially, Schelling’s subject comes into being by splitting itself inherently, into the intuiting subject and the intuited object (that is, itself); that is why it is in endless striving for its lost self-completion, only to find brief appeasement in the self-complete autonomy of the arts. For the underlying, noumenal unity of the subject and everything else, Schelling relies on God. By contrast, Fichte remains faithful to Kant and relies on reason alone. Like Schelling’s, Fichte’s subject posits (or intuits) itself, but does not end up inherently split, because Fichte equates the I with the very *activity* of the I’s self-positing: “The I is nothing but its own activity. The representing subject is identical with its own self-activity, which constitutes its very essence”.¹³⁶ That self-activity is the I’s activity of positing itself: “the concept of the I comes into being by means of a *self-reverting activity* [...] By observing oneself while engaged in this activity, one becomes immediately conscious of it; i.e., *one posits oneself as self-positing*”.¹³⁷

As he did with Kant, Bowie sidesteps Fichte in favor of Schelling and Schopenhauer, presumably because the latter two philosophers put more weight on music in relation to their respective conceptions of subjectivity. But precisely because Fichte’s subject (the I) is absolutely free and self-same *qua* its self-positing activity—unlike its Schellingian and Schopenhauerian counterparts—Fichte has no need to posit music as a glimpse into the subject’s lost primordial unity, as Schelling does; this is because Fichte’s subject, by constantly positing itself, is always

¹³⁴ Fichte 1992, p. 404.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

in the process of regaining its unity, rather than endlessly striving for it in vain, as its Schellingian counterpart is, having lost it forever at the moment of its inception.¹³⁸ By the same token, Fichte has no need for music as a locus where the subject might transcend its subjection to an all-consuming, irrational force, as in the Schopenhauerian Will, again because Fichte's subject *is* essentially free. In Jerrold Seigel's assessment, Fichte's I is in a superior position even to Kant's subject, inasmuch as the Fichteian I summons *itself* to act morally (via the not-I, which the I itself posits), whereas the Kantian subject is supposed to follow its moral consciousness predicated on a transcendental freedom that it cannot know. This might be a reason why Fichte was even less interested in music and aesthetics than Kant was, because the Fichteian I has no need for the aesthetic *qua* a sensuous representation of its transcendental freedom: instead of having to infer its freedom from its moral consciousness, the I is already consciously free in positing itself and the not-I, which summons it to act morally. That might be why the aesthetic does not feature so prominently in Fichte's philosophy, as it does in Kant's and Schelling's.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ As Jerrold Seigel asserts: "Limiting as the satisfaction of such existence might be, it assured that the ego remained always in motion: the repeated positing and overcoming of limitations reaffirmed the ego's nature as pure activity"; see Seigel 2005, p. 362. However, one could equally flip the coin and focus, as Andrew Bowie does, not on the I's self-positing activity and fleeting moments of its self-completion, but on its endless striving, resulting therefrom; see Bowie 1997, p. 69. Fichte himself comes close to acknowledging the split nature of the I, when he notes that it "appears as something double—and indivisibly so"; see Fichte 1992, p. 151. Besides, it is arguable that Fichte's notion of absolute freedom is not much more knowable than Kant's transcendental freedom. It was perhaps these shortcomings on Fichte's part that motivated the younger post-Kantian generation, spearheaded by Schelling, to keep searching for a bridge across the Kantian gap, relying ultimately not on reason, as Kant and Fichte did, but on the irrational, in Schelling's case—on God.

¹³⁹ Elsewhere, however, Fichte did address music, as demonstrates, for instance, his editorial on the merits of technical skill, published in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* and discussed in the following chapter.

The Passing of Music on the Road to Freedom and Absolute Knowledge: Hegel

Although of course different in many important respects, the philosophy of Fichte's more illustrious successor at Berlin, G. W. F. Hegel, offers some similar insights regarding the links between philosophical conceptions of music and subjectivity.¹⁴⁰ Unlike Fichte, Hegel has a great deal to say on music and the other arts and values music in particular much more than Kant did; still, he denies it the supremacy it has in Schelling's and Schopenhauer's aesthetics, whereas he shows more faith in the subject's freedom and cognitive powers than did any of the thinkers discussed so far.¹⁴¹ As argued in the remainder of this chapter, those two aspects of Hegel's thought—the moderate standing of music and Hegel's absolute faith in the subject—are closely related. For Hegel, as for E. T. A. Hoffmann before him, music is central among “the romantic arts”: “The *second* art in which the romantic type realizes itself is contrasted with painting, and is music”.¹⁴² Like Hoffmann's (and Schelling's and Schopenhauer's), Hegel's *Tonkunst* is an abstract, intellectual, and autonomous art, not reducible, as it is in Kant, to the performance of music. In Chapter Three below, we will see that this conception of music, which Hegel largely shared with Schelling, Schopenhauer, and many others, conditioned the privileging of composition at the expense of performance—and thus also of virtuosity—in much of contemporary criticism. This is where Hegel departs from Kant, who still conflated music with musical performance and partly for that reason distrusted music, and approximates Schelling and Schopenhauer, his complicated relationships with them notwithstanding.

¹⁴⁰ For general studies of Hegel's philosophy, see Kain 2005, Rockmore 2003, Russon 2004, Solomon 1983, and Stern 2002.

¹⁴¹ For more on Hegel's aesthetics, see Desmond 1986, Houlgate 2007, James 2009, and Speight 2008.

¹⁴² Hegel 1993, pp. 94–95.

In other respects, however, Hegel is closer to Kant and Fichte than he is to his hated rivals. For, although he does place music near the top of his aesthetic hierarchy, Hegel does not place it *at* the top, as Schelling and Schopenhauer do, but, following Kant, reserves that position for poetry. The reasons for this are at the core of Hegel's philosophy. Hegel places his ultimate trust neither with God, like Schelling, nor, like Schopenhauer, with the irrational, but, like Kant and Fichte, still with human reason. His is "the most famous example of a philosophy which still seeks overall systematic answers to the questions posed by modernity".¹⁴³ However, Hegel ventures farther than either Kant or Fichte did, in his confidence that reason will, through a gradual series of successively more enlightened states of consciousness, eventually achieve absolute knowledge of itself and the world around it: "before the mind can attain the true notion of its absolute essence, it has to traverse a course of stages whose ground is in this idea itself".¹⁴⁴ In parallel motion, the subject (or self-consciousness, as Hegel calls it) progressively traverses a number of well-known stages in its own individuation, from the inchoate "subject of desire", in Judith Butler's apt expression,¹⁴⁵ via a rising series of intermediate levels of consciousness, to the fully self-conscious subject of absolute knowledge, whereby each level takes the subject further away from the total sensuous immediacy of desire and closer to the full conceptual determinacy of absolute knowledge.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Bowie 2007, p. 104.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁴⁵ The "subject of desire" refers to an early stage in Hegelian subject-formation, where the as yet inchoate self-consciousness has still no concept of a boundary between itself and the other, therefore relating to the other only through desire, trying to appropriate whatever is not already a part of its own self; see Butler 1999, p. xv. Marina Bykova sees desire as the driving force in the next stage of Hegelian subject-formation, too, the struggle for recognition: "The desire that a self-consciousness has and needs to satisfy in order to obtain a sense of its existence as an individual subject is a desire to be desired by others, namely a desire for *recognition*"; see Bykova 2009, p. 279.

¹⁴⁶ Particularly helpful studies of Hegel's account of subject-formation include Bykova 2009, Carlson 2005, Navickas 1978, Rauch and Sherman 1999, and Taylor 2000.

Since Hegel's subject is, like Kant's and Schelling's, neither entirely sensuous (which would make it into an animal), nor exclusively rational (which would equate it with God), Hegel follows Kant and Schelling in charging the arts with the important role of enabling the subject to acquire knowledge of itself and the world in a sensuous form. For Hegel, art is a "sensuously concrete way of knowing", as Wayne Bowman puts it.¹⁴⁷ However, in the arts Hegel sees neither Schelling's self-manifestation of God, nor a sign of the transcendental freedom of the Kantian subject; instead, Hegel credits the subject itself with attaining sensuous knowledge of itself and the world, on its own, by making art:

[A]rt has the vocation of revealing *the truth* in the form of sensuous artistic shape.¹⁴⁸

[T]he task of art is to represent the idea to direct perception in sensuous shape, and not in the form of thought [as in philosophy] or of pure spirituality [as in religion] as such.¹⁴⁹

In Hegel's conception of art, nothing is revealed to the subject from without, but the subject discovers the truth of the world by itself. By the same token, Hegel sees the work of art not as a model of the subject's ideal (and thus unattainable) primordial state of unity and self-identity (Schelling), nor as a passing transcendence of its subjection (Schopenhauer), but as a true reflection of the subject's unity and autonomy, attainable in absolute knowledge, a reflection that the subject fashions by himself. Thus in artistically modifying external, natural things, "upon which he impresses the seal of his inner being", the subject "finds repeated in them his own characteristics. Man does this in order as a free subject to strip the outer world of its stubborn foreignness, and to enjoy in the shape and fashion of things a mere external reality of himself".¹⁵⁰

This may be one of the reasons why Hegel goes to such great lengths to emphasize that art must

¹⁴⁷ Bowman 1998, p. 126.

¹⁴⁸ Hegel 1993, p. 61.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

be aesthetically autonomous: if the Hegelian subject, endowed as it is with autonomy and (eventually) with absolute knowledge, “finds repeated in [the arts] his own characteristics”, then those arts, too, must be autonomous themselves. Hegel thus follows Kant in stipulating that art must be “*free* in its end as in its means”¹⁵¹ and that “other objects, such as instruction, purification, improvement, pecuniary gain, endeavour after fame and honour, have nothing to do with the work of art as such, and do not determine its conception”.¹⁵² In due course we will see how violating those injunctions, especially subjecting music to “pecuniary gain” and “endeavour after fame and honour” shaped the critical reception of virtuosity.

Though the Hegelian subject is, like Kant’s and Schelling’s, partly sensuous and partly a rational being, it is not forever stuck in its present condition, as its Kantian and Schellingian counterparts are, but rather firmly set on its progressive path from the total sensuality of the “subject of desire” to the total rationality of absolute knowledge.¹⁵³ Crucially, it is by learning to appreciate art, that is, to contemplate and enjoy it without consuming or destroying it, that the “subject of desire” learns to transcend its slavery to desire, which is Hegel’s umbrella term for the subject’s sensuous needs, drives, passions, and the like, just as the Kantian subject catches a glimpse of its transcendental (that is, noumenal) freedom from (phenomenal) causality in the aesthetic judgment:

[T]he interest of art distinguishes itself from the practical interest of *desire* by the fact that it permits its object to subsist freely and in independence, while desire utilizes it in its own service by its destruction.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Hegel 1993, p. 9.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁵³ Robert Solomon aptly summarizes Hegel’s evolutionary account of subject-formation as “an ontological theory about the nature of ‘selfhood’ in which the whole history of philosophy, and in particular the Cartesian-Leibnizian vision of the fully formed individual ego is summarily rejected”; see Solomon 1983, p. 428. For more information on the individual stages of Hegelian subject-formation, see Williams 1997, Kinlaw 2003, DeVries 2008, Honneth 2008, and Chiereghin 2009.

¹⁵⁴ Hegel 1993, p. 86.

Because the subject is at this stage still a partly sensuous being, it can only proceed towards absolute knowledge by means of the sensuality of art. But “the sensuous aspect of the work of art has a right to existence only in as far as it exists for man’s mind, but not in as far as *qua* sensuous thing it has separate existence by itself”.¹⁵⁵ Consequently, making art “must be a spiritual activity which, nevertheless, at the same time has in itself the element of sensuousness and immediateness. [...] the spiritual and the sensuous side must in artistic production be as one”.¹⁵⁶ We already encountered some of this suspicion of the sensuous in Davison’s review of Liszt, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, and we will see much more of it, in similar contexts, in the chapters that follow.

As the subject progresses along the path of decreasing sensuality towards absolute knowledge,¹⁵⁷ its artistic creativity grows less and less sensuous, from the “symbolic” art of architecture, via the “classical” art of (ancient Greek) sculpture, to the “romantic” arts of painting, music (that is, German romantic music), and poetry. Painting is less sensuous than, and thus superior to, sculpture in Hegel’s mind, because it dispenses with the latter’s three-dimensionality, confining itself to flat surfaces. Hegel then deems music superior to both, because it dispenses with spatial and visual materiality and representation altogether, retaining the sensuous only in the form of the self-referential, intangible medium of sound:

¹⁵⁵ Hegel 1993, p. 40.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁵⁷ There is a useful summary of the Hegelian subject’s progressive evolution from total sensuality to absolute rationality in David James’s study of Hegelian ethics; James rightly locates the beginning of this evolution in the staking of its own life on the part of the victorious self-consciousness in the struggle for recognition: “This indifference to one’s own natural existence can therefore be seen as part of a formative experience in which human beings, acting on unconscious impulse, become aware of their abstract freedom, that is to say, their capacity to conceive of themselves in abstraction from all natural and merely given forms of determination”; see James 2007, p. 22. Like Kant before him, Hegel saw freedom not as blind following of one’s sensuous drives, but on the contrary, as one’s ability to resist those drives by means of free will. The crucial difference between Kant’s and Hegel’s respective conceptions of the subject is that the latter will eventually, in absolute knowledge, break free from sensuality altogether, whereas the former will always remain a part-sensuous, part-rational creature.

Its medium, though still sensuous, yet develops into still more thorough subjectivity and particularization. [...] Such an inchoate ideality of matter, which appears no longer as under the form of space, but as temporal ideality, is sound, the sensuous set down as negated, with its abstract visibility converted into audibility, inasmuch as sound, so to speak, liberates the ideal content from its immersion in matter. This earliest inwardness of matter and inspiration of soul into it furnishes the medium for the mental inwardness— itself as yet indefinite—into which mind concentrates itself; and finds utterance in its tones for the heart with its whole gamut of feelings and passions. Thus music forms the centre of the romantic arts.¹⁵⁸

Taken together, Hegel sees the arts as the sensuous self-expression of the artist's freedom, inner spirituality, and supersensuous significance as a human subject. Music may be seen as more instrumental in this regard than either sculpture or painting, because it reflects human subjectivity without recourse to tangible or visible external objects, using instead only pitch-definite sounds, themselves artificially produced, and focusing on the inner world of feelings of the human subject.

But even though Hegel posits music as “central among the romantic arts”, he reserves the supreme position for an art form that he finds even less sensuous than music: poetry, which, according to Hegel, makes do without any sensuous media whatsoever, relying instead on language and using sound only as a “sign”. For Hegel after all, music deals “only with the undefined movement of the inward spiritual nature”, “with musical sounds as, so to speak, feeling without thought” and therefore “needs little or no spiritual content to be present in consciousness”.¹⁵⁹ This is where Hegel approximates Kant in his assessment of music and the arts, despite the much higher positioning of music in the younger philosopher's hierarchy of the arts. For, although Hegel does not simply equate music with musical performance, as Kant did, he still sees it as irreducibly sensuous, for which reason he situates it below poetry. Music may

¹⁵⁸ Hegel 1993, pp. 94–95.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

be “central among the romantic arts”, according to Hegel, but is still sensuous, an art of tones—unlike Schopenhauer’s “copy of the Will itself”, which could exist even if the world did not, or Schelling’s “primal rhythm of nature and of the universe itself”, a manifestation of the underlying unity of everything, that is, God. It is to this rationalist, Enlightened, Kantian, and now we may also say Hegelian concept of music as irreducibly sensuous that virtuosity *qua* a class of musical performance clings, not to the newer, Romantic, and decidedly less rationalist idea of music as a radically abstract and disembodied art. And when that Romantic idea of music actually prevailed over Kant and Hegel’s older conceptions of music, as it did even in Hegel’s own lifetime, it was only to be expected that the kind of instrumental virtuosity practiced by Liszt and his contemporaries would be made obsolete, too. That development will be detailed in the following two chapters.

Hegel’s somewhat Kantian denigration of music culminates when he remarks that “we often enough see very great expertness in musical composition, as also in execution, subsist along with remarkable barrenness of mind and character”.¹⁶⁰ But “where music only suggests”, as Wayne Bowman concludes, “poetry discloses”.¹⁶¹ Of course, Hegel’s privileging of poetry over music is predicated on his confidence that the human mind indeed has the power to “disclose” (through poetry and other means) the “truth”, in other words that the subject may and will arrive to the absolute knowledge of itself and the world as it really is—a capability that neither Kant, nor Schelling, nor Schopenhauer would grant it. For the same reason, however, Hegel predicts that art as a whole will be supplanted by the desensitized spirituality of “revealed religion” (that is, Hegel’s conception of Lutheran Christianity), itself only to be

¹⁶⁰ Hegel 1993, p. 33.

¹⁶¹ Bowman 1998, p. 106.

replaced by the absolute knowledge and rationality of (Idealist) philosophy, “a higher mode than representation by means of the sensuous concrete”.¹⁶² At this stage, art “ends by transcending itself, inasmuch as it abandons the medium of a harmonious embodiment of mind in sensuous form, and passes from the poetry of imagination into the prose of thought”, because “the spirit of our modern world [...] reveals itself as beyond the stage at which art is the highest mode assumed by man’s consciousness of the absolute”. Art has become, Hegel concludes, “a thing of the past”.¹⁶³

Andrew Bowie then rightly concludes that for Hegel, music and all art are “only part of the prelude to the fully transparent and articulated concept of philosophy”.¹⁶⁴ Only such a concept of philosophy and Hegel’s subject of absolute knowledge will survive through the final stage of his teleological narrative, whereas art and even religion will fall by the wayside, thrown off by a subject fully conscious of himself and the world around it, entirely free from his erstwhile need for the sensuous and the spiritual.¹⁶⁵ If music and the other arts are only a “prelude” to philosophy, one may then rightly challenge Hegel’s notion of the aesthetic autonomy of art. For, although Hegel does insist that art is “*free* in its end as in its means”, he still subjects it, as Kant did, to a purpose other than itself—the unfolding of the Spirit, the subject’s attainment of absolute knowledge—which, once achieved, will render all art obsolete.

¹⁶² Hegel 1993, p. 78.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–13.

¹⁶⁴ Bowie 2003, p. 158.

¹⁶⁵ It is on the eventual obsolescence of religion that Robert Solomon erects his tempting thesis that Hegel was a covert atheist, who, taught by Fichte’s example, paid only lip-service to Protestant Christianity to cover his tracks and appease Prussia’s conservative religious establishment. Solomon’s thesis is not easy to refute, for the simple reason that it is unclear what the role of Hegel’s “revealed religion” will be, despite its exalted position in his narrative, once the subject has attained absolute knowledge in philosophy. On the other hand, one could say in Hegel’s defense (if need be) that the subject would never get there without the “revealed religion” of (Hegelian) Christianity in the first place (or without art, for that matter). But the doubt remains that the absolute knowledge of philosophy will render religion obsolete, just as it does with art. See Solomon 1983, pp. 565–84. See also Bowie 2007, p. 144: “From the beginning of his work Hegel is concerned with finding ways to replace the ‘substance’ of religion, as the power which binds a community together, with what can be achieved through human reason”.

In Bowman's summary, "[i]ts ultimate significance is as a means to that end".¹⁶⁶ William Desmond likens Hegel's aesthetics to "a peculiar theodicy, a theodicy which through art stresses the actual manifestness of *Geist* through the significant sensuousness of beauty".¹⁶⁷ Stressing its social aspect, Terry Pinkard interprets the Hegelian aesthetic as "a way of collectively reflecting on what it means to be human".¹⁶⁸ David James goes so far as to see Hegel's aesthetics as a "devaluation of the strictly 'aesthetic'", insofar as "it does not attempt to understand art by means of an analysis of the aesthetic experience of an individual human subject", as Kant did.¹⁶⁹ That said, even though Kant did not envisage the obsolescence of art (because his subject never will attain absolute knowledge), he, too, subjected art (that is, the autonomy of the aesthetic judgment) to a higher purpose—morality. Such a notion of aesthetic autonomy, relativized by the larger goal it is made to serve and, in Hegel's case, with a set expiry date, is very different from the absolute and eternal autonomy of art and especially music, which Schelling bases in God and Schopenhauer in the Will.

Now as Bowie points out, Schelling needs such a radical conception of aesthetic autonomy as a phenomenal sign of the subject's primordial unity, while Schopenhauer needs it as a refuge, however fleeting and ephemeral, from his own bleak outlook. As he did with Kant and Fichte, Bowie mostly stays away from Hegel, too, presumably because his conception of the aesthetic autonomy of art, like Kant's, is not as radical as Schelling's and Schopenhauer's are. But he could have easily included both Kant and Hegel in his discussion, because they would have further corroborated his interpretation of Schelling and Schopenhauer: Kant has no need for such a radical conception of aesthetic autonomy, because his subject is already transcendently

¹⁶⁶ Bowman 1998, p. 98.

¹⁶⁷ Desmond 1986, p. 104.

¹⁶⁸ Pinkard 2007, p. 8.

¹⁶⁹ James 2009, p. 7.

free; he only needs it as a phenomenal sign of that freedom; and Hegel has even less need for it, because the subject of absolute knowledge will be both noumenally and phenomenally free. The subject of absolute knowledge, it is true, can only be free *with* other subjects, whom he freely acknowledges as free and who likewise freely acknowledge him as free.¹⁷⁰ By qualifying the subject's freedom as social, Hegel seeks to construct a society of free subjects that would not disintegrate into "atomicity", just as Kant did by introducing the *sensus communis*. This social kind of freedom "must always appeal to, or rely upon, the sanction or recognition of its other";¹⁷¹ in other words, it is intersubjective from the start, inasmuch as "*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*",¹⁷² "exists only in being acknowledged",¹⁷³ and "can reach completion only within a social community formed by mutually recognizing and freely active subjects".¹⁷⁴ Nonetheless, the fact remains that Hegel's subject in the end does achieve absolute knowledge of itself and the world, including its noumenal freedom. It is true that the Hegelian self-consciousness "cannot be understood in isolation from the intersubjective and objective world which subjects inhabit",¹⁷⁵ that "there can be no [Hegelian] subject without intersubjectivity", that it is "intersubjective and social from the beginning",¹⁷⁶ and that, in Butler's apt formulation, Hegel's "ek-static" subject "constantly finds itself outside itself", because it "discovers its dependency" on the other's recognition "as its very self".¹⁷⁷ It is

¹⁷⁰ In Andrew Bowie's reading, the "aim of Hegel's version of Idealism is to show how the self constitutes itself via its relationships to the objective world and to other subjects"; see Bowie 2007, p. 152.

¹⁷¹ Russon 2004, p. 159.

¹⁷² Hegel 1977, § 175.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, § 177.

¹⁷⁴ Hegel 2007, p. 198.

¹⁷⁵ Bowie 2007, p. 412.

¹⁷⁶ Neuhauser 2009, p. 45.

¹⁷⁷ Butler 1999, p. xv. Equally important, Butler's broader Hegelian conclusion that "true subjectivities come to flourish only in communities that provide for reciprocal recognition, for we do not come to ourselves through work alone, but through the acknowledging look of the Other who confirms us" (Butler 1999, p. 58) will play a crucial

likewise true that Hegel’s “self-consciousness” had to traverse a long and tortuous path from the “unreflecting immediacy” of mere self-certainty,¹⁷⁸ via extorting the other’s recognition in Lordship and Bondage and learning to transcend the resulting condition,¹⁷⁹ to the true freedom of the “man who is inherently free [...] and lets the others be free”,¹⁸⁰ in Mark Taylor’s eloquent summary, “the journey to selfhood can reach completion only in spiritual community”.¹⁸¹ However tortuous that journey has been and although his freedom can only ever be social, that is, shared with others, such a “man” no longer needs music and the arts to see in them a reflection of his potential freedom—he has already secured it, in the free recognition from other free subjects, whom he likewise freely recognises as such.¹⁸² But for many, even before Hegel’s death in 1831, such an optimistic conception of subjectivity seemed less and less believable, in the face of growing political and economic oppression. As we saw above, philosophers such as Schelling

role in her later engagements with subjectivity and gender issues, especially in *Bodies That Matter*, *The Psychic Life of Power*, and *Undoing Gender*.

¹⁷⁸ Bowie 2003, p. 148. Bowie likens the mere self-certainty of a subject that has yet to receive another subject’s recognition to “an embryo that never becomes a person”.

¹⁷⁹ For more on Lordship and Bondage in particular, see Neuhouser 2009 and Redding 2008.

¹⁸⁰ Hegel 2007, p. 163. Marina Bykova nicely summarizes the Hegelian subject’s dependence on another subject’s recognition: “To be both self-conscious and self-certain in relation to an object thus requires an object that retains its independence through negation. The only object that meets this requirement is another self-consciousness”; see Bykova 2009, pp. 278–79. Robert Williams likewise notes that the Hegelian subject is “decentered, qualified by and dependent on the other”; see Williams 1997, p. 57. Similarly helpful discussions of Hegelian intersubjectivity are also found in Neuhouser 2009, pp. 46ff; Solomon 1983, pp. 447ff; and Taylor 2000, pp. 194ff. Hegelian intersubjectivity has led a number of scholars to draw parallels between it and what they see as equivalent traits in Kant’s and Fichte’s respective accounts of subject-formation; see Mohr 1995, pp. 39–41, Williams 1997, pp. 35–38, and Bowie 2007, p. 197. However, it is debatable how far the parallels can be drawn, since Hegel is adamant that the subject *depends* on the recognition of another equal subject, whereas Kant’s subject is transcendently free and morally conscious by itself (although its moral consciousness exhorts it to respect other subjects as equal) and Fichte’s not-I is only a product of the I. It may also be noted here that Hegel duly puts his account of subject-formation to practical work in his political writings, especially in the *Philosophy of Right*, his final work. There he specifies that true freedom is achieved only in *Sittlichkeit*, an ethical living in harmony with others and in legitimate social institutions, including the family, the corporation, and the state. As Robert Pippin puts it, “to live freely *is* to participate in these institutions”; see Pippin 1995, pp. 149ff. Only in *Sittlichkeit*, Hegel insists, may the subject fulfill the “commandment of right”, to “*be a person and respect others as persons*”. The alternative, doing whatever one pleases (Kant’s “heteronomy”) is *Willkür*, arbitrariness, “negative freedom” or the “principle of atomicity”, which Hegel diagnoses as the most worrying symptom of modernity (Hegel 1991, § 46). In *Antigone’s Claim*, Judith Butler accordingly defines *Sittlichkeit* as “the scheme of cultural intelligibility” and “the sphere in which reciprocal recognition is possible”; see Butler 2000, p. 13.

¹⁸¹ Taylor 2000, p. 160.

¹⁸² In Chapter Four, we will see that Hegel explicitly reserved free subjectivity to men only.

and Schopenhauer sought refuge in the ambitious metaphysical claims they made for music; the chapters below will show that music critics such as Davison did so, too. This in turn pitted them against instrumental virtuosity, which had been practiced peacefully throughout the preceding century by the likes of C. P. E. Bach and his father,¹⁸³ because it was now deemed dangerous to the new conception of music and via it, to the utopian idea of subjective freedom that it was meant to symbolize.

All of the foregoing—the conception of (instrumental) music as an abstract, intellectual, disembodied art and the different thinkers' views of music thus conceived as a model and/or symbol of subjective freedom and humanity—forms the conceptual ground of James William Davison's diatribe against Liszt and all virtuosity, discussed at the opening of this chapter. Music is incorporeal, absolutely autonomous, could exist to an extent, as Schopenhauer enigmatically claims, even if the world did not. But virtuosity exposed precisely those aspects of music that Davison's conception of it sought to conceal: its irreducible corporeality, both audible, in terms of its medium (that is, sound, especially in improvisation but also in the reproduction of written works, which was never too far removed from improvisation), and visible, in terms of the body of the virtuoso/virtuosa, whether arousing (as in Liszt, or Marie Moke Pleyel), or unsettling (as in Paganini); and the dependence of music on performance and performers, on instruments and instrument-makers, on money and impresarios. And if music, too, is in fact irreducibly sensuous and dependent on the physical act of performance, the mechanical materiality of instruments, and the contaminating impact of market forces, then neither could the subject that it was meant to symbolize any longer be posited as free and transcendent *vis-à-vis* its ephemeral, corruptible

¹⁸³ For an excellent study of C. P. E. Bach's reception in the eighteenth century, see Morrow 1997.

body and the social pressures surrounding it. Hence Davison's fear that overexposure to virtuosity might reduce one to the total sensuality of an animal. As we have just seen, the less certainty about subjective freedom, the more insistence on aesthetic autonomy; and the 1830s and '40s—virtuosity's *Glanzzeit*, in the wake of Napoleon and in the midst of reactionary political and economic repression—challenged the notions of subjective freedom of many an intellectual, not just the philosophers'. These included Davison as well as many of his British and Continental colleagues. But that is a story for the remaining three chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

VIRTUOSITY IN CONCERT

Now that Chapter One has set up the intellectual context of the symbolic relationship between music *qua Tonkunst* and free subjectivity (whether actual or ideal, transcendental or primordial) in nineteenth-century philosophy, the present chapter may begin to document that between *Tonkunst* and virtuosity in journalistic criticism between *c.* 1815 and *c.* 1850. Ultimately, the goal is to show how critical reception of virtuosity at this time was determined by virtuosity's relationship to subjectivity, along two routes: 1) by way of the virtuoso as a paradigm of bourgeois free and omnipotent subjectivity, celebrated, but also reviled whenever its proficiency and individuality crossed the line of an extraordinary but still *human* achievement and 2) by way of the (in)compatibility of virtuosity with *Tonkunst* as symbolic of free subjectivity. Presently, we will be focusing on the critical reception of virtuosity as performance; the following chapter will address the reception of virtuosity in composition.

Here, the critical reception of virtuosity in musical performance will be discussed under seven subheadings, as laid out in the Table of Contents.

“Not just a skilled virtuoso”, but an “Artist”: General Attitudes to Instrumental Virtuosity in the Journalistic Critical Community

Overall, the critical reception of instrumental virtuosity in Europe's major music periodicals between *c.* 1815 and *c.* 1850 does not significantly depart from that found in some of later lexica

and encyclopedias discussed in the Introduction. After all, this was, according to Dana Gooley, “the most intense period of anti-virtuosity backlash in the history of instrumental music”;¹ in its mildest form, this backlash took the form of implicit but clear denigration. A particularly illustrative case is an 1841 review of a Chopin recital, penned by Liszt for the *Revue et Gazette*. According to Liszt, what the select audience heard that night at salon Pleyel was “not just a skilled virtuoso, a pianist expert in the art of producing the notes; it was not only an artist of great renown, it was all that and more than that, it was Chopin”.² When one removes the layers of (not always sincere) enthusiastic exaggeration typical of Liszt’s prose, what remains is Liszt’s clear denigration of the virtuoso as a public and artistic figure, implicit in his assertion that Chopin is so much more than “just a skilled virtuoso”. That the implied disparagement here comes from a fellow-virtuoso, and a much more public virtuoso at that,³ only makes Liszt’s pronouncement more symptomatic of the prevailing negative critical reception of virtuosity in the 1830s and ’40s. Nor was this the only occasion when Liszt echoed other critics’ negative views of virtuosity. Most famously, he did so in his obituary of Paganini, published in the same journal, where he charged his former virtuosic model and source of inspiration with egoism and vanity. The artist of the future, Liszt hopes, will transcend this egoism and vanity, so typical of modern virtuosi:

May the artist of the future renounce, therefore, with all his heart, the egoistic and vain role, of which Paganini was, we trust, one of the final and illustrious examples; may he place his goal not in himself but beyond himself; may his virtuosity be a *means*, not the

¹ Gooley 2004a, p. 13.

² Franz Liszt, “Concert de M. Chopin”, *RGMP*, 2 May 1841, p. 245: “[C]e n’était pas seulement un virtuose habile, un pianiste expert dans l’art de faire des notes; ce n’était pas seulement un artiste de grand renom, c’était tout cela et plus que tout cela, c’était Chopin”.

³ According to John Rink, Chopin gave a total of two dozen public concerts in his entire career (Rink 1997, p. 14); compare that to Liszt’s over a thousand, in the eight years of his *Glanzzeit* (1839–47) alone (Leppert 2001, p. 216).

purpose; may he always remember that, like nobility, and without a doubt more than nobility: GENIUS OBLIGES [GÉNIE OBLIGE].⁴ It was indeed, as Dana Gooley characterizes it referring to Paganini's formative role in Liszt's own virtuosity, "one of the boldest imaginable examples of the need to kill the father".⁵

As we know, before the decade expired the Oedipal son himself abandoned what was perhaps the most successful virtuoso career of all time. Robert Wangermée speculates that he may have done so out of the "guilty conscience" of a virtuoso,⁶ while Jim Samson and Dana Gooley have interpreted it as a calculated bid to "remake" or "reinvent" himself as a composer, so as to improve his cultural status.⁷ Liszt's own pronouncements concerning virtuosity, such as those quoted above, corroborate both lines of interpretation; the cultural prestige of composition over performance will be discussed further below. Similar sentiments against virtuosity are readily found in other French, German, and English periodicals of the time. An 1844 issue of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, for instance, brings an unsigned report from Weimar, where, this time, it is Liszt who is the object of praise. "Liszt is known to most as a piano virtuoso, and at that the foremost living one". The author calls this "a distressing crime", but asserts that, while as a virtuoso he is a "miraculous phenomenon", Liszt is "more than a mere virtuoso", an important and presumably redeeming fact known only to a few.⁸ Of course, one should not read

⁴ Franz Liszt, "Sur Paganini: à propos de sa mort", *RGMP*, 23 August 1840, p. 432: "Que l'artiste de l'avenir renonce donc, et de tout cœur, à ce rôle égoïste et vain dont Paganini fut, nous le croyons, un dernier et illustre exemple ; qu'il place son but, non en lui, mais hors de lui ; que la virtuosité lui soit un *moyen*, non une *fin* ; qu'il se souvienne toujours, qu'ainsi que noblesse, et plus que noblesse sans doute : GÉNIE OBLIGE".

⁵ Gooley 2004a, p. 13. Of course, as a virtuoso and a (part-time) critic, Liszt had his own political agenda to follow. Here we see him falling on the right side of the fence as far as the *Revue et Gazette* critics of virtuosity were concerned (especially the influential Fétis), which, of course, hardly prevented him from pursuing at the same time the most brilliant career in virtuosity himself. Liszt's review of Chopin quoted above is also one of a great number of instances of Parisian critics using the Polish composer-pianist as a blank slate for airing their own views; see Claudon 1989.

⁶ Wangermée 1987, p. 556.

⁷ Samson 2003, p. 134 and Gooley 2004a, p. 14.

⁸ [Unsigned], "Ein Blick auf Weimars Musikleben", *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* [henceforward *AMZ*], 6 March 1844, p. 163: "Liszt ist den Meisten nur als Claviervirtuos bekannt, und als solcher für den Ersten jetzt lebenden erklärt. Natürlich, dass sich Mancher für dieses peinliche Verbrechen durch nachträgliche Abers zu

too much into the often deliberately provocative rhetoric of early-nineteenth-century journalism; calling virtuosity a “distressing crime” here is probably not much more than an ironic jibe. But the author’s warning that Liszt is “more than a mere virtuoso” seems more serious, especially given that it precedes an exhaustive list of Liszt’s extraordinary skills at the piano. It appears that being “just a virtuoso” did not amount to much of an asset in mid-nineteenth-century music journalism, even when the reviewer was favorably predisposed to the virtuoso under consideration; on the contrary, it seems that it was more of a liability, even if only an implicit one, which had to be countered or somehow accounted for to justify the reviewer’s approval of the virtuoso.

But whenever the critic was not as friendly or benevolent to the virtuoso, the denigration of the latter and his trade was more explicit, and no justifications were offered. For instance, Schumann exclaims in his Florestan mode: “But by heavens! It would be a real fortune if in the world of artists [...] we had ten fewer virtuosi and one artist more”.⁹ Schumann’s hostility to virtuosity is well documented by this and many other pieces in his *Neue Zeitschrift*.¹⁰ Aside from “Florestan’s” typically polemical and provocative tone, otherwise customary of much nineteenth-century journalism, what remains is the no doubt deliberate dichotomy between the virtuoso and the artist. We find the same juxtaposition in Henri Blanchard’s roundup of the 1846–47 concert season in Paris, published in the *Revue et Gazette*. Himself an able violinist taught by Rodolphe Kreutzer, as well as a relatively successful composer of popular *airs de*

rächen sucht. [...] *Liszt* ist, als Virtuos *Liszt*, ein wunderbares Phänomen. [...] Aber *Liszt* ist mehr, als bloßer Virtuos, und davon ist weniger bekannt”.

⁹ “Florestan” [Robert Schumann], “Großes und Feines. (Von den Davidsbündlern.)”, *NZM*, 7 August 1834, p. 147: “Aber beim Himmel! es wäre ein wahres Glück, wenn in der Künstlerwelt [...] würden wir zehn Virtuosen weniger und einen Künstler mehr haben”.

¹⁰ For instance, Dana Gooley singles him out, along with François-Joseph Fétis, as one of the driving forces of what he calls the “war on virtuosity” in the journalist criticism of the 1830s and ’40s; see Gooley 2004a, p. 13; see also Kabisch 2006.

vaudeville, Blanchard (1791–1858) left his most lasting mark in music criticism, closely collaborating with Fétis and Schlesinger as contributing co-editor at the *Revue et Gazette*.¹¹ With his usual conservative perspective, Blanchard laments the poor taste of Parisian audiences, reflected in their thronging to see the “ephemeral music” and “frolics” of “*virtuoserie*”, while “serious and well-made music” must seek refuge at the Conservatoire’s smaller auditorium and the city’s many private salons.¹² We find the same hostility to virtuosity, only more explicit, in the no less conservative editor of the Leipzig *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, Gottfried Wilhelm Fink (1783–1846), for whom virtuosity is no more than “throwing sand in the eyes”.¹³

Critics often derided specific virtuosi as well, not just their profession. Some of these reviews were quite witty, especially those in English journals. Thus the anonymous correspondent for the London *Harmonicon* from Berlin draws an analogy between virtuosi and comets: “[T]heir course is wild and eccentric, they excite a momentary astonishment, and then sweep away into vast distances, from which their return is not to be calculated”.¹⁴ But the wit often turned acerbic, as happened to Henri Herz (1803–1888) in the hands of an anonymous

¹¹ For more on Blanchard, see Macdonald 2001 and Ellis 1995.

¹² Henri Blanchard, “Coup d’œil musical sur les concerts de la saison.”, *RGMP*, 14 February 1847, pp. 55–6: “La *virtuoserie* prends ses ébats ; elle est en plein exercice, et s’inspire des clavier d’Érard et de Pleyel, des Stradivarius et des Maggini, des instruments en cuivre de Sax et d’une foule d’albums. Ce qu’il y a d’assez singulier, c’est que pour ces recueils de musique légère et de circonstance, les concerts les plus fastueux, les plus retentissants, ont été donnés, la plus grande salle a été choisie : et, par opposition, la musique sérieuse et bien faite se produit dans la petite salle du Conservatoire et dans plusieurs salons particuliers”.

¹³ Gottfried Wilhelm Fink, “Bravourstücke für verschieden Instrumente mit Orchesterbegleitung”, *AMZ*, 14 August 1833, p. 535: “Allhier klingt es sehr schwer und ist es nicht sonderlich; oder hiermit ist gut Sand in die Augen streuen”. One is reminded here of the famous E. T. A. Hoffmann story, “Der Sandmann” (“The Sandman”), first published in 1816, which involves a horrific mythical creature that robs children of their eyes by throwing sand in them. Although the original Sandman is a lovable character who sprinkles children’s eyes with his magical sand to make them fall asleep, Hoffmann’s version is of a more sinister variety: “He is a wicked man who comes to children when they refuse to go to bed and throws handfuls of sand in their eyes till they bleed and pop out of their heads. Then he throws the eyes into a sack and takes them to the half-moon as food for his children, who sit in a nest and have crooked beaks like owls with which they pick up the eyes of human children who have been naughty”, Hoffmann 1982, p. 279. The same story also features an automaton, a regular appearance (as discussed below) in much of contemporary criticism of virtuosity.

¹⁴ [Unsigned], “Berlin.”, *The Harmonicon*, April 1825, p. 58.

contributor to *The Musical World*. Though not exactly a household name today, the Austrian pianist-composer was one of the most famous virtuosi on the busy Parisian scene in the 1830s and '40s. His tours of continental Europe (including Russia), South America, and the United States, which he crossed three times between 1845 and 1851, were as successful. He was also a piano-manufacturer and one of Paris's most sought-after piano teachers, despite the stiff competition from Chopin and others.¹⁵ It is in his latter professional capacity that the *Musical World* mocks him:

He is the most fantastic professor that can possibly be imagined.

He is a spirit, a sylph, a whiff of smoke, he is here, there, and everywhere, and gives lessons at one and the same time at Paris and London, Madrid and Vienna.

M. Henri Herz, No. 38, Rue de la Victoire, is quite an eccentric professor. His lesson generally lasts half an hour—ten minutes for arranging the large curls and the cravat of M. Henri Herz; ten minutes more to draw his watch—his *montre à la Bréguet*—out of his fob, which he hooks without ceremony on the piano, above b flat; the last ten minutes for the instruction and advice which M. Henri Herz, No. 38, Rue de la Victoire, invariably gives whilst arranging his curls. All at once the *montre à la Bréguet* disappears, and M. Henri Herz along with it. His pupil thanks him, and hands him two or three Louis-Philippes—that is the fee. After two or three years of such lessons, the pupil is quite ready to play pieces for any number of hands.

M. Henri Herz is the veritable artist of the epoch. He rises at five o'clock in the morning, and goes to bed at midnight, and as long as the day lasts he gives lessons on the piano.¹⁶

This admittedly amusing portrait of a foppish and apparently somewhat avaricious teacher culminates with a more serious jibe at the virtuoso composer:

He composes musical battering while he snores, and a variation for four hands while he wipes his nose.

It is evident that M. Henri Herz will, ere long, invent a mode of giving piano-forte lessons by letter.

[...]

Go on, M. Henri Herz, No. 38, Rue de la Victoire, purchasing hotels, with lemonade airs and waltzes arranged for an infinite number of hands.

That is not your fault, but the fault of the public.¹⁷

¹⁵ Lindeman 2001. For more on Henri Herz, see Kammertöns 2000.

¹⁶ [Unsigned], "M. Henri Herz, No. 38, Rue de la Victoire.", *The Musical World*, 23 August 1838, pp. 274–75.

¹⁷ "M. Henri Herz, No. 38, Rue de la Victoire.", pp. 274–75.

The wit notwithstanding, Herz is actually being charged here with profiteering from the debased taste of the general public by producing facile, worthless music solely for the sake of monetary gain, thus both abusing music as an art and perpetuating the debasement of public taste. Similar reproaches to many other virtuosi, but in more serious contexts, will be discussed below.

Typically, such *ad hominem* critiques of individual virtuosi and of the virtuoso as a socio-cultural phenomenon were harsh. Perhaps the best-known example is Carl Gollmick's lengthy article "Virtuosity Today" ("Das heutige Virtuosenwesen"), published in Schumann's *Neue Zeitschrift* in 1842.¹⁸ Gollmick was one of Schumann's main contributors, and the article is one of the most important historical documents of nineteenth-century virtuosity in contemporary reception. I will discuss it in detail below; for now, suffice it to say that he paints a bleak portrait gallery of contemporary virtuosi, from the teachers, who are "individually harmless, but harmful as a group" because of their access to young, as yet unspoiled pupils, to the itinerant professionals, "rootless" and "joyless" creatures, the "fallen angels" of music who "prostitute their art to usury".¹⁹ Still, it is the same dichotomy as noted earlier in Blanchard, Liszt and elsewhere, that between the virtuoso and the "(real) artist", since Gollmick does allow for a handful of "real artists" and "noble spirits" who, *despite* their virtuosity, remain faithful to their art. But he makes sure to tell us that they are the smallest class of virtuosi.

Faced with this sketch of virtuosity in reception, it may seem that there was an all-out "war against virtuosity", as Dana Gooley has surmised. Such a conclusion is particularly tempting in light of the diversity of the authors cited: Europe's foremost virtuoso—Liszt; a

¹⁸ It is better-known than most largely because it is one of the few that are discussed in modern scholarship. See Gooley 2006, pp. 89–90.

¹⁹ Carl Gollmick, "Das heutige Virtuosenwesen.", *NZM*, 2 December 1842, pp. 183–85. In Gooley's summary, Gollmick "was disgusted with the virtuoso bigwigs who sweep into town, seduce the public, and leave with huge quantities of money. And he was not alone"; See Gooley 2006, p. 90.

major conservative French critic—Blanchard; a radical German critic but also an esteemed composer and formerly a virtuoso himself—Schumann; and his archrival in journalistic criticism, the man whose conservatism drove Schumann to leave the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* and to found his *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*—Fink.²⁰ These critics seem united by their negative outlook on virtuosity, their serious ideological differences notwithstanding. But the picture grows more complicated when one examines its many individual aspects, starting here with the critics’ valorization of composition over performance.

***“Idealities” and “animal spirits”: The Denigration of Performance in Favor of Composition
in Nineteenth-Century Criticism of Instrumental Virtuosity***

A crucial factor that helped determine the status of instrumental virtuosity among nineteenth-century critics was their general position on the respective merits of performance and composition. By and large, critics attached much more cultural prestige to composition than to performance. Now virtuosity being a type of performance, such a state of affairs could not bode well for its own standing. Possible reasons for the low esteem of performance as opposed to composition in so much nineteenth-century music criticism, as well as its impact on the critical reception of virtuosity, are further discussed below. First, though, we must document the observations made in this paragraph.

As was the case with the overall denigration of virtuosity in criticism discussed above, that of performance, in its mildest form, likewise came as implied devaluing, taken as a matter

²⁰ Warrack and Porter 2001 and the Introduction to this dissertation.

of course. Indeed, the very fact that the inferiority of performance to composition could be taken as an unspoken axiom is a symptom of the bias against it. For instance, an anonymous correspondent for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* from Berlin reported on Liszt's spectacular successes there, despite his notorious pricing policies, extolling Liszt as "a genius *Tonkünstler* [a musical artist, composer, as opposed to a *Musiker* or, worse still, a *Musikant*], whom we cannot merely call a pianist".²¹ A similar example is Blanchard's 1841 praise of Henri Vieuxtemps, at that time still a young aspiring violinist. Like most virtuosi, Vieuxtemps (1820–1881) started out as a child prodigy, but was soon taken under the wing of Charles-August de Bériot (1802–1870), the celebrated founder of the so-called Belgian violin school, of which Vieuxtemps was an early product. Vieuxtemps had an internationally successful career, with regular appearances in Paris and London, tours of Germany and the United States, and a particularly successful sojourn in Russia (1846–51).²² But excelling *just* as a performer was apparently not enough, since Blanchard finds it necessary to assert that while the "new aspirant possesses a very remarkable talent for the violin; in the first place, he has what distinguishes him from his competitors—like Viotti and [Rodolphe] Kreutzer, he is really a violinist-composer".²³

That composition carried superior cultural prestige to performance is more explicit in the unsigned "Memoir of Sigismond Thalberg", published in an 1837 issue of *The Musical World*. The author notes that Thalberg took up composition because he "was well aware that if he was

²¹ [Unsigned], "Nachrichten. *Berlin*.", *AMZ*, 16 February 1842, p. 143: "*Franz Liszt*, [...] der berühmte, geniale Tonkünstler—den wir nicht bloss als Pianist bezeichnen mögen". For an excellent discussion of Liszt's famous tour of Berlin and the accompanying "Lisztomania", see Gooley 2004a, pp. 201–62.

²² Schwarz and Hibberd 2001. For more on Vieuxtemps's life and works, see Radoux 1983 and Cornaz 2008.

²³ Henri Blanchard, "Concerts de MM. Herz, Labarre et Vieuxtemps.", *RGMP*, 21 February 1841, p. 118: "Le nouvel aspirant possède un talent très remarquable sur le violon : et d'abord, il a cela qui le distingue de ses compétiteurs que, comme Viotti et Kreutzer, il est réellement violoniste-compositeur".

to occupy the position of one of the first pianists in Europe, it was not enough to say of him that his execution was the most rapid, or that he could perform the most prodigious quantity of notes in the shortest possible time.

The most brilliant and solid reputation of a professor²⁴ is that which is founded upon his genius as a composer. It is in the fertility of conception—the clear design—the happy episode—novel phraseology—profound science—aggregation of ideas, differing in expression, energy, and character, that distinguish the imaginative musician from the mere imitator.²⁵

Then as now, commentators ranked Thalberg at the top of nineteenth-century virtuosi; Robert Wangermée asserts that he “must be ranked as the greatest virtuoso pianist of the mid-19th century”,²⁶ and Fétis expressed similar judgments on the pages of the *Revue et Gazette*.²⁷ At the time the anonymous contributor to *The Musical World* wrote his “Memoir”, Thalberg had already received the honorary title of the *k. & k. Kammervirtuoso* (Imperial and Royal Chamber Virtuoso) from Emperor Francis I (in 1834; this title, an object of Liszt’s bitter envy, was to be complemented by another similar one, that of the Royal Saxon Virtuoso, conferred on Thalberg by King Anthony in 1838),²⁸ effectively owned the Parisian scene (during Liszt’s Swiss sojourn), made successful tours of central Europe, which would be followed by equally

²⁴ A “professor” in this context meaning not a member of the teaching staff at an institution of higher learning, but a learned professional, one who *professes* music as his/her profession.

²⁵ [Unsigned], “Memoir of Sigismond Thalberg”, *The Musical World*, 17 March–9 June 1837, pp. x–xi.

²⁶ Wangermée 2001.

²⁷ See, for instance: François-Joseph Fétis, “MM. Thalberg et Liszt.”, *RGMP*, 23 April 1837, pp. 137–42.

²⁸ Gibbs 2006, pp. 191–95. In his notorious criticism of Thalberg, published in 1837 by his friends at the *Revue et Gazette*, Liszt scarcely missed a chance to mock Thalberg’s Imperial title. In a review of January 8th, for instance, he writes: “In addition, M. Thalberg is a pianist of H. M. the emperor of Austria and for many, this means something. We confess that, when it comes to us, we do not quite understand what artistic significance these royal and imperial titles might have” (“M. Thalberg est un outré pianiste de S. M. l’empereur d’Autriche, et pour beaucoup de gens cela signifie quelque chose. Nous avouons, quant à nous, ne pas bien comprendre quelle significations artistique peuvent avoir ces brevets royaux et impériaux”, Franz Liszt, “Revue critique. M. Thalberg, Grande Fantaisie, œuvre 22 ; 1^{er} et 2^e Caprices, œuvres 15 et 19.”, *RGMP*, 8 January 1837, pp. 17–20). However, Gibbs demonstrates that Liszt lobbied heavily at the Austrian court to receive the same title, which had been conferred by that time on Clara Wieck (the first woman to win it) and another five virtuosi, but never succeeded, possibly due to his inadequate connections at the Imperial Court and colorful political leanings (socialist, Saint-Simonian, Hungarian nationalist, among others), which probably raised more than a few eyebrows among the ever-vigilant administration of Prince Metternich.

successful tours of Cuba, Brazil, and the United States in the 1850s.²⁹ Still, in the judgment of his *Musical World* biographer, all that would have amounted to a successful career of a “mere imitator”, had he not taken up composition, to distinguish himself as an “imaginative musician”. The implications are clear: only composition qualified as an intellectual, creative music-making, whereas performance was considered mere imitation, mindless, automatic and—inferior.

Those who did content themselves with being “mere imitators”, or failed, in the opinion of their critics, to prove their compositional genius, received correspondingly harsh treatment. Such was the fate of the Jewish-Bohemian virtuoso pianist-composer Alexander Dreyschock (1818–1869) at the hands of an anonymous reviewer for *The Musical World* in 1843. Like many of his rivals, Dreyschock began his career as a child prodigy. He spent his youth on a series of long European tours, including Germany, Russia, Paris, the Netherlands, Austria and Hungary, Denmark, and Sweden.³⁰ *The Musical World* published this diatribe during Dreyschock’s London tour of 1843. As though to establish his credentials, the reviewer begins by reminding us that his “total want of enthusiasm about *mere* performance of any sort is well known” (emphasis in the original).³¹ He then lists Dreyschock’s extraordinary technical skills in a matter-of-fact fashion, but only to preface what really matters:

Now come we to the true question—the really important part of every performance—*what* did M. Dreyschock play?—to what *musical* use does he put his great executive acquirements?—and let it not be overlooked that this is the head and front of all critical inquiry; [...] a genuine reverence for art will not permit the excellence of an individual performer, however great, to gloss over the defects of that which he announces as his composition. In truth, then, M. Dreyschock’s music, judging by his Monday evening’s

²⁹ For more on Thalberg’s life and works, see Hominick 1991; for his famous rivalry with Liszt, see Kleinertz 1993; for his tour of the United States, with focus on some eighty concerts he gave in New York, see Lott 2006.

³⁰ Dannreuther and Charlton 2001. For more on Dreyschock’s career and reception, especially its anti-Semitic overtones, see Fuchs 1994.

³¹ [Unsigned], “Dreyschock”, *MW*, 18 May 1843, p. 172.

selection, is, by many degrees, the worst, the most singularly uninteresting, ugly, and rhodomontade, we have yet heard.³²

The reviewer then proceeds to detail the perceived imperfections of Dreyschock's music. Dreyschock is dismissed entirely, as an artist, solely on account of his compositions, even though the reviewer himself acknowledges him as a great performer. Given that he asks "to what *musical* use" Dreyschock "put his great executive acquirements", it is apparent that in his judgment performance does not qualify as art, or as music.

The question is: why? Why, in the judgment of Dreyschock's reviewer and so many of his colleagues, did musical performance not qualify as art, or as music? Why was it deemed so vastly inferior to composition? A number of scholars have pointed to the rise of the musical work concept as a possible cause.³³ The claim of this compelling reading is that composition was valorized over performance because it produces a score, a relatively fixed, tangible, and permanent object, whereas any performance, however accomplished, is merely an ephemeral event—especially in a culture, such as nineteenth-century Europe, without sound-recording technology. However, I want to situate this claim within the larger philosophical issues discussed in the previous chapter. There, we saw that philosophers invariably valorized music as a strictly disembodied, abstract, and intellectual art: thus for Schelling, music was "an emanation from the Absolute itself", for Hegel "ideal content [liberated] from its immersion in matter", whereas Schopenhauer asserted that music "could to a certain extent exist if there was no world at all";³⁴ in other words, they all valorized *Tonkunst*, not *Musik*. The one major

³² "Dreyschock", p. 172.

³³ See Samson 2003, pp. 2–5, 67–69, and 74–78, and Wangermée 1970, pp. 31–32. For broader discussions of the privileging of the score as the only (supposedly) representation of the musical work, see Goehr 1992; Citron 1993, p. 38; and Leppert 1993, p. xxii.

³⁴ References may be found in Chapter One.

exception, Kant, regarded music with suspicion precisely because he would not separate it from its sounding, that is, from its sensuous, bodily manifestation in performance.

At the beginning of the same chapter we also saw how that conception of music seeped into at least one contemporary journalist review of nineteenth-century instrumental virtuosity, with disastrous consequences for both virtuosity and the virtuoso under consideration: the unsigned review of Liszt's performances in London of 1840, published that year by *The Musical World* and almost certainly written by its chief editor James William Davison. Much of that review is an insistent devaluation of the utterly sensuous, in the reviewer's judgment, bodily act of performance, in favor of the purely rational, intellectual, and disembodied art of composition. For Davison, music is "something viewless and incorporeal, an all-gracious and a God-like thing".³⁵ Works of music, he insists, exist ideally, represented by their scores, independently from any performance; whereas performance is merely a dispensable sensuous manifestation of music, with which it must not be confused. Music is therefore "not the *sound* of instruments or voices" but a "system of ideality which, as a pure emanation of mind, is rendered generally demonstrable by the appliances of mechanism, it matters not whether vocal or instrumental"; music, furthermore, "may be created and remain in being without the help of playing of any kind". The sin of all virtuosity (and in this instance Liszt's in particular) is, according to the author of the review, that it reverses this "natural" order of things, diverting the listener's attention from the work itself, that is, from the ideal essence of music, onto its merely sensuous, ephemeral, supplemental manifestation, that is, performance; "from music to its performance"—clearly, performance is *not* music—placing "the last first, and the first, last". Virtuosity thus

³⁵ References to this Liszt review are found in Chapter One.

“enslaves the understanding to the ear” and even dehumanizes the listeners, “tickling” them into “animal spirits” and causing “animal astonishment”.

However, the reviewer’s real concern is that virtuosic performance, grounded in, and emanating from, the virtuoso’s body, its product—musical sound—penetrating, in turn, the bodies of its listeners, scandalously reveals the irreducible corporeality of all music. As Susan Bernstein put it, virtuosity “is obstinately grounded in materiality”.³⁶ “Music, despite its phenomenological sonoric ethereality, is an embodied practice, like dance and theater”, Richard Leppert writes; “When people hear a musical performance, they see it as an embodied activity”.³⁷ Crucially, if music is inseparable from the perishable, ephemeral human body, then it cannot be taken to symbolize free human subjectivity. For as we saw in the previous chapter, the philosophical notion of human freedom very much hinged on whether the subject might be shown to be able to transcend its physical, bodily existence; Kant located this ability in the subject’s transcendental freedom, Schelling in his primordial self-unity, Hegel in the total rationality of the subject of Absolute Knowledge, and even the atheist Schopenhauer allowed it in aesthetic contemplation. If the subject may transcend his bodily existence, his finite, perishable body, then he may be posited as free of it and potentially eternal; if not, he is grounded in his body and must perish with it. Worse still, a subject unable to counter and overcome its body and sensuous nature may not even be called properly human, according to the philosophic understandings of humanity, discussed in the previous chapter; hence Davison’s fear that too much virtuosity, enslaving “the ear to the understanding” (that is, the mind/reason

³⁶ Bernstein 1998, p. 11.

³⁷ Leppert 1993, pp. xx–xxi.

to the sense/body), may turn listeners into animals.³⁸ That is why those philosophers who valorized music took pains to stipulate that their subject was the abstract, disembodied art of music (*Tonkunst*), and not the bodily practice of music. That is also why composition and the work, viewed as its product, come to be valorized over performance; the work (that is, the score), a product of the mind's intellectual, rational activity (i.e., composition), is permanent, whereas performance is absolutely ephemeral, just like the perishable bodies that produce and enjoy it. That may be the reason why Davison and so many of his colleagues discussed in this chapter devalued performance in favor of composition. And since virtuosity was rightly seen as a class of musical performance, its own denigration was taken as a matter of course. Worse still, inasmuch as virtuosity, *qua* performance, threatened to eclipse the ideal essence of music, it had to be not only denigrated, but also actively opposed.

The Only Good Virtuoso is a Dead Virtuoso: From Virtuosity to "Interpretation"

At this point, Dana Gooley's assertion that the 1830s and '40s saw a "war on virtuosity"³⁹ waged by most influential European critics must be qualified, if not quite opposed. For, while virtuosity was on the whole regarded with suspicion, as we saw above, not all *kinds* of virtuosity were equally suspect. A large number of virtuosic performances received rave reviews. However, these reviews were often predicated not so much, or not only, on the virtuoso's command of his instrument, as on his *faithful interpretation* of the works selected for

³⁸ Of course, all of these binaries—mind/body, rational/sensual, composition/performance—were very much gender binaries as well, which also played a significant part in the critical reception of virtuosos, male and female alike. That, however, is the topic of Chapter Four.

³⁹ Gooley 2004a, p. 13.

performance. Indeed, it is at this time that the highly influential notion of *Werktreue* comes to redefine performance as interpretation of the work, that is, of the composer's intentions as they are (supposedly) embodied in the work. As Lydia Goehr has shown, the emergence of the musical work concept and that of *Werktreue* did not merely coincide: rather, the rise of the musical work concept conditioned the imposition of *Werktreue* as the guiding ideal of musical performance, which is arguably still with us.⁴⁰ It was, of course, another instance of the subjugation of performance to composition. But that story was told in the preceding section; we now turn to contemporary criticism to see what the imposition of *Werktreue* did to virtuosity.

A good example of the regulative force of *Werktreue* on the critical reception of virtuosity is an early article on Liszt published in the *Revue musicale* in 1833. The author, signed only by his initials "E. F.", was almost certainly the elder Fétis's son Edouard (1812–1909), who assumed the editorship of his father's journal upon the latter's move to Brussels in 1833. Although barely twenty, the younger Fétis apparently inherited most of his illustrious father's aesthetic and ideological leanings.⁴¹ He devotes most of his article to a relatively mild critique of Liszt's concert persona, which he judges as mannered and extravagant, but concludes with this important advice to the young virtuoso:

It is a favor to Liszt to remind him that in his age and with his fortunate faculties, it is less about astonishing [his audiences] with the strangeness of his manners than moving [them] with a profound and genuine expression. Above all, let him not forget that the most inviolable respect must be attached to the composer's work and that the performer must never be allowed to distort the former's intentions.⁴²

⁴⁰ Goehr 1992, pp. 231–42.

⁴¹ Wangermée *et al.* 2001: "His musical tastes were similar to those of his father". For more on Edouard Fétis, see Becquart 1999.

⁴² E. F., "Nouvelles de Paris. Galerie de musique de M. Dietz. Concert du 19 janvier.", *Revue musicale* [henceforward *RM*], 26 January 1833, pp. 412–13: "Mais c'est un service à rendre à M. Liszt que de lui rappeler qu'à son âge et avec ses heureuses facultés il s'agit moins d'étonner par l'étrangeté des manières que d'émouvoir par une expression profonde et vraie. Qu'il n'oublie pas surtout que le plus inviolable respect doit être attaché à l'œuvre du compositeur, et que dans aucun cas il ne doit être permis à l'exécutant de dénaturer les intentions de celui-ci".

Judging from later reviews, it appears that the mature Liszt did not always heed the younger Fétis's advice. Thus we find him censured nine years later, in the *Neue Zeitschrift*, a journal hostile to virtuosity but normally friendly to the young romantics, including Liszt. However, not even Liszt could be pardoned for violating Beethoven's authorial intentions:

I have already spoken in brief about Liszt's way of playing the compositions of others, and the performance of Beethoven's concerto has only rendered new validation to my view. Beethoven's concerto is full of the highest genius; the player's striving, in my opinion, must be to penetrate it and bring it to the ear in its entire significance and singularity. Liszt certainly does not always do so. To him, not even a Beethoven composition is anything other than a racetrack for his own, wild, unrestrained genius, which, chasing here and there, often wholly diverges from the direction that the composer indicated.⁴³

The irony here is that this concert, in which Liszt also played music of his own, sounds like the series of recitals he had given in Paris in 1837, in which he deliberately programmed his own music next to Beethoven's, in a bid to legitimize himself as both a guardian and composer of "great music". In Gooley's words, Liszt sought "to present a particular, idealized version of his artistic identity to the Parisian public", piggybacking on Beethoven's enormous stature.⁴⁴ While that may have worked with his journalist friends at the *Revue et Gazette*, programming Beethoven's music whilst taking liberties with it was apparently not enough for a positive review in the *Neue Zeitschrift*.⁴⁵

⁴³ [Unsigned], "Zehntes Abonnementconcert, d. 16. Decbr. 1841.", *NZM*, 18 January 1842, pp. 23–24: "Ueber Liszt's Spielweise fremder Compositionen habe ich bereits in der Kürze gesprochen, und hat der Vortrag des Beethoven'schen Concerts meiner Ansicht nur neue Bestätigung gegeben. Beethoven's Concert ist voll der höchsten Genialität; diese zu durchdringen und in ihrer ganzen Bedeutung und Eigenthümlichkeit zu Gehör zu bringen, muß, nach meiner Meinung, des Spielers Streben sein. Dies thut Liszt freilich nicht immer. Für ihn ist auch Beethoven's Composition nichts anderes, als die Rennbahn seiner eigenen, wilden, zügellosen Genialität, die, hin und her jagend, von der Richtung, die der Componist vorgezeichnet, oft ganz abweicht".

⁴⁴ Gooley 2004, p. 152.

⁴⁵ Since performances were not transcribed in notation and could not be recorded, it is rather difficult to know what exactly Liszt did with Beethoven. From this and a handful of other similar reviews, we can surmise that Liszt used Beethoven to promote himself as a conscientious virtuoso, that is, as a virtuoso interpreter of great music, which apparently did not prevent him from "touching up" Beethoven's music (both his piano and orchestral music in Liszt's own transcriptions) so as to make it more virtuosic, by means of playing at excessively fast or slow tempi,

However, when the reviewer was satisfied that the composer's intentions had been duly honored, praise was plentiful. We see that, for instance, in a generous review of Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst's performance of Mendelssohn's violin concerto at London in 1850, published in *The Musical World*. Ernst (1814–1865) was a violin virtuoso from Brno, Moravia (now a region of the Czech Republic), extremely successful on tours throughout Europe, but especially in London, where he settled in 1855.⁴⁶ In this particular review, the anonymous contributor tells his readers at the outset that in Ernst, “the genius of the composer found a congenial interpreter”.⁴⁷ The rest of the review is a listed account of Ernst's proficiency, but it is that opening sentence that matters the most—that Mendelssohn's *genius* found in Ernst a “congenial interpreter”—because it sets the cultural hierarchy in high relief: it is the composer who has the monopoly on genius, whereas the performer receives legitimacy only as long as he or she acquiesces to an inferior position of self-abnegation and obedience.

That hierarchy is explicitly spelled out in an important essay on contemporary virtuosity that Richard Wagner wrote for the *Revue et Gazette* in 1840.⁴⁸ Robert Jacobs and Geoffrey Skelton's English translation has its title as “The Virtuoso and the Artist”,⁴⁹ which does capture the juxtaposition Wagner himself makes—and which was there in some of the reviews discussed earlier in this chapter. But the essay's original title—“Du Métier de virtuose et d'indépendance des compositeurs”—is much more illustrative of the gist of the article: not only does it juxtapose the virtuoso and the composer, but it also stresses the asymmetry between the

adding octaves and tenths, “filling out” his chordal writing, improvising additional parts in his polyphonic textures, etc. There is some limited information on this in Gooley 2004, Wangermée 1970 and 1987, and Leppert and Zank 1999.

⁴⁶ Schwarz 2001. For more on Ernst's reception, see Fan 1993.

⁴⁷ [Unsigned], “Our Contemporaries”, *MW*, 11 May 1850, pp. 294–95.

⁴⁸ Richard Wagner, “Du Métier de virtuose et d'indépendance des compositeurs : Fantaisie esthétique d'un musicien”, *RGMP*, 18 October 1840, pp. 495–98.

⁴⁹ Wagner 1973.

two, the independence of the composer and the comparatively demeaning *métier*—trade, craft—of the virtuoso.

Wagner begins with an allegorical story of a precious gem lost in the depths of the Earth and a couple of poor miners who painstakingly dig through the surrounding “mass of rubbish and rubble that covers them”,⁵⁰ to recover it. The story’s obscure meaning “would be easily grasped”, Wagner writes, “if the magic jewel were held to represent the *genius of music*”.⁵¹ The identities of the two miners are not revealed, presumably because their names “would not be hard to guess”;⁵² we may assume, from Wagner’s well-documented opinions and aesthetic leanings, that one of them is certainly Beethoven and the other likely Mozart. The gem’s “legendary light” is deliberately contrasted with the surrounding “mass of rubble”, presumably most of contemporary music (excepting, of course, Wagner’s own).

Wagner then launches into his manifesto of a desirable aesthetics of musical performance:

[T]he supreme merit of the executive artist, the virtuoso, is his ability to reproduce perfectly the composer’s thoughts, and that this ability is only possessed by the artist who really and truly assimilated his intentions, completely suppressing any invention of his own. No doubt the composer’s intention can be correctly elucidated in a performance which he himself directs. Next best would be the performer who also possesses a creative gift and who accordingly values fidelity to intention and yet knows how to handle the music with a certain affectionate freedom. With these two one could class the executive artist not endowed with creative power but with the ability to absorb the work of another and treat it as though it were his own. He must have modesty to suppress his personal characteristics, whatever they may be, so completely that neither his merits nor demerits are noticed. For what matters is that we should hear the work itself, ideally reproduced, and that our attention to it should in no wise be distracted by the special qualities of the performer.⁵³

⁵⁰ Wagner 1973, p. 53.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54.

In her excellent article “The Idea of the Performer in Early Romantic Aesthetics”, Mary Hunter discusses some rather more liberal (in comparison to Wagner’s) nineteenth-century conceptions of ideal performance, drawing on the Hegelian idea of the composer’s and performer’s selves coming together in the act of performance.⁵⁴ Also, those of us who have enjoyed, say, Richter’s as well as Gould’s recordings of Bach’s keyboard music might conceive of the notion of interpretation as actually leaving quite a bit of (interpretative) freedom to the performer. But the above-quoted extract shows that Wagner had something much more restrictive in mind. Twice, in a relatively short passage, he uses the verb “suppress” on the virtuoso: he must “suppress his personal characteristics” and “any invention of his own”. All that matters is the work itself in an ideal (and therefore really impossible) reproduction, with no distraction emanating from the performer’s own individuality. Even a performer without any “creative power” of his own, provided that he be able to “absorb the work of another”, is better than one who would presume to violate the composer’s intentions. A certain amount of “affectionate freedom” is the most that a virtuoso may be allowed.

But the very next paragraph suggests that not even this meager concession is genuine, since the virtuoso, as Wagner asserts, must merely be “the composer’s representative, [...] the medium through which artistic ideas first attain a real existence”; in this capacity, he is “responsible for preserving the dignity and purity of art”.⁵⁵ Not an artist in his own right, but a “representative”; not even an autonomous person, but a “medium”. And as though any further

⁵⁴ Hunter 2005, p. 37: “the Romantic sense of the ‘genius of performance’ involves the performer’s psycho-spiritual capacity to transform himself into an other. But not just any other: this capacity creates a miraculous merging of his own self with that of the composer to represent a new subjectivity”.

⁵⁵ Wagner 1973, p. 54.

confirmation were needed, a few paragraphs down Wagner concludes: “the virtuoso should neither add nor take away but be [the composer’s] very self”.⁵⁶

In Wagner’s view it is unfortunate that the modern virtuoso is typically not content to evacuate his own self in the way he prescribes. Instead, the virtuoso (as Davison also charged) misdirects the audience’s attention from the work to his own skill, “holding high revel at his keyboard, running, leaping, gliding, melting, caressing, swooning, and to the right and left of him the public hanging on every finger”.⁵⁷ Still, some exceptions do exist:

[A]fter all there are other virtuosos, some of them fine artists, famous for their performance of great works, to whom indeed, in the chaos of present day music-making, the public owes its knowledge of those works. Here is a placard announcing a recital to be given by such a one, and, yes, thereon the name of Beethoven! That suffices.⁵⁸

Wagner’s assertion that the mere presence of Beethoven’s name on a concert program “suffices” confirms that Liszt was indeed savvy in performing Beethoven’s music to boost his standing with Parisian critics. Wagner proceeds to paint such a vivid picture of the Paris concert-going class that it deserves to be quoted here in full:

Here is the hall. We take our seats, and truly it is Beethoven himself who appears amidst those elegant ladies, whole rows of them, and those lively gentlemen with lorgnettes standing in a wide circle behind. Yes, Beethoven is there, sinewy and forceful, with a look of sad omnipotence: he is there, sowing dread in the perfumed heart of all that dreamily swaying elegance.

One must not miss the over-determined gender contrast between the outsized, hyper-masculine, towering figure of Beethoven (or, strictly speaking, his music), “sinewy and forceful, with a look of sad omnipotence”, and the effeminate assembly, rows of ladies and “lively gentlemen” with lorgnettes, “all that dreamily swaying elegance” and its “perfumed heart” into which Beethoven’s music is “sowing dread”. We will address some implications of this gendering in

⁵⁶ Wagner 1973, p. 56.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Chapter Four. Meanwhile, as it turns out, despite his loyalty to Beethoven, Wagner's unnamed virtuoso has a nasty surprise in store:

But who is coming with him? Good God!—William Tell, Robert the Devil, and—who next?—Weber, my dear and gentle Weber! I breathe again! But then—O Heavens!—a galop. Whoever has himself written galops, not to mention potpourris, knows the lengths to which one can be driven in order to get near to Beethoven. I understand the dreadful necessity which today still exacts galops and potpourris from one who would proclaim the genius of Beethoven so, while I could not but admire this virtuoso, I cursed his virtuosity...

The passage is a thinly veiled jibe at Liszt—he is the Parisian virtuoso who, around 1840, gave recitals combining the music of Beethoven and Weber's *Konzertstück* (Op. 79; 1821) with music of his own, which did include his fantasias on Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* and Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*, as well as a number of galops, most famously his *Grand galop chromatique* (1838; this galop is discussed in some detail in Chapter Four). All of these were among Liszt's favorite "warhorses", as Dana Gooley has dubbed them.⁵⁹ Wagner ends with an exhortation to all the "true disciples of Art": "Resist the temptation of all that gold lying around as you dig your way down the ruined mine. Keep on digging ever more deeply for the magical jewel".⁶⁰ (How the "mass of rubbish and rubble" from the opening allegory turned into "gold" is anyone's guess.)

His essay notwithstanding, later in life Wagner did develop a more substantial, if complicated, relationship with Liszt. The rest of the article deals, in similar fashion, with Wagner's real target: virtuosity in conducting and in opera, especially in contemporary Italian opera. One might summarize Wagner's opinion of contemporary virtuosi in just a few words: the only good virtuoso is a dead virtuoso. Of course, Wagner does not argue for a physical

⁵⁹ Gooley 2000.

⁶⁰ Wagner 1973, pp. 54–55.

annihilation of virtuosos, but he does argue for an annihilation of the virtuoso's subjectivity by demanding that the virtuoso "suppress his personal characteristics" and "any invention of his own", that he become the composer's "very self"; conceptually at least, what Wagner is demanding is suicide. For virtuosity precisely *is* about individuality, the virtuoso's "personal characteristics" and "invention of his own". By asking the virtuoso to sacrifice his individuality, Wagner is really asking him to give up his trade, to sacrifice his very identity. And while Wagner's essay is, typically for him, more explicit about its author's agenda than most of the reviews discussed so far, its message is not essentially different from theirs, inasmuch as they, too, demand that the virtuoso annihilate his own self, in strict adherence to the composer's intentions. But without the virtuoso's self, there is no virtuosity either. Or, we might say that it has been replaced by interpretation. In other words, virtuosity could be tolerated, even encouraged, but only if it renounced its very self. Thus, while the virtuoso could and did stand for the bourgeois ideal of free subjectivity, he was increasingly coming to be replaced by the aesthetically autonomous musical work and, by extension, *Tonkunst*, as symbolic of free subjectivity. The virtuoso was still necessary, but only as a faithful interpreter, that is, servant, of the work; no longer could he be the star. And that meant that virtuosity as practiced by Paganini and Liszt was coming to an end. Around 1850, Paganini had been dead for a long time, Chopin died, Liszt and Thalberg retired from the virtuoso circuit; it was the protracted death of the virtuoso and the birth of the interpreter, his successor, who is still with us.⁶¹

⁶¹ Carl Dahlhaus maintained that the imposition of interpretation as the ruling principle of performance was the main cause of the demise of virtuosity, a development he linked to the rise of what J. Peter Burkholder was to dub the "historicist mainstream" of nineteenth-century music: "Around mid-century, the primary of virtuosity was gradually undermined by the principle of interpretation [...] This development was apparently linked to a change in the intellectual climate of the times, a change which, to use a catchphrase, we might refer to as the replacement of nonhistorical thought by historical awareness"; see Dahlhaus 1989, pp. 138–39.

Heroes and Charlatans, Demons and Monsters: The Demands and Dangers of Originality,

Part I

Thus spake Wagner. But despite the exorbitant demands he put to virtuosi, we must remember that he still expected them to play with some “affectionate freedom”. The fact that he contradicts himself in the very following paragraph, asking the virtuoso to be the composer’s “representative”, “medium”, his “very self”, only puts the difficulty of fulfilling his and other critics’ demands of virtuosity in high relief. The same critics who upbraided Liszt and others for failing to obey composers’ intentions nonetheless demanded a consistently high level of originality from virtuosi. After all, the virtuoso was expected to embody radical individuality, to be a paradigm of the supposedly free, enterprising subject of the brave new bourgeois world. But at the same time, that radical individuality was still expected to remain within certain bounds and attracted censure as soon as it crossed them. As shown by some of the reviews discussed below, harsh words were reserved for those virtuosi who did overstep those boundaries, just like for those deemed not original enough. In virtuosity, originality and individuality were very much *de rigueur*—but only up to a point. As we are about to see, that point concerned not merely bourgeois manners, decorum, and respectability, but something much more profound: the recognizability of one’s individuality as human and the dire consequences when that recognizability was threatened.

For instance, Carl Koßmaly (1812–1893), Schumann’s major collaborator and successor as editor at the *Neue Zeitschrift*, urges performers to fight any influence from others, as that “irresistible external [*fremden*] influence impairs even the most innate originality and singularity

of an individual, as it leads, little by little, to superficiality and shallow one-sidedness”.⁶² Those performers who could resist such external influences usually received favorable reviews for it, in which their perceived originality and individuality played a crucial part. Thus, for instance, an anonymous Paris correspondent to the *Neue Zeitschrift*, reviewing a recent Chopin recital, singles out the composer-pianist’s originality as the most important of the many commendable aspects of his performance: “His playing is perfect in every respect. There is tone, power, infinite grace, fervor, profound emotion, a purity and lightness in the execution that leave nothing to be desired, and, what is most important, originality in the performance of his compositions, which are original in many respects”.⁶³ Similarly, Escudier of *La France musicale* praised Chopin as “a unique pianist, who neither can nor should be compared to anyone else”.⁶⁴

By contrast, those virtuosi who, in the critic’s view, did allow themselves to be influenced by others were treated harshly. The violinist Ernst, discussed above in a highly positive English review, receives criticism of this kind in an 1839 anonymous review of a concert at Amsterdam, published in the *Neue Zeitschrift*.⁶⁵ This lengthy review begins

⁶² C. Koßmaly, “Musikalische Charakteristiken.”, *NZM*, 12 November 1839, pp. 153–54: “Eine gute Schutzwehr gegen diese so unwiderstehlichen fremden Einwirkungen, welche eben so die angeborene Originalität und Eigenthümlichkeit des Individuums beeinträchtigen, als sie nach und nach zur Oberflächlichkeit, zu seichter Einseitigkeit führen, gewährt daher der feste Entschluß, **ehrer nie** über irgend bedeutende Erscheinungen unsere Ansicht als abgeschlossen, fertig betrachten zu wollen, als nach erfolgter eigener Kenntnißnahme oder persönlicher Ueberzeugung”. (As far as I can tell, Koßmaly here intended *fremden* to mean nothing more specific than “coming from others” or “not one’s own”, not necessarily originating from another country or nation.)

⁶³ [Unsigned], “Briefe aus Paris.”, *NZM*, 26 May 1834, p. 64: “Sein Spiel ist vollendet in allen Beziehungen. Da ist Ton, Kraft, unendliche Grazie, Leidenschaft, tiefes Gefühl, eine Sauberkeit und Leichtigkeit in der Ausführung, die nichts zu wünschen läßt, und was das Bedeutendste ist, Originalität im Vortrage seiner in vielfacher Hinsicht originellen Compositionen”.

⁶⁴ Escudier, “Concert de M. Chopin.”, *La France musicale* [henceforward *FM*], 2 May 1841, pp. 155–56: “Chopin est un pianiste à part qui ne doit et ne peut être comparé à personne”.

⁶⁵ The same review appears in English, although without any acknowledgement, in *The Musical World*, 12 September 1839, pp. 302–3, despite Ernst’s good standing in England, thus reflecting the *Neue Zeitschrift*’s influence and reputation across Europe (as well as the comparatively lax ethical standards of European nineteenth-century journalism).

generously enough, placing Ernst among “the most prominent violin virtuosi, the most gifted talents of our epoch, already rich in that respect”. The reviewer then lists all the laudable aspects of Ernst’s art, such as complete technical mastery, elegance, and grace.⁶⁶ But the lavish, though undeserved, praise he gets from Parisian journals and their German parrots, the *Neue Zeitschrift* correspondent continues, would be more merited if he could “ennoble” his skill with a more soulful, fervent, and singing tone.⁶⁷ The reviewer then blames that, in his opinion, undeserved praise on the notoriously bizarre, scheming ways of the Parisian artistic and journalist community, as he describes it. This anti-journalist sentiment, here somewhat curiously expressed by a journalist himself and combined with a hint of chauvinism, was, as Susan Bernstein reveals in her study of nineteenth-century journalism, fairly commonplace in much of European criticism. “Journalism comes under attack as the discourse governed by inauthentic and debased standards”, Bernstein writes.⁶⁸ That, of course, may not be Ernst’s fault. The reason why Ernst cannot be recognized as an “autonomous” and “complete” master, the reviewer asserts, is his continued laboring under the domination of external influences, ranging from the “elegance” of French masters, to the “energetic grandiosity” of German violinists, to the “fantastic elements and effusions of the romantic school”, represented by Paganini. In short,

⁶⁶ [Unsigned], “Vertraute Briefe aus Amsterdam.”, *NZM*, 26 July 1839, p. 30: “**Ernst** gehört unstreitig zu den bedeutendsten Violinvirtuosen, zu den begabtesten Talenten unserer in dieser Beziehung ohnehin reichen Epoche;—vollkommene Herrschaft über die Technik, überlegene, seltene Meisterschaft über die bedeutendsten mechanischen Schwierigkeiten, die er mit Leichtigkeit und fast spielend bewältigt, mit einem Worte eine seltene außerordentliche Züge seiner Erscheinung. Dazu kommt noch eine überall durchblickende Eleganz der Formen, eine Grazie der Auffassung und der Ausführung, die er durch ein gleich und stets geistreich nuancirtes und motivirtes Spiel im höchsten Grade interessant zu machen versteht”.

⁶⁷ “Vertraute Briefe aus Amsterdam”, 31: “Diese von vorn herein blendenden, in die Augen springenden Eigenschaften, die deswegen überall zuerst auf die größere Masse des Publicums ihre elektrische Wirkung ausüben, und es für sich einnehmen—wären sie andererseits durch die edleren, selteneren Vorzüge eines **großen, markigen und seelenvollen Tons**, eines **grandiosen, leidenschaftlichen und begeisterten Vortrags**, und endlich eines mit den **Geheimnissen und Wirkungen der Menschenstimmen vertrauten Portamentes** gehoben und—gedelt, dann wäre **Ernst** wirklich das Phänomen, die unerhörte, kometenartige Erscheinung, wofür ihn einige Pariser Blätter mit aller Gewalt ausgeben wollen, und in deren Ausspruch die hiesigen Journale, in andächtiger Verzückung, aus Gefälligkeit à *l’unison* einstimmen” (emphasis in the original).

⁶⁸ Bernstein 1998, p. 11.

what he lacks is “prominent originality, a singularity that might distinguish him from all others, something innately autonomous and his own, with which the founder of a new school, whether as a composer or a virtuoso, must make himself known to all”.⁶⁹

On top of all this, Ernst’s anonymous reviewer makes one final charge: that his art “is not altogether free from charlatanry”.⁷⁰ Charlatanry or charlatanism (*charlatanisme*, *Charlatanismus*) appears to have been one of the harshest derogatory labels that nineteenth-century critics attached to contemporary virtuosi. It is also one of the most commonly encountered. In William Weber’s summary, the term “appeared within musical commentary chiefly when touring virtuosos were accused of manipulating the public in unprofessional ways, through flamboyant clothing or behavior rather than music itself”.⁷¹ But in fact, many reviews suggest that in addition to flamboyant clothing and behavior critics did regard certain artistic, that is, musical decisions on the part of virtuosi as charlatan and described them accordingly. Thus Henri Blanchard, for instance, invoked the term against the Italian violinist Camillo Sivori, reviewing a recital of his for an 1843 issue of the *Revue et Gazette*:

As a performer, Mr. Sivori does not bother to be original; he does nothing but reproduce the bizarre effects, we might say pasquinades of his famous teacher, without having his powerful sound or with his broad style. [...] His melody is affected, mannered like that

⁶⁹ “Vertraute Briefe aus Amsterdam.”, p. 31: “nur vermögen wir unmöglich jetzt schon, ihn als eine **selbständige**, in sich **abgeschlossene Erscheinung**, als einen großen, **vollendeten** und **in sich einig gewordenen Meister** anzuerkennen, wo er noch **zu merklich** unter der Herrschaft **fremder** Einwirkungen steht, wo er zwischen den eleganten, geschliffenen, **französischen Meister** oder den Ueberschwenglichkeiten, den wunderbaren, phantastischen und subjectiven Elementen der durch Paganini repräsentirten, romantischen Schule noch unschlüssig schwankt und wählt—kurz: man vermißt **hervorstechende Originalität**, eine ihn vor allen Andern unterscheidene **Eigenthümlichkeit**, ein **nur ihm** innerlichst **Eigenes** und **Selbstständiges**, wodurch der **Gründer** einer **neuen Gattung**, sei es als **Componist** oder als **Virtuos**, sich vor Allem bemerklich machen muß” (emphasis in the original).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31: “Ernst muß und wird überall Sensation erregen; ob aber eben diese augenblickliche, **nicht ganz** von Vorwurf der **Charlatanerie** loszusprechende Richtung seines Talents, die ihm seine Triumphe bei der größeren, leicht erregbaren und nicht streng unterscheidenden Masse sichert, ihm in gleichem Maße die Achtung und Anerkennung der **wahren Musikkenner**, die das ächte Kunstgold von den Schlacken, das Solide, Gediegene, Wahre von dem Falschen, Gehaltlosen und Erheuchelten sehr gut zu sondern wissen—kurz: die Stimme der eigentlichen, **ächtten künstlerischen Musiker** verschaffen werde, ist sehr zu bezweifeln”.

⁷¹ Weber 2004a, p. 15.

of his master; but the latter was gifted with a profound sensibility that flowed and showed itself in melodies imprinted with a noble melancholy, with a poetic and mysterious sadness. [...] The pupil of that extraordinary man is nothing but... his pupil, his imitator [...] It is not without some grief that we see that Mr. Sivori, still young, is learned in the little dignified art of striking the vulgar with pantomimic effects, such as, for instance, staying frozen after having played a *pizzicato* at the end of a passage; making his violin meow, or giving it a nasal voice by playing *sul ponticello*. All that may make a few friends cry out in wonder, a few budding music dealers, or that party of the concert-going public with whom one does as one pleases with a bit of charlatanry; but it is not what a serious and long-lasting reputation may be based upon.⁷²

Sivori (1815–1894) was a pupil of Paganini, the “extraordinary man” from Blanchard’s review; in fact, he was the only pupil Paganini acknowledged as his own. Sivori was hugely successful on a number of European grand tours, including his native Italy, Paris, the British Isles, Germany, the Low Countries, and Russia. Between 1846 and 1850 he toured the Americas and the Caribbean.⁷³ He did use many of the Paganinian antics, such as the “meowing” and playing *sul ponticello*—although the latter does not raise as many eyebrows today as it did at the time of Blanchard’s writing. Although perhaps unsavory by Blanchard’s conservative standards, Sivori’s Paganinian “pasquinades” were, *pace* Weber, musical devices. More importantly, as Weber does note correctly, virtuosi like Sivori were forced to resort to such antics by the critics’ valorization of originality. In Weber’s words, “an aspiring musician had to make claims for him

⁷² Henri Blanchard, “Matinées et soirées musicales. M. Camille Sivori.”, *RGMP*, 19 February 1843, pp. 62–63: “Comme exécutant, M. Sivori ne se pique pas d’être original ; il ne fait que reproduire les effets bizarres, on pourrait dire les pasquinades de son célèbre professeur, sans avoir sa puissance de son et sa large manière. [...] Le chant de M. Sivori est mignard, maniéré même comme celui de son maître ; mais ce dernier était doué d’une profonde sensibilité qui débordait et se manifestait en des mélodies tout empreintes d’une noble mélancolie, d’une tristesse poétique et mystérieuse. [...] L’élève de cet homme extraordinaire n’est que.... son élève, son imitateur [...] On ne voit pas sans quelque peine que M. Sivori, jeune encore, est savant dans l’art peu digne de frapper le vulgaire par des effets de pantomime, comme, par exemple, de rester en attitude après avoir fait sonner un *re pizzicato* à la fin d’un trait ; de faire miauler son violon, ou de lui donner une voix nasillarde en jouant *sul ponticello*. Tout cela peut faire crier au miracle quelques amis, quelques marchands de musique en herbe, et cette partie du public des concerts dont on fait ce qu’on veut avec un peu de charlatanisme ; mais ce n’est pas ainsi que se fonde une réputation sérieuse et durable”.

⁷³ For more on Sivori’s extraordinary career, see Menardi Noguera 1991 and Inzaghi 1994.

or herself in ways that went beyond conventional music-making”.⁷⁴ Sometimes, it worked; *La France musicale*, always benevolent to Sivori, managed to praise him in an 1843 review as both “extraordinary” and indistinguishable from his illustrious teacher: “Mr. Sivori is an extraordinary violinist. We could not honor him more than by saying that if Paganini could play before or after him, it might be impossible to distinguish the master from the student”.⁷⁵ But it did not always do the trick, as Blanchard’s review proves, and it is symptomatic that charges of charlatantry often went hand in hand with those of a lack of originality, as is the case both in the Blanchard review and the *Neue Zeitschrift* anonymous critique of Ernst discussed earlier.

The charlatan had his polar opposite in the virtuosic hero, the larger-than-life figure, so original, so singular and individual that he defied every effort to compare or classify him with any other virtuosi. This would be Jim Samson’s “Faustian man”, “the individual in search of self-realisation—free, isolated, striving, desiring”.⁷⁶ The paradigmatic hero of early- and mid-nineteenth-century instrumental virtuosity, “the quintessential virtuoso” was, of course, Liszt.⁷⁷ He is the “hero”, “Prometheus”, “god” of modern pianism.⁷⁸ Such exuberant epithets are not atypical of the music criticism of this time; critics did apply them to other virtuosi. Furthermore, they should not be taken at face value, bearing in mind the subterranean connections Liszt maintained with a number of critics, especially at the *Revue et Gazette*. But the sheer number of articles in which Liszt is described in such a way is at least illustrative of his special status in the contemporary reception of virtuosi. For instance, the author of an 1843 report from Moscow,

⁷⁴ Weber 2004a, p. 5.

⁷⁵ Escudier, “Soirées et concerts.”, *FM*, 22 January 1843, pp. 29–31: “M. Sivori est un violoniste extraordinaire. Ce que nous avons de mieux à dire de son exécution, c’est que si Paganini pouvait jouer avant ou après lui, on ne saurait peut-être pas distinguer le maître de l’élève”.

⁷⁶ Samson 2003, p. 76.

⁷⁷ Gooley 2004a, p. 1.

⁷⁸ The gender import of these and other such hyper-masculine epithets reserved for Liszt and a few of his rivals is discussed at length in Chapter Four below.

signed “F. G.”, is actually relatively subdued when he describes for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* Liszt’s successes there as no less than “the rightful triumph of art and humanity”.⁷⁹ He is “a genuine child of his epoch”; his performances resonate with a “thousand voices of freedom and humanity”.⁸⁰

Although the language may be hyperbolic, it is not for that reason any less symptomatic of the author’s use of Liszt *qua* the paradigmatic virtuoso-hero as a model of the heroic, liberal-bourgeois subjectivity, at a time of increased post-Napoleonic repression throughout Europe, which was making such an ambitious conception of subjectivity seem increasingly utopian. Another report in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, this time from Prague, extols Liszt as a “genius [...] which asserts his independence in every aspect of his art”.⁸¹ As the paradigmatic virtuoso-hero, Liszt was, during his *Glanzzeit*, often received as a blank screen, onto which his critics projected their own values, agendas, and fantasies, be they musical, aesthetic, sexual, or, in these two cases, political. Liszt “was more than a man or a performer”, Richard Leppert writes; “he also was a psychological projection produced by his auditor-lookers, the ‘ordinary’ bourgeois and aristocratic publics and published critics alike”.⁸² If he indeed was more than “just” a man or a performer, he had only his virtuosity to thank for it.

But, there was also another tendency in Liszt’s contemporary reception, one less unequivocally positive and only marginally less common. It is observable in all those reviews that are focused on the sheer strangeness of Liszt as a phenomenon, more than any particular

⁷⁹ F. G., “Nachrichten. Moskau.”, *AMZ*, 28 June 1843, p. 478: “Auch hier feierte er die gerechten Triumphe der Kunst und Humanität”.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*: “ein ächtes Kind seiner Zeit, mussten die Bewegungen derselben, die tausend Stimmen der Freiheit und Humanität in seinem für alles Schöne und Gute empfänglichen Herzen auch tausendsällig wiederhollen in freien fessellosen Accorden”.

⁸¹ [Unsigned], “Nachrichten. Prag, 13. März.”, *AMZ*, 25 March 1840, p. 262: “Liszt, das Genie, das sich selbst dem Ebenbürtigen nicht blindlings hingibt, sonder in jedem Kunstmoment seine Selbständigkeit behauptet”.

⁸² Leppert 2004, p. 26.

aspect, positive or not, of his virtuosity; such reviews typically present a Janus-face portrayal of Liszt as part-god, part-demon. “C. M.”—most likely Carl Montag, Schumann’s correspondent from Weimar—nicely captures this dichotomy in his report of a Liszt recital in that Thuringian town:

What can we say about this artist that has not been said a hundred times already? About him, whom they call now a god, now a demon, who is here deemed the most magnetic, spiritually deep pianist, and there the most abhorrent, mannered one. In fact, one will find basis and evidence for all this in the phenomenon of Liszt, but everyone agrees that he is one of the greatest virtuoso geniuses that the art has ever produced.⁸³

Such conflicting descriptions of Liszt occur with remarkable frequency. In another instance, music scholar, critic, poet, and collaborator to the *Neue Zeitschrift* Anton von Zuccalmaglio (1803–1869), here using his customary pseudonym “Diamond”, describes Liszt in a report on his visit to Cologne as a “divine pianist, terrific”, but also “dreadful”, “horrid”, and “awful”.⁸⁴

Of course, all of this could easily be dismissed as so much journalistic hoopla and romantically exaggerated prose. But maybe that would be too easy. Indeed, there are many reviews, such as Montag’s and Zuccalmaglio’s, to suggest that one could also be criticized as too original, too individual. The critical reception of the Norwegian violinist and Liszt’s contemporary Ole Bull (1810–1880) provides numerous examples of this charge. Although today largely forgotten outside Norway and a particularly leafy corner of north Pennsylvania, Bull was, from the 1830s on, a veritable sensation throughout Europe and much of the United States, on a par with Liszt. Complete with his good looks, tall, imposing stature, and long,

⁸³ C. M., “Aus Weimar.”, *NZM*, 14 December 1841, p. 191: “Was können wir sagen, das nicht schon hundertsällig über diesen Künstler gesagt wäre? Ueber ihn, den sie bald einen Gott, bald einen Dämon nennen, der hier als der anziehendste, geistig-tiefste, dort als der abstoßendste, manierteste aller Clavierspieler geschildert wird. In der That wird man für Alles dieses in Liszt’s Erscheinung Grund und Belege finden, darüber aber einig sein, daß er eines des größten Virtuosengenies ist, die jemals die Kunst hervorgebracht”.

⁸⁴ Diamond, “Aus Köln”, *NZM*, 15 November 1842, pp. 165–66: “Ein göttlicher Clavierspieler, ein ungeheurer! ein furchtbarer, ein grausamer, ein schrecklicher!”.

flowing hair, he was equally dubbed “the Paganini of the North” and “the Liszt of the violin”. He undertook long and mostly successful tours on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States he even established a Norwegian colony in Potter County, Pennsylvania. However, the colony came to naught, because the land, which Bull bought with his own funds, turned out to be unsuitable to agriculture. The Norwegian colonists, whom Bull had brought over at his own expense, then relocated to Minnesota. They are mostly the source of the frequency of Scandinavian surnames in that part of the United States today. At present, the Ole Bull State Park occupies the place where the ill-fated “New Norway” and its main town “Oleania” were supposed to flourish and commemorates the outsized personality of its founder.⁸⁵ But such grand (or extravagant, as the case may be) gestures were not the only source of Bull’s fame. Its main source was his idiosyncratic playing, usually of his own music. He only used his own violin, which he modified to approximate the traditional Norwegian fiddle, with its lower, flat bridge, additional sympathetic strings, and a round and heavier bow. Along with his extraordinary skill, these modifications enabled him to play polyphonically, most notably his “quartet” for violin solo, which invariably put his audiences into hysterics wherever he went.⁸⁶

But the critics were not always impressed. In fact, Bull was a virtuoso most critics loved to hate. Escudier of *La France musicale* routinely described him as “that supreme charlatan”.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ This particularly bizarre episode from the life of Ole Bull, only one among many, is well documented in Bull 1982. Other major sources on Ole Bull include Bull 1981, Caron 1988, Haugen 1993, Smith 1974, and Weinstein 2000.

⁸⁶ Bergsagel 2001.

⁸⁷ This was written in response to a purported self-marketing scheme of Bull’s own concoction (one of many), whereby he apparently ordered 40,000 empty cigar boxes to be adorned with his portrait and sent to Cuba, so as to make himself heard of even before arriving there; Es....., “Petite chronique”, *FM*, 28 July 1844, p. 235: “Quant à Ole Bull, ce suprême charlatan, il continuera pendant quelques temps à exploiter le béotisme américain. Ce violoniste fait un singulier métier dans l’autre monde pour y populariser son nom. Dernièrement, devant faire un voyage à la Havane, il a imaginé de faire expédier de Hambourg 40,000 caisses de cigares vides, avec son portrait imprimé sur chaque caisse ; de sorte que lorsqu’il est arrivé dans le pays des cigares, sa figure et son nom, tirés à

Some, though, took up a more cautious stance, apparently not knowing what to make of him, but warning him and others against slipping on the treacherous path of extreme stylistic idiosyncrasy. That is, for instance, the gist of a rather lengthy article on Bull that conductor, composer, journalist, and Schumann's collaborator at the *Neue Zeitschrift* Heinrich Dorn (1804–1892) wrote for that journal in 1838. Dorn begins with a detailed account of Bull's early travels in Europe and then addresses his main concern—finding an aesthetic explanation for Bull's success. This is, as Dorn puts it, Bull's own “authentic I”, from which gushes out his sheer originality and individuality, unfettered by any formal training (for Bull hardly had any). But, it is a potentially perilous path:

Ole Bull's position is at any rate a dangerous one, because it is lawless. Where his path, covered with certainty and success, **will** take him—who could say; but where it **can** take him, that I know: to ruin. Because the autocracy of feeling usually degenerates into sentimentalism, and from there to tastelessness and the deflation of any spiritual emotion into sensuous striving is but a step.⁸⁸

Where “degenerating” into “sensuous striving” may lead one, Davison has already told us. What sets Bull on his own dangerous path is his “lawlessness”—in other words, his idiosyncrasy, unrestrained originality, unique individuality. It seems, then, that there was only so much originality nineteenth-century critics of virtuosity could take.

Still, Bull's “lawlessness” does not necessarily mean that he had no models of his own. One such model—if not the only one—was Paganini. At any rate, his is the only name that appears in this context, as, for instance, in an 1840 report of Bull's visit to Frankfurt, published

40,000 exemplaires, se trouvaient dans toutes les boutiques. Ole Bull a des ressources de charlatanisme incroyables”.

⁸⁸ H. Dorn, “Ole Bull. Skizze von H. Dorn.”, *NZM*, 17 April 1838, p. 123: “Ole Bull's Standpunct ist jedenfalls ein gefährlicher, denn er ist ein außergesetzlicher. Wohin ihn nun der mit Sicherheit und Erfolg eingeschlagene Weg führen **werde**—wer vermag es zu sagen; aber wohin er führen **kann**, daß weiß ich: zum Verderben. Denn die Alleinherrschaft des Gefühls artet gewöhnlich in Empfindelei aus, und von dieser zur Geschmacklosigkeit und Verflachung aller geistigen Regung in sinnliches Streben ist nur ein Schritt”.

in the *Revue et Gazette*. The author, signed “S.***” asserts that “the same critical rules that serve to compare the one great master to another should not be applied to Ole Bull”. He points out that Bull is comparable neither to the French nor to the German school, but only to “the genius of Paganini”, with whom it has a “filial rapport”.⁸⁹ Paganini was perhaps the only violin virtuoso whose apartness attracted even more commentary than Bull’s. But as in Bull’s case, that fascination was not unequivocally positive. Thus, for instance, a short unsigned notice published in an 1835 issue of the *Revue et Gazette* describes him as “the great musician, the sublime violinist, the genius who fascinated entire populations with the magnetic influence of a talent both divine and diabolic”.⁹⁰ A similar dualism in the reception of Liszt has already been discussed; the parallel between Liszt and Paganini was not lost on contemporary critics, either; in a review of Liszt’s arrangement of Paganini’s Caprices, Gottfried Wilhelm Fink, for instance, calls both the pianist and the violinist “two demonic natures”.⁹¹

But such and similar references were made to Paganini much more than to any other virtuoso, including Liszt. Jim Samson suggests that Paganini fared worse in reception than Liszt mostly because he chose to perform almost exclusively his own music, whereas Liszt, as was mentioned above, purposefully aligned himself with already canonized composers, chiefly

⁸⁹ S.***, “Correspondance particulière. Francfort, 9 décembre.”, *RGMP*, 2 January 1840, pp. 10–11: “Je dois faire observer d’abord qu’on ne saurait appliquer au talent d’Ole Bull les mêmes règles critiques qui servent à comparer entre eux les grands maîtres de son art. Ici il n’est nullement question de tradition ; ce n’est ni à l’école classique française dont Viotti a jeté si hardiment les bases, et que, depuis, Rode, Kreutzer et Baillot ont perfectionnée et rendue semblable à un temple grec du goût plus pur, ni à la franche manière allemande dont Spohr est le représentant, et qui se distingue, comme la prose de Goethe, par tant de noblesse et d’élévation, qu’Ole Bull a emprunté les éléments de son exécution. Celle-ci a plutôt un rapport de parenté avec le génie de Paganini, et peut-être a-t-il suivi l’instinct du siècle en se modelant sur ce type contemporain”.

⁹⁰ [Unsigned], “Nouvelles de Paris.”, *Revue musicale*, 13 September 1835, p. 296: “le grand musicien, le sublime violoniste, le génie qui a fasciné des populations entières par l’influence magnétique d’un talent divin et diabolique, Paganini”.

⁹¹ G. W. Fink, “Franz Liszt, *Etudes d’Exécution transcendante d’après Paganini*.”, *AMZ*, 29 December 1841, p. 1111: “Also Paganini und Liszt,—zwei dämonische Naturen”.

Beethoven, by performing his works in public.⁹² But Paganini was hardly the only virtuoso to perform his own music only; moreover, most contemporary reviews focus on Paganini's idiosyncratic style of playing, his seemingly inaccessible concert persona, and singular appearance. Thus in his *Biographical Notice* Fétis dwells on the “extraordinary expression of his face, his livid paleness, his dark and penetrating eye, together with the sardonic smile which occasionally played upon his lips”, which “appeared to the vulgar, and to certain diseased minds, unmistakable evidence of satanic origin”.⁹³ Accusations of compacting with the devil against violin virtuosos, with varying degrees of seriousness, were, of course, nothing new, as the case of Giuseppe Tartini demonstrates.⁹⁴ But contemporary articles on Paganini are indeed focused on his appearance to an unprecedented degree. This anonymous review, for instance, couples Paganini's appearance with his “diabolical” genius:

Who would not sense in Paganini's untidy dress, in his dislocated posture, in his gaze of an eagle, in his livid complexion, in his absorbed attitude that, for him, the body is nothing, that its limbs are but supple slaves to its will, that a diabolical genius animates him, that a raging fire devours him, that he seeks those supernatural inspirations that seem to crush the heart with a thousand unknown sensations not on earth but elsewhere.⁹⁵

As though to drive the point home, the unsigned author then compares Paganini with the French violinist Baillot:

A thoughtful, pensive face, strong with expression and austere habits, announces this distinguished artist in Baillot, a friend of the simple, the true, the beautiful, the great; unlike Paganini, this is not a phantasmagoric talent, a talent of dreams, it is an inspired man who electrifies his audience; a blazing soul who communicates his fire, not a

⁹² Samson 2003, p. 78.

⁹³ Fétis 1876, p. 59.

⁹⁴ For a history of this longstanding diabolic trope regarding violin virtuosity, see Fournier 2001 and Fauquet 2005.

⁹⁵ [Unsigned], “Nouvelles des Départemens.”, *RM*, 15 October 1831, p. 290: “Qui ne devinerait à la mise négligée de Paganini, à son attitude disloquée, à son regard d'aigle, à son teint livide, à son air profondément absorbé que, pour lui, le corps n'est rien, que ses membres sont les souples esclaves de sa volonté, qu'un génie diabolique l'anime, qu'un feu trop vif le dévore, qu'il cherche ailleurs que sur terre ces inspirations surnaturelles qui semblent nous broyer le cœur par mille sensations inconnues”.

devouring fire that torments, but this benevolent fire whose sweet warmth animates without end; it is not at all a glistening flash, it is the sun; it is not at all an impetuous cascade, it is a majestic flow.⁹⁶

The reviewer's agenda is fairly obvious here: contrasted with the "sweet warmth" and traditionally French values—"the simple, the true, the beautiful, the great"—of Baillot, the "diabolical" outlandishness of Paganini is supposed to come into high relief. A pupil of Viotti, Pierre Baillot (1771–1842) was the last major representative of the Classical French school,⁹⁷ so a certain dose of Fétisian conservatism and possibly nationalism as well can be read in between the lines of this review. As a number of scholars have noted and as I have already repeatedly stressed in the Introduction and throughout this chapter, the virtuoso did embody extreme individuality and free subjectivity, but that subjectivity was nonetheless expected to stay within certain bounds. The reviews discussed above suggest that Paganini and to a lesser extent Bull overstepped those bounds, due to their ethnic otherness and idiosyncratic styles of playing, as well as, in Paganini's case, unusual physique,⁹⁸ aided by a deliberately off-putting style of clothing and onstage manner. Paganini simply appears to have been too original, too weird for his reviewers, French and German alike.

That the Paganini myth well outlived its subject is suggested by this description of the violinist written by Jules Janin (1804–1874), a leading Parisian critic, six years after Paganini's death:

⁹⁶ "Nouvelles des Départments.": "Un visage réfléchi, pensif, fort d'expression, des habitudes austères, annoncent dans Baillot cet artiste distingué, ami du simple, du vrai, du beau, du grand ; ce n'est pas comme Paganini un talent de fantasmagorie, de rêveries, c'est l'homme inspiré qui électrise un auditoire ; une ame brûlante qui communique son feu, non ce feu dévorant qui tourmente, mais ce feu bienfaisant dont la douce chaleur anime sans cesse ; ce n'est point l'éclair qui brille, c'est le soleil ; ce n'est point une cascade impétueuse, c'est un fleuve majestueux".

⁹⁷ For more on Baillot, see François-Sappey 1978.

⁹⁸ Jean-Bernard Condat has surmised that Paganini's unusual height and length of his limbs were the result of a rare disease; see Condat 1990.

Paganini is a strange being;—a most inexplicable riddle. There is nothing human in his appearance. His long bony head, covered with disheveled hair, can hardly contain the fire which gives light to that morose regard, so difficult for human looks to bear. We can scarcely be certain, in beholding him, that he is not a corpse [...] We have always looked upon this man with awe, whether he salutes the pit with his heavy, cold, and marble smile [...] or whether he abandons himself truly and proudly to all that galvanic inspiration which leaves us mute and transported. [...]

[...] And phantom-like he was, in his habits and caprices. He was seen—and he was seen no more. [...] He was a species of wandering Jew, with a cross of fire between his eyebrows. [...] He was separated from mankind by an invisible circle which none had dared to break through.⁹⁹

Paganini's apparently corpse-like appearance was a commonplace in his contemporary critical reception in French, German, and English journals alike. Janin here uses the favorite Gothic-novel trope of the uncertainty whether an apparently living being might actually be dead and vice versa ("We can scarcely be certain [...] that he is not a corpse"),¹⁰⁰ to set Paganini apart from the rest of humankind; another four years later, the same journal would transmit a similar description of Paganini's face as "cadaverous [...] with an expression not of the earth".¹⁰¹ For Janin, therefore, Paganini is "a strange being", there is "nothing human in his appearance", he has a "morose regard, so difficult for human looks to bear", a "heavy, cold, and marble smile", he is "phantom-like". As if all of that were not enough, Janin rounds off his fantastic description of Paganini's appearance by spelling out the conclusion that we were meant to infer from it: Paganini was "separated from mankind by an invisible circle which none had dared to break through".

Such descriptions of Paganini's otherworldly appearance were often accompanied by attempts to explain his virtuosity by pathologizing him. Fétis's *Revue musicale* thus transmits

⁹⁹ Jules Janin, "Paganini and Berlioz", *MW*, 17 January 1846, pp. 23–24.

¹⁰⁰ In his famous essay on the subject, it is this kind of uncertainty that Freud singles out as the paradigmatic instance of the uncanny. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is probably the best-known Gothic novel that makes use of this trope.

¹⁰¹ [Unsigned], "Our Scrapbook. Paganini.", *MW*, 21 December 1850, p. 826.

“Extracts from a Physiology Notice on the Famous Violinist Nicolò Paganini”, by a certain Doctor Bennati. The notice is a demonstration that “for the extraordinary skill that he has acquired, Paganini is less indebted to the frequent and regular practice of his instrument’s difficulties, than to the pathological organization of his body”.¹⁰² Dr Bennati then offers a description of Paganini’s appearance: his face is pale, his stature thin and medium-sized; the absence of teeth suggests a man older than just forty-seven; a voluminous head supported by a long and thin neck, out of proportion with his thin limbs; dark, long, and disheveled hair, contrasted with his pale complexion; all these, the doctor concludes, “give Paganini a physiognomy that is not ordinary, and which to a certain point represents the originality of his genius”.¹⁰³ The good doctor does allow that Paganini may have developed his faculties through long practice after all; “that is possible”, Dr Bennati writes, but “one must admit that nature had to predispose him admirably to arrive at such a result; it had to give him the organic disposition that the study then perfected”. Without his peculiar physical structure, Paganini’s musical genius could not alone make him into the virtuoso that he has become, the Dr Bennati concludes.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² [Unsigned], “Extraits d’une Notice physiologique sur le célèbre violoniste Nicolo Paganini, par M. le docteur Bennati.”, *RM*, 14 May 1831, p. 113: “M. Bennati se propose de démontrer dans sa notice que c’est moins à l’exercice fréquent et habituel des difficultés de son instrument que Paganini est redevable de l’habileté extraordinaire qu’il a acquise, qu’à son organisation pathologique”.

¹⁰³ “Extraits d’une Notice physiologique”, p. 113: “Paganini est pale et maigre et d’une taille moyenne. Quoiqu’il ne soit âgé que de quarante-sept ans, sa maigreur et le manque de dents, en faisant rentres sa bouche et rendant son menton plus saillant donne à sa physionomie l’expression d’un âge plus avancé. Sa tête volumineuse, soutenue sur un col long et maigre, offre au premier aperçu une disproportion assez forte avec ses membres grêles ; un front haut, large et carré, un nez aquilin fortement caractérisé, des sourcils arqués d’une manière parfaite, une bouche pleine d’esprit et de malice rappelant un peu celle de Voltaire ; des oreille amples, saillantes et détachées, des cheveux noirs et longs retombant en désordre sur ses épaules, et contrastant avec un teint pâle, donnent à Paganini une physionomie que n’est pas ordinaire, et que représente jusqu’à certain point l’originalité de son génie”.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 114: “On dira que ces facultés physiques se sont développées par un long exercice ; c’est possible ; mais il faudra convenir que la nature devait l’avoir admirablement disposé pour arriver à ce résultat ; elle a dû le gratifier de dispositions organiques que l’étude a perfectionnées. Ainsi, pour arrive à être Paganini, ce n’était point assez de son génie musical, il lui fallait la structure physique qu’il présent”.

This pathologization continued into the final months of Paganini's life, when his body was actually turning into a corpse, and beyond his death in 1840. The articles on Paganini from this time reveal a disturbingly morbid focus on the most gruesome details of his body's physical decay. It is almost as though some of the journalists were savoring the spectacle, such as the author of a notice published in the *Neue Zeitschrift* in 1840, with its focus on Paganini's emaciated body, wrinkled face, and loss of teeth; "he was just a worn-out machine, a phantom", the writer significantly concludes.¹⁰⁵ What all these contemporary responses to Paganini have in common, whether they are focused on his peculiar ("cadaverous") appearance, the "pathology" of his body, or its physical decay, is their dehumanization of the man and, explicitly or not, using that means to account for his virtuosity. It is apparent, then, that a virtuoso's radical originality and individuality did not necessarily guarantee positive critical reception: whereas critical responses to Liszt were dominated by superhuman epithets, those to Paganini tended toward making him into a devilish demon. It seems then that the originality and individuality of a virtuoso had to make some concessions to his audiences, be it communicating with them or the good looks of a Liszt, or the soothing "warmth" of a Baillot, in order to be recognized and celebrated as extraordinary or even superhuman but, after all, still human. On the other hand, Bull's and, more prominently, Paganini's radical originality and individuality facilitated the critics' rationalization of their extraordinary abilities not as human or superhuman, but as "degenerate", "pathological", in a word, monstrous. Crucially, virtuosic originality and individuality, whilst indispensable, had to stay within the bounds of the humanly possible or at least of the humanly conceivable. When they overstepped those boundaries, they had to be

¹⁰⁵ [Unsigned], "Paganini", *NZM*, 5 August 1840 and 12 August 1840: "er war nur eine abgenutzte Maschine, ein Phantom".

rationalized somehow, in Paganini's case by linking him with the devil, by pathologizing him, and finally, by morbidly focusing on the most gruesome details of his actual decay and demise, posited almost as a logical outcome of his sheer strangeness and (perceived) pathology.

At this point, we might be reminded of that Hegelian dictum, discussed in Chapter One, that self-consciousness “exists only in being acknowledged”.¹⁰⁶ According to Hegel, only if one is freely acknowledged as a human subject by other subjects may one actually become a human subject and subsist as such. The radical idiosyncrasy of Paganini's virtuosity, it seems, precluded a recognition of his achievement as that of an extraordinary but still *human* being; instead, critics sought to explain it by means of pathologizing and dehumanizing Paganini the man. Of course, this does not mean that the above-quoted critics *really* mistook Paganini for a ghost or a living dead, or that his career was ever seriously threatened by such criticism; if anything, this kind of journalistic sensationalism could only help him, as so much free eye-catching publicity. What it does mean, however, is that Paganini was *symbolically* dehumanized in much of his contemporary and posthumous critical reception due to his idiosyncrasy or radical originality, that is, the critics' inability to recognize his virtuosity as the achievement of a human being. A virtuoso, then, had to be original; but at the same time, his virtuosic originality still had to remain securely identifiable as human, as issuing from a human body. In other words, so that his virtuosity might be admired as an amazing accomplishment of a human being and not dreaded as a manifestation of monstrosity, the virtuoso still had to be recognized as embodying the category of the human; that is, his human (or almost superhuman) identity had to remain undeniably clear. Despite all the exhortations of originality, the virtuoso still had to conform to a recognizable identity category, that of the human; the pathologization of Paganini

¹⁰⁶ Hegel 1977, § 177.

in his critical reception shows that total originality, total otherness, subjectivity out of control, were not an option, all the fantasizing about the virtuoso as embodying freedom notwithstanding. The virtuoso had to be original, but not *too* original, or idiosyncratic. Otherwise, he risked being seen not as superhuman, but as subhuman, that is, monstrous.¹⁰⁷

How to Be a Perfect Virtuoso, but Not an Automaton: The Elusive Notions of Expression and Expressivity

Paganini was hardly the only virtuoso monster around. As far as the Viennese correspondent to *The Musical World* signed only by his initials “H. G.” was concerned, all virtuosos were monsters and their recitals little more than freak-shows. It is mere curiosity that attracts people to them:

[D]oes the innate love and admiration we feel for the beautiful in nature deter us from crowding to gaze upon some two-headed or three-legged monster which may be exhibited in our city? And is it to be inferred, that because we go to see it we find it more lovely and agreeable than the graceful and symmetrical being which we are accustomed to regard as beautiful? It is our thorough knowledge of the beautiful which makes us keen in our perceptions of the ugly and monstrous. We are led to monstrous productions of nature by curiosity, and the same feeling prompts us to listen to these monsters of art [...].¹⁰⁸

But there was a special variety of these other monsters that merits a separate discussion: the “automata” virtuosos. It is in this capacity that an 1820 report from Paris, written for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, treats the young Henri Herz. The author of the report, composer and violinist Louis Spohr (1784–1859), acknowledges Herz’s “extraordinary skill” as “astonishing”, but accuses him, as well as other Parisian virtuosos, of putting technical ahead of

¹⁰⁷ I have treated a similar reception-history case, albeit in the very different context of late-twentieth-century popular music, in Cvejić 2010.

¹⁰⁸ H. G., “Letters from Vienna”, 21 March 1846, pp. 132–33.

intellectual training. It is easy to see, Spohr continues, that those given over to such pursuits will end up with their own spirit dead and grow into “nothing better than musical automata”.¹⁰⁹ Returning to Paganini for one last time, we should remember how the author of the *Neue Zeitschrift* obituary quoted above likened the dying Paganini to a “defunct machine”.

In a rapidly accelerating industrial age, which increasingly had to contend in everyday life with machines of all sorts, such as train engines, steamers, steam-powered mills, and, last but not least, pianos,¹¹⁰ it was only to be expected that contemporary music criticism would not stay immune to the wholesale mechanization of life starting around 1800. It is therefore little wonder that we find automata in some of these reviews. The more important question for us is why automata entered the critical discourse of *virtuosity* and how that reflects the larger philosophical issues that influenced that discourse. Automata were self-powered machines, which, when appropriately wound-up by a human operator, mimicked living beings, animal or human; and they were very much en vogue in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Europe, from Vaucanson’s “duck” and “flautist”¹¹¹ to Maelzel’s “chess-player”, which achieved global fame.¹¹² But as Catherine Liu explains in her study of early-modern automata and their contemporary reception, those machines had a strongly destabilizing effect as well, because the more believable and well-made among them seemed to suggest that the difference between the

¹⁰⁹ Louis Spohr, “Briefe aus Paris von Louis Spohr. Zweyter Brief. den 31sten December 1820.”, *AMZ*, 7 March 1821, pp. 156–62: “Die ausserordentliche Fertigkeit dieses jungen Mannes setzt in Erstaunen; doch scheint auch bey ihm, wie bey allen hiesigen jungen Künstlern, die ich bis jetzt hörte, die technische Ausbildung der geistigen vorgeschritten zu seyn [...] Dass bey solchem Verfahren der Geist getödtet werden müsse, und aus solchen Leuten nicht viel Besseres werden könne, als musikalische Automaten, ist leicht begreiflich”.

¹¹⁰ Parakilas 2001a, p. 115: “The piano is a machine. Already when it was invented at the beginning of the eighteenth century, it embodied a more complex mechanism than any earlier stringed keyboard instrument”.

¹¹¹ A facsimile of Vaucanson’s original treatise with detailed descriptions and diagrams of his automata is available in Vaucanson 1979. Vaucanson’s flutist is briefly discussed in Mathiesen 1992.

¹¹² Standage 2002 is an amusing and informative history of the chess-player and other automata. Additional information on music automata and their histories can be found in Carrera 1984, Toop 2002, and Voskuhl 2007.

human and the mechanical (or, more generally, the non-human) may not be as obvious as we thought:

Man can be *like* a machine and a machine can be *like* a man. In this kind of comparison, a relationship of analogical rather than absolute difference is established between what man (or human) is from what he is not.¹¹³

If a soulless mechanism could be made to mimic actual living beings so closely that it becomes difficult to distinguish between a living organism and an automaton, how may one rest assured that living beings are not likewise mere mechanisms, without immaterial souls to animate them? That this was precisely the fear that tormented the citizens of the unnamed university town in E. T. A. Hoffmann's famous story "The Sandman"¹¹⁴ demonstrates how preoccupied with automata the culture of early-nineteenth-century Europe was, apparently in such disparate fields as fine literature, mechanical engineering, and virtuosity criticism. If a mechanical simulacrum can come so close to the organic original that the two may become indistinguishable, how can one be sure that the original is organic and, moreover, that it is really the original? It may all come down to a soulless, self-animating mechanism, then; there might be no such thing as the immaterial soul, just a jumble of pulleys, rods, and wheels.

¹¹³ Liu 2000, pp. 78–79.

¹¹⁴ Hoffmann 1982, pp. 305–306: "The story of the automaton had very deeply impressed them, and a horrible distrust of human figures in general arose. Indeed, many lovers insisted that their mistresses sing and dance unrhythmically and embroider, knit, or play with a lapdog or something while being read to, so that they could assure themselves that they were not in love with a wooden doll; above all else, they required their mistresses not only to listen, but to speak frequently in such a way that it would prove that they really were capable of thinking and feeling. Many lovers, as a result, grew closer than ever before; but others gradually drifted apart. 'One really can't be sure about this', said one or another. At tea parties, people yawned with incredible frequency and never sneezed, in order to ward off all suspicion. Spalanzani, as has been noted, had to leave the place in order to escape criminal charges of having fraudulently introduced an automaton into human society". It is symptomatic for our purposes here that Nathanael, the main character in the story, mistakes the wooden doll (automaton) "Olympia" for a real, living girl and falls in love with her at the moment when he hears "her" sing and play the piano, as any respectable bourgeois girl ought to be able to do (more on this in Chapter Four below). One might perhaps understand Nathanael's mistake given that voice has long been theorized as the most faithful sign of human (self-)presence, most notably by Derrida. As for "Olympia's" other feminine accomplishment, it is noteworthy that Hoffmann takes care to tell us that her piano-playing was "too perfect", like that of a virtuoso. For discussions of this and other Hoffmann stories involving automata, see Seidel 1990, Dolan 2008, and Hirt 2010.

As Spohr's review of Henri Herz shows, the danger for virtuosi was that in their quest for perfection in performance, they might come to be likened to, and dismissed as, automata, mere lifeless machines, instead of being celebrated as extraordinary human individuals who push the limits, as virtuosi were supposed to do, of the humanly possible.¹¹⁵ As noted above, every virtuoso was obliged to pursue originality and perfection; but, he also had to make sure that his achievement, however extraordinary, remain recognizable as that of a human being. Otherwise, his seemingly superhuman achievement might be explained away as that of a demon, monster, or automaton, and he himself might be demonized and pathologized, like Paganini, dismissed as a charlatan, like Sivori and Bull, or likened to an automaton, like Herz. A virtuoso had to be original, but humanly original, not *too* original; he had to be perfect, but *humanly* perfect, not *too* perfect. He had to be the embodiment of extreme individuality and free subjectivity, but still of a *human* individuality and subjectivity.

What was required of virtuosi to keep their virtuosity perfect and avoid being compared to automata? According to a vast number of reviews, that vital ingredient was *expression*. To earn a positive review, any performance had to be not only technically perfect (that almost went without saying), but also *expressive*; otherwise, it might be dismissed as that of a mere automaton, not of a (human) virtuosic hero. The valuation of expression in contemporary criticism of virtuosity chimes in with the inauguration of expression as the purpose of all art and especially music in contemporary aesthetics, in the wake of mimesis, which was discussed at length in the preceding chapter. And if, as we are about to see, critics of virtuosity were less

¹¹⁵ There is a related but brief discussion of this predicament of virtuosity in Mallet 1990. In Parakilas 2001a, James Parakilas offers an interesting interpretation of nineteenth-century piano pedagogy, arguing that “it was not until the nineteenth century (which was called the Machine Age even at that time) that the ideal of the machine was extended to the way the piano was played—or more precisely, to the way people were taught to ‘play it’” (Parakilas 2001a, pp. 115–16). Klaus Giersch has suggested that Czerny's didactic method was inspired by the industrial division of labor; see Giersch 1992.

than forthcoming on what exactly constituted, in their minds, expression in performance, or what exactly virtuosic performances were supposed to be expressive of, that, too, was entirely consistent with the philosophic notions of the alleged power of music (i.e., *Tonkunst*) to communicate (*express*) that which otherwise could not be communicated or expressed. In a way, then, it would be unfair to blame nineteenth-century critics of virtuosity for not telling us what exactly virtuosic performances should express, as if they did not know, for that was precisely the point: if music expresses what otherwise could not be expressed (therefore not in language either), then it would be futile to try to put it in writing (or speaking, for that matter).

Thus, although most of us would probably have at least a rough idea of what contributes to an expressive musical performance—articulation, dynamics, phrasing—most early-to-mid-nineteenth-century critics were, as mentioned above, tantalizingly vague about the notion. It is tempting to see a design in this, namely, to preserve an ineffable, immaterial core in performance—analogue to the ineffable essence of *Tonkunst* in contemporary aesthetics—and thus save it from degenerating into an automatic and dehumanized activity of a merely correct and technically accomplished reading of the score, that is, pressing and depressing keys, bowing and stopping the strings of a violin at all the appropriate times and in all the appropriate places, for even Maelzel and Vaucanson’s automata could accomplish that much. “L. R.”, for instance, the author of a review published in an 1845 issue of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, praises the Bohemian composer-pianist Ignaz Moscheles for the “humanity of his execution”, coming straight out of his soul, which “will always win him the hearts and appreciation” of the audience.¹¹⁶ Moscheles (1794–1870) was a somewhat anomalous figure, inasmuch as he

¹¹⁶ L. R., “Nachrichten. Leipzig.”, *AMZ*, 8 January 1845, p. 28: “Aber sein feines, edles Spiel, durch welches stets die solideste und tüchtigste Technik durchblickt, das milde freundliche Blick, dass er dem Hörer dadurch vor die

pursued the international career of a touring virtuoso until he settled in Leipzig to teach at the Conservatory in 1846 *and* held, for a virtuoso, unusually conservative aesthetic views, which favored the music of Clementi, Beethoven, Bach, and Domenico Scarlatti.¹¹⁷ It is therefore no surprise that he received regular praise from such a conservative journal as the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* and, in this instance, from an apparently likewise conservative reviewer, who dedicated most of this review to a sharp critique of modern virtuosity, with its “all sorts of extravagance”, “so-called brilliance”, and “salon coquetry”, of which Moscheles is deemed a rare exception.¹¹⁸ It is more important, however, to note that the reviewer chooses “humanity” as the most appropriate characterization of Moscheles’s “soulful” and “expressive” style, in contrast to most contemporary virtuosity. It is as though “expressive” (whatever that really meant) play vouchsafed for the humanity of the virtuoso—and vice versa.

Numerous other reviews and articles express similar views. For instance, the unsigned author of an 1833 review from the same journal, concludes his praise of the then-famous German-French pianist and Chopin’s teacher Frédéric Kalkbrenner (1785–1845)¹¹⁹ with the assertion that “the spirit of the individual belongs now and always to any, as well as to the best virtuosity”.¹²⁰ Writing ten years later, another anonymous contributor to the same journal

Seele führt, und mit welchem er diesen erfreuen, nicht überraschen will, mit einem Worte: die Humanität seines Vortrages wird ihm stets die Herzen und grosse Anerkennung gewinnen”.

¹¹⁷ Smidak 1988 is the only modern book-length biography of Moscheles.

¹¹⁸ “Nachrichten. Leipzig.”, pp. 26–27: “Mag die neuere Zeit mit ihren gesteigerten Anforderungen an das Pianofortespiel die Virtuosität vorzugsweise in halsbrecherischen Künsten, in möglichster Setzung des Orchesters und in allerhand Extravaganzen suchen, und wird auch der besonnenste Kunstfreund fast wider Willen mit in den Taumel der Bewunderung fortgerissen, den sich die frappanten Leistungen der jetzigen Clavierheroen zu erzwingen verstehen, so ist und bleibt es gewiss für Jeden, welcher der Kunst eine höhere Tendenz einräumt, und ihrer solideren Richtung gern folgt, um so erquickender und beruhigender, sich einmal wieder in die Zeit zurückversetzt zu sehen, in welcher Bravour und Eleganz des Vortrags noch nicht auf die äusserste Spitze, noch nicht bis zur weltstürmenden sogenannten Genialität und süsslichen Saloncoquetterie getrieben waren”.

¹¹⁹ For more on Kalkbrenner’s life and works, see Nautsch 1983.

¹²⁰ [Unsigned], “Nachrichten. Leipzig, im Juny.”, *AMZ*, 16 June 1833, p. 434: “In jede, auch die beste Virtuosität gehört nun Geist und immer der Geist des Individuums”.

declares that only “the genuine artists” among modern virtuosi “are allowed” to transcend “the merely sensuous” by the power of “the driving force of expression”.¹²¹ But such genuine artists are few and far between in the world of contemporary virtuosi, the unsigned author tells us, most of whom are absorbed with themselves only, with their little celebrity cults, for the sake of which they are happy to turn musical performance into “finger-art” and “handiwork”.¹²²

Some reviewers even turned a blind eye to slight deficiencies in technique, provided that the virtuoso’s playing could be deemed expressive enough. For instance, that grace was extended to Ernst by an unsigned correspondent for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* from St. Petersburg. Comparing Ernst with Vieuxtemps, the reviewer asserts that both are “great, extraordinary virtuosi”, though different in their accomplishments and intentions.¹²³ Vieuxtemps’s technique is impeccable; and yet, he lacks some of that “inner warmth” that “coming from the heart, captures the heart of the listener”; but he should not be reproached over this, since it is “a free gift from God and cannot be learnt through any amount of study”.¹²⁴ Ernst, on the other hand, even if his tuning is not always perfect, has that “warmth of feeling,

¹²¹ [Unsigned], “Nachrichten. *Wiener Musikleben.*”, *AMZ*, 9 August 1843, pp. 586–87: “Nur den wahrhaften Künstlern unter [den heutigen Virtuosen] ist es gegönnt, uns, im Momente ihrer Wirksamkeit, jenes im Kleinen vorzuführen, und das Gemüth, über das bloß Sinnliche hinweg, in die Fernen einer romantischen Zauberwelt zu tragen. Doch dazu gehört ein ausserordentlich günstiges Ebenmaass der individuellen Kräfte, ein glückliches Erfassen des Characters der Zeit, und eine von dieser bedingte Schwungkraft des Ausdrucks, mit einem Worte ein Verein von Eigenschaften, wie man sie kaum bei den begabtesten Tonangebern in der Virtuosenwelt antrifft”.

¹²² “Nachrichten. *Wiener Musikleben.*”, pp. 587–88: “Allein die meisten repräsentiren nichts als ihr liebes, an sich unbedeutendes Ich, lassen entweder ihre schatten Fingerkünste, oder ihre bizarre Manier und sonstigen Schwänke prädominiren, streben nach Journalslärm, bauen darauf ihren Ruhmenstempel und ihre Börsenhalle, gehen wie sie gekommen, um anderwärts ihre alten paar Stückchen wieder von Neuem bewundern zu lassen, mit einem Worte, machen aus der Kunst ein wahres Handwerk, womit sie zwar sich nützen, doch jener Himmelstecher immerdar so fremd bleiben, als ohne künstlerische Besselung das hölzerne Tonwerkzeug es bleibt, dessen sie sich zu ihren Kling- und Schaukünsten bedienen”.

¹²³ [Unsigned], “Nachrichten. St. Petersburg.”, *AMZ*, 23 June 1847, p. 430: “Beide, *Vieuxtemps* wie *Ernst*, sind grosse, ausserordentliche Virtuosen. Und doch sind sie, in ihren Leistungen, wie in ihren Intentionen, sehr wesentlich von einander verschieden”.

¹²⁴ “Nachrichten. St. Petersburg.”: “Wenn ihm jene innere Wärme fehlt, welche in der Leistung der Künstlers als Begeisterung emporledert und, wie sie vom Herzen kommt, auch die Herzen der Hörer ergreift, so darf ihm deshalb kein Vorwurf gemacht werden, denn sie ist ein freies Geschenk des Himmels und kann durch kein Studium erworben werden”.

rapture, and originality that no study but only nature can give”. Although he, too, must have devoted ample time to diligent study, the correspondent continues, “this was limited by a spiritual tendency, which saved his virtuosity from that one-sided, cold perfection, which causes amazement because it approximates an art-machine, but cannot capture the heart”. For that reason “*Vieuxtemps* is a virtuoso and composer par excellence, but Ernst is an artist par la grâce de Dieu”.¹²⁵

A few years earlier, *The Musical World* made a similar comparison of Ernst, this time to Sivori, with a similar outcome:

Sivori possesses a command of his instrument almost unlimited; a fine, broad, free, and open style of playing; great brilliance and finish of execution, and a softness of manner that is not by any means without its powers of captivation. Ernst has, no less than he, the capability to express upon the violin the uttermost caprices of the wildest fancy; and he also has, far more than he, a fancy, quick, brilliant, and imaginative, to suggest the most delicate, refined, and passionate expression, which he pours out from his instrument with the enthusiasm of an author, rather than with the mechanical accuracy of a mere performer.¹²⁶

The “author”/“mere performer” binary itself at this point probably requires no further comment, but it should be noted that “expression” is associated with the former, whereas the latter’s domain is only “mechanical accuracy”. The reviewer proceeds to inform his readers of a raging polemic in London between the “Ernstists” and the “Sivorists”, but hastens to remark that

the latter comprise nearly all the violin-players—we mean persons limited to the performance and comprehension of that instrument—and that the former consists of nearly all such persons as have studied and known music, in its wide and general developments, persons who have spent their lives, in the analyzation [*sic*] and

¹²⁵ “Nachrichten. St. Petersburg.”: “[...] *Ernst*, der das, was kein Studium, sondern die Natur allein geben kann, Wärme des Gefühls, Begeisterung und Originalität in hohem Grade besitzt. Unstreitig hat er auch seiner Kunst nach allen Richtungen hin ein ernstes Studium gewidmet, dieses mag aber stets von einer geistigen Tendenz bedingt worden sein und hat so seine Virtuosität vor jener einseitigen, kalten Vollendung bewahrt, welche, weil sie an eine künstliche Maschine erinnert, wohl Bewunderung hervorrufen, aber nie das Herz ergreifen kann. [...] *Vieuxtemps* ist ein Virtuose und Componist par excellence, *Ernst* aber ein Künstler par la grâce de Dieu”.

¹²⁶ [Unsigned], “Sivori and Ernst”, *MW*, 10 August 1843, p. 268.

admiration of great works, rather than in the solution of mechanical intricacies and the practice of individualities.¹²⁷

When it comes to assessing violinists, the author apparently puts more trust in those who engage in the “analyzation and admiration of great works” than in those who can actually play the instrument. Expression, though the author does not specify in any concrete terms what exactly he means by it, is the ultimate criterion:

Ernst, in his performance, seems to open the extremest depths of passion, and to expose the acute, strong, and impulsive workings of a musician’s heart, while Sivori evinces only the superficial gallantries of art, and captivates rather than commands our feelings, by the fascination of his graceful demeanour; in short, [...] Sivori is a *fine player*, Ernst is a *great one*!¹²⁸

That the conservative staff of *The Musical World* preferred a representative of the relatively more classical German school to Paganini’s only pupil acknowledged by the master is no surprise. As mentioned above, Ernst’s visits and a later extended stay in London were rather successful, not least due to the journal’s generous support. “His playing comes from the heart and goes to the heart”, reviewers exclaimed,¹²⁹ “Ernst is our violinist *de cœur*—he has that within him which surpasses show—he is a great artist, and his devotion to music is as unmistakably great as any of the qualities which we have so frequently found occasion to laud in him as a mere violinist. He plays the fiddle, certainly—and right ably he plays it,—but he *feels* something far beyond it—and *he expresses what he feels*”.¹³⁰ Yet again, note the usual juxtaposition of the “great artist” and the “mere violinist”.

Thus, only a sufficiently “expressive” virtuosic performance was worthy of a positive review; technically accomplished but inexpressive performances caused virtuosi to be

¹²⁷ “Sivori and Ernst”, p. 268.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

¹²⁹ [Unsigned], “The Winter in Paris.”, *MW*, 7 June 1838, pp. 103–104.

¹³⁰ Q., “Ernst”, *MW*, 11 July 1844, pp. 227–28.

dehumanized, likened to automata, mere, lifeless machines, and therefore dismissed. Virtuosi were expected to be *superhuman* but still human, not *inhuman*. But virtuosic feats often did approach the inhuman: tempi were so fast, chords so dense, and leaps so wide that one could scarcely believe that such a machine-like proficiency could issue from a human being. The elusive notions of “expression” and “expressivity” were then borrowed from contemporary aesthetics and employed to ensure that virtuosic performance could still be recognized as human: an “expressive” performance, which could not be achieved by simply reading the score that a machine might be capable of, was taken as a reassuring sign of human presence in the virtuoso, in the music he performed, and in the act of virtuosic performance itself. And if it could not be pinned down in language what exactly it was that a virtuosic performance should express, so much the better, since music *qua Tonkunst*, according to contemporary aesthetics, likewise expressed, as we saw in Chapter One, what otherwise could not be expressed, not least concerning the essence of the human subject and its autonomy.

Expression’s Mortal Enemy: Virtuosoic Technique

The archenemy of that humanizing effect of expression was, in most critics’ views, a defining feature of virtuosity: excessive virtuosic technique. At this point, we may be reminded of Susan Bernstein’s remark, quoted in the Introduction, that in “mere virtuosity”, “the effect is caused by mechanical instruments and techniques, not by the intended expression of a transcendent

subject”.¹³¹ For, when a virtuoso’s performance was deemed not expressive enough, not only was his quality as a performer questioned, but sometimes also his “soul”:

One notices too much of physical self-renunciation and a too **objective** tendency in Thalberg;—one might almost be tempted to admire just the instrument that gives such new, rich effects. But where is the soul here, the inner man, who should unfold in tones and in his own way? Where is the fervor of feelings and warmth that animate us inside and should elevate us to genuine rapture?¹³²

Due to Thalberg’s superb technique coupled with his famous “aristocratic” poise at the keyboard, Schumann’s unsigned correspondent from Brussels notes, tellingly, that “one might almost be tempted to admire just the instrument”—that is, the piano as the most machine-like of instruments—and not the (human) piano virtuoso himself. Amazing virtuosic technique is there, but what is missing is “the soul”, “the inner man”, the “feelings and warmth that animate us inside”: in other words, the irreducibly human element of expression in the performance of music. Of course, none of that means that critics regarded proficient technique as anything less than essential to any satisfying performance; rather, a positive review of a performance was typically contingent on the presence of both technique and expression in it. Thus for instance, the *Neue Zeitschrift*’s unsigned correspondent from Paris criticizes in 1834 both Kalkbrenner, for his “perfect mechanical play without inner life and fire”, as well as Mendelssohn and unnamed others, for their “playing with poetry and youthful power of feeling, but without a good enough technical training to control the instrument”.¹³³

¹³¹ Bernstein 1998, p. 81.

¹³² [Unsigned], “Aus Brüssel. Mitte December.”, *NZM*, 4 January 1841, pp. 7–8: “Bei Thalberg bemerkt man ferner ein zu starkes **physisches** Selbstverleugnen und zu **objective** Tendenz;—man möchte bald versucht sein, nur allein das Instrument zu bewundern, das so neue, reiche Effect von sich gibt. Wo ist aber hier die Seele, der innere Mensch, der sich in Tönen auf seine Weise entfalten soll? wo ist jene Gefühlsluth und Wärme, die unser Inneres anregen, uns zur wahren Begeisterung erheben soll?”

¹³³ [Unsigned], “Correspondenz. Paris im März”, *NZM*, 3 April 1834, p. 4: “Jedem denkenden Musiker muß es ausgefallen seyn, daß auf dem Pianoforte etwas ganz Anderes geleistet werden kann und soll, als wir bisher zu hören gewohnt waren, vollendetes mechanisches Spiel ohne inneres Leben und Feuer, wie bei Kalkbrenner, oder,

But most critics were not worried about any lack of technique in the art of contemporary virtuosi. On the contrary, they were concerned with excessive technical display, which threatened to unduly elevate technique beyond its legitimate role. Thus one finds in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*'s opening issue for 1824, in lieu of its annual editorial lead, a short text by the philosopher Fichte, which begins with his admission of the indispensability of technique to any kind of artistic production, but then warns, in no unequivocal terms, that it is not "the spirit" of art, with which it is often confused: "No ideas are created through it alone, just empty jingle-jangle"; it is empty play for play's sake; "it does not rise up to ideas but, at most, expresses a wantonness and a waste of power"; finally, "the mere mechanist will produce through his highest art no more than a mechanical work, which will at best amaze with its construction".¹³⁴ Positioned in such a prominent place, Fichte's text reveals not only his own position on the merits of virtuosic technique, but also that of the journal and its conservative editor, Gottfried Wilhelm Fink.

That is not to say, however, that Fichte's (or Fink's) suspicion of virtuosic technique was restricted to the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* or that it necessarily was very conservative, for similar views are easily found in the less conservative journals, too. Thus August Gathy, one of Schumann's fellow *Davidsbündler*,¹³⁵ writing in the *Neue Zeitschrift*, blames the development of technique for leading modern pianism astray; it is a "treacherous path", a

wie bei Mendelsohn [*sic*] und Anderen, Spiel mit Poesie und jugendlichem Kraftgefühl, doch ohne die höhere technische Bildung, die das Instrument beherrscht".

¹³⁴ Fichte, "Zur Einleitung", *AMZ*, 1 January 1824, p. 1: "Man hat diese Leichtigkeit der mechanischen Kunst sehr oft mit dem Geiste selbst verwechselt; und sie ist allerdings die ausschliessende Bedingung seiner Aeusserung, und jeder, der an das Werk geht, muss sie schon erworben haben: aber sie ist nicht der Geist selbst. Durch sie allein wird nichts hervorgebracht, als ein leeres Geklimper; ein Spiel, das auch nichts weiter ist, denn Spiel; das nicht zu Ideen erhebt, höchstens einen Muthwillen und eine verschwendete Kraft ausdrückt, der man in der Stille eine bessere Anwendung wünscht. Zwar wird des leichteste und muthwilligste Pinselstrich des wahren Genie's einen Anstrich von Ideen haben: aber der blosser Mechaniker wird durch seine höchste Kunst nie etwas anderes hervorbringen, als ein mechanisches Werk, über dessen Bau man höchstens sich wunder wird".

¹³⁵ For more on Gathy's life and work in criticism, see Federhofer-Königs 2006.

“school of ruin”, this “empty technique”, “mechanically learnt skill”, because it disables all “genuine artistic production in composition and performance” alike, for the sake of empty finger-skill bereft of all spirit and expression.¹³⁶ “Expression” being the purpose of all artistic musical performance and technique merely its means, the latter’s development beyond its prescribed subservient role threatened, in the views of critics such as Fichte and Gathy, that status quo. Crucially, by sidelining expression for the sake of technique, virtuosity threatened to rob performance of its only irreducibly human ingredient.

As was the case with Thalberg and others discussed above, individual virtuosos were judged accordingly. Those performers whose playing was deemed too technical and not expressive enough were dismissed as “cold”, “soulless”, and the like. Illustrative in this regard is an anonymous 1840 article from the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, which discusses the respective merits of Ernst and Ole Bull. The author devotes most of the article to a detailed praise of what he sees as Ernst’s expressive play, whereas Bull’s is dismissed as “[s]tupendous technique [which] may be achieved even without eminent talent, through relentless study”.

¹³⁶ August Gathy, “Aus Paris.,” *NZM*, 28 September 1843, p. 103: “Durch das Auftreten glänzender Erscheinungen im Fache des Pianofortespiels und den Wettkampf der einander überbietenden ausübenden Künstler ist einerseits zwar eine an’s Unmögliche grenzende Entwicklung der Technik gewonnen worden, andererseits aber eine über alle wahre Kunst hinausragende Steigerung der angewandten Mittel entstanden, die als Abweg schon längst und sittsam bezeichnet worden ist. Für die einzelnen Vertreter und Leister dieser Richtung, für die wenigen Kampfhelden des modernen Virtuosenenthums, denen zugleich eine bedeutenden geistige Kraft innerwohnt, ist die von ihnen gebrochene Bahn keine gefährliche, in sofern sie sich auf diesem Tummelplatz geräuschvoller Anstrengungen der kleinen Anzahl der Berufenen gegenüber in Ehren zu behaupten wissen; für alle übrigen aber, die ihnen auf dieser lockenden Bahn zu folgen den unsinnigen Muth haben [...] ist diese Richtung im vollen Sinne des Wortes eine Schule des Verderbenes. Denn die größten und talentvollsten unter ihnen [...], wie nahe sie in ungeheuern Leistungen auch ihren Vorbildern kommen mögen, und selbst dann, wenn sie sie erreichen, bleiben nach mühsam errungenem Ziele immer doch nur Nachahmer, und haben auf dem langen, dürren Wege dahin alle Frische des Geistes eingebüßt und nichts gewonnen, als die Beherrschung einer leeren Technik, eine mechanisch angelernte Geschicklichkeit. Wie ihre Technik, um sich geltend zu machen, eine angemessene Compositionsweise bedingt, so diese auch wiederum jene, und somit ist der unselige Kreise, innerhalb dessen sich die Uebertreibung gewaltsam bewegt, unwiderruflich geschlossen, ohne sich je zu einer wahrhaft künstlerischen Production in Composition und Ausführung erheben zu können, entwickeln diese Helden zweiten Ranges theils eine auf bloße Klopffechtereie berechnete empfindungsleere, geistlose Satzweise, theils eine blendende und doch in ihrer innern Armseligkeit Bedauern erregende Fingerfertigkeit, die nicht selten am Vortrag des Anspruchlosen, des einfach Schönen scheitert, da wo eine minder glänzende, aber künstlerischer ausgebildete Virtuosität den Anforderungen echter Kunst entspricht und in Ehren bestecht”.

“Soul” and “expression of feelings”, by contrast, cannot be taught.¹³⁷ The violinist Sivori receives similar censure from *The Musical World*, “for feeling, expression, and everything like poetical enthusiasm, were swallowed in the flood of executive mechanisms” in a London recital of his.¹³⁸ The thirteen-year-old Vieuxtemps, on the other hand, “deserves the title of a first-rate artist” because he excels not only in technique, but also in “feeling and expression”.¹³⁹ He masters difficult works not only through mechanical virtuosity, but also endows them with “a wealth of feeling and expression”.¹⁴⁰

Therefore, virtuosic technique, a defining characteristic of virtuosity, had to be kept under control, so as not to jeopardize expression, the ineffable human core of musical performance. When it was deemed uncontrolled, technique was blamed for turning amazing human virtuosity into the proficient, but dull, functioning of a machine and, by extension, the virtuoso, from a living embodiment of human individuality and power, to a lifeless automaton. Like originality, technique, too, had to be kept within limits recognizable as human. If not, it threatened to turn a (super)human virtuoso into another kind of monster, this time a dehumanized machine. In this regard, the automated, mechanized virtuoso is closely related to his diabolic, demonic counterpart, whose main paradigm was, as we saw above, Paganini; what

¹³⁷ [Unsigned], “Nachrichten.”, *AMZ*, 29 July 1840, p. 635: “Stupende Technik, siegreiche Ueberwindung aller Arten von Schwierigkeit lässt sich sogar ohne eminentes Talent, blos nur durch rastloses Studium erringen, und wird, mit dem Beisatz einer erklacklichen Dosis von Charlatanerie, die der Mystifikation so bereitwillig sich hingehende Menge immerdar allarmiren; die Seele aber, des Gesang des Spiele kann nicht erlernt werden, wenn der Gefühlsausdruck, welcher mit der Zeit zur vollsten Reife gelangt, im Keine zum Künstlerthum nicht schon vorhanden”.

¹³⁸ [Unsigned], “Miscellaneous”, *MW*, 25 April 1844, p. 145.

¹³⁹ [Unsigned], “Nachrichten. *Stuttgart*, Ende December 1833.”, *AMZ*, 22 January 1834, p. 59: “Der junge lebenswürdige Musiker verdient schon jetzt in der That den Namen eines vorzüglichen Künstlers, der mit Kraft und Sicherheit und bewunderungswürdiger Reinheit nicht nur die technischen Schwierigkeiten jeder Art nicht überwidmet, sondern auch mit Gefühl und Ausdruck im Adagio, wobey ihm seim trefflicher Bogenstrich wesentliche Dienste leistet, die frühe Herrschaft über sein Instrument kund gibt”.

¹⁴⁰ [Unsigned], “Nachrichten. *Wien. Musikalische Chronic des ersten Quartals.*”, *AMZ*, 11 June 1834, pp. 398–99: “[...] und besiegt nicht nur mit eimenter Virtuosität den mechanischen Theil, sondern legt auch einen Reichthum von Gefühl und Ausdruck hinein”.

brought the demon and the automaton together was their shared belonging to the category of the non- or subhuman. The elusive quality of expressivity was read as an unmistakable sign of an ineffable human core in musical performance, however technically proficient and virtuosic in other ways; as such, it enabled critics to recognize even extremely virtuosic, seemingly superhuman performances as nonetheless human. But without expressivity, virtuosic performances readily degenerated in the eyes of their critics from (super)human artistry down to the subhuman or non-human working of an automaton. Paganini's example showed us that whatever they did, however original they were, virtuosi still needed to ensure that their virtuosity remain recognizable as a human achievement, so that they too, in a rather Hegelian fashion, might be recognized as human; otherwise, they faced the risk of being dismissed as monsters. Expressive performance (whatever that elusive notion really meant) was a means of keeping one's virtuosity recognizable as that of a human being.

The Fallen Angels of Music: Moralistic Critiques of Virtuosity

Excessive cultivation of technique at the expense of expression; charlatanry; disrespecting other composers' authorial intentions in performances of their music—these and other sins of virtuosity were often couched in moralistic terms, as the individual virtuoso's own moral failing. In such reviews, individual virtuosi are either praised or dismissed in moralistic terms, while virtuosity is treated as a morally suspect pursuit, chiefly because, as their authors allege, it subjects the art of music (“God-like”, in Davison's terms) to base purposes, unworthy of it. Thus the elder Fétis asserts in an 1847 review that for the young aspiring artist “two things are

necessary: talent, which justifies his aspirations; character, which achieves them”.¹⁴¹ The main obstacle on the artist’s path towards self-realization was, in most critics’ views, the prevailingly corrupt (and corrupting) taste of the public, fascinated not with good music but with charlatanry, cheap virtuoso tricks, and “empty” technique—all typical anti-virtuoso reproaches already discussed above. What we have here is a nice illustration of the tension between the ideal(ist) conception of the artist as a free subject and the reality of the virtuoso under constant pressure from the market and the concert-going public. Thus an unsigned correspondent from Paris deplures in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* “the superficial direction that musical taste has taken for a long time”, which “partly explains why Paris has become the promised land of virtuosity, the disciples of which have contributed the most to the ruination of taste and have been reaping greatly from the thus self-cultivated soil”.¹⁴² Similar concerns are found in other journals, too, such as *The Musical World*, which in 1839 reminded its readers as well as “the dictators and leaders of the public, and private musical taste [...] that the state and application of the fine arts are an index not merely of civilization, but even of morals”, thus making the moralist link explicit.¹⁴³

But the link was most explicitly made in Carl Gollmick’s influential article “Virtuosity Today” (“Das heutige Virtuosenwesen”), for the *Neue Zeitschrift*. As noted above, Gollmick structures his article around a threefold classification of contemporary virtuosi. The first class comprises three sub-classes. The first of these is made of teachers, “entirely harmless as

¹⁴¹ Fétis père, “Revue critique.”, *RGMP*, 25 July 1847, p. 244: “Le jeune artiste qui entre dans la carrière rêve des succès. Pour atteindre son but, deux choses sont nécessaires : le talent, qui justifie ses prétentions ; le caractère, qui les réalise”.

¹⁴² [Unsigned], “Nachrichten. Paris. Jüngere Componisten und Virtuosen.”, *AMZ*, 27 January 1847, p. 58: “Die rein äusserliche Richtung, die der musikalische Geschmack seit längerer Zeit genommen hat, ist der Anerkennung grösserer musikalischer Compositionen sehr ungünstig. [...] Hieraus erklärt sich theilweise, wie so Paris das gelobte Land des Virtuosenenthumes geworden ist, seine Jünger haben zum Verderben des Geschmackes bestens beigetragen und ernten reichlich auf dem selbstangebauten Boden”.

¹⁴³ [Unsigned], “Thalberg.”, *MW*, 5 December 1839, pp. 505–506.

individuals, but dangerous as a group, since precisely **they** have to plant the first concepts of music into young, careless minds, still susceptible to good and bad alike”.¹⁴⁴ The second sub-class comprises the child-prodigies, “whom their parents mercilessly forge on the torture rack of virtuosity”. They excel only for as long as they are still children and thereafter usually join the first sub-class.¹⁴⁵ The third sub-class “should be called *en général* the **unavoidable**, because it is the most numerous one and fills the Earth, as far as music sounds”.¹⁴⁶ It comprises the “homeless” itinerant virtuosi, who “in foreign lands betray the love” of their “noble muse”.¹⁴⁷ They are often talented, but their gift is “ruined by fashionable taste”; they “profit by imitating others, putting other artists’ originality to usury”; their “superficial noblesse” notwithstanding, they are “joyless creatures inside”; “their entire being is directed towards fame and monetary gain”.¹⁴⁸ I have already discussed originality as an important prerequisite for any degree of

¹⁴⁴ Carl Gollmick “Das heutige Virtuosenwesen”, p. 183: “Sie ist sehr harmlos im Einzelnen, aber gefährlich im Ganzen, da gerade **sie die** ersten Begriffe über Musik in den sorglosen, noch für Gutes wie für Schlimmes empfänglichen jungen Verstand zu pflanzen hat”.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: “In jene frühreifen bedaurungswerthen Wunderkinder, von speculirenden Eltern auf die Folterbank der Virtuosität unbarmherzig angeschmiedet. [...] Diese excelliren nur so lange sie klein bleiben, und mit den Kinderschuh, die indessen oft das chinesische Maaß überschreiten, treten sie auch ihren Treibhausruhm aus. [...] Wir finden sie meistens in der ersten Unterabtheilung wieder”.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: “Diese dreigetheilte Classe sollte *en général* die **Unvermeidliche** heißen, denn sie ist die zahlreichste und füllt die Erde, so weit Musik ertönt”.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: “[...] seine edle Muse, deren Liebe er in fremden Landen verrathet”. The trope of the virtuoso as an essentially nomadic figure influenced the critical reception of virtuosity to a considerable degree. It is not hard to see that in a culture imbued with nationalism as nineteenth-century Europe was, such a seemingly homeless, rootless creature, who squanders his life travelling endlessly from one town to the next and from one country to another, always trying to please for the sake of money and willing to downplay his national identity, might find it hard to win the respect of more nationalist-oriented critics. For instance, Dana Gooley has discussed the impact that Liszt’s numerous public personae (e.g. cosmopolitan Parisian virtuoso, Hungarian patriot, Weimar-based guardian of Germanic greatness in music, etc.) had on his reception, causing him to be seen, with considerable suspicion, as a (cultural) “chameleon”; see Gooley 2004a, p. 12. However, the issue of nationalism in the critical reception of virtuosity did not get a subheading of its own in this dissertation, because it does not seem immediately relevant to the main line of interpretation of the critical reception of virtuosity as laid out in the Introduction above. That said, the issue of the impact of their ethnic otherness on the reception of specific virtuosi (e.g. Paganini, Ole Bull, Chopin, among others) has already been discussed above and will be taken up again in Chapter Three.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: “Hoffnungsvolle Talente sehen wir hier nicht selten im Modegeschmack verderben. [...] Nachäffer fremder Originalitäten treiben sie mit ihrer Kunst völligen Wucher [...] Trotz äußerer Vornehmheit, prahlerischer Titelketten, trotz des Salontons &c. sieht’s im Innern doch sehr muthlos aus [...] Ihr ganzes Dasein ist auf Gewinn und lob gerichtet”.

critical success. But that other charge—that itinerant virtuosi abuse (other people’s) original music for the sake of monetary gain—carries more ethical weight: by subordinating music to money, itinerant virtuosi contaminate the one cultural treasure (supposedly) untainted by the vicissitudes of the market. Thus the itinerant virtuoso, ostensibly a model of free, unrestrained, heroic individuality, descends to the abject level of an entrepreneur.

The second class “consists of those noble spirits, who have remained true to their faith”. They are unconcerned with the outer world; they live “their inner god” and their virtuosity is intertwined with their life, as a healthy body is with a healthy soul. Their “unaffected, often rough brilliance is the offspring of that ample self-awareness that always marks our great men”. Even if he wanted to, the true artist could not leave his art, his love and life companion. “He would not give her for crowns, though he often must play for *Kronenthaler*. [...] He cares not for the judgment of the crowd; the handclasp of his equals is his favorite reward”.¹⁴⁹ Though Dana Gooley maintains that Gollmick’s “second and idealized category, the solid, describes unambiguously the stable, small-town German musician”,¹⁵⁰ to the present writer these “noble spirits”, complete with their self-awareness of their “often rough brilliance”, seem more akin to Beethoven, whose cult had by the early 1840s, the time of Gollmick’s writing, metastasized to mythical proportions.¹⁵¹ The true artist’s august alienation from society (the “outer world”, the “crowd”) and the *Kunstreligion* overtones (his “inner god”) were, of course, likewise important

¹⁴⁹ “Das heutige Virtuosenwesen”, p. 183: “Die **zweite Classe** besteht aus solchen edeln Geistern, die ihrem Glauben treue geblieben sind. Unbekümmert um Außenwelt und Kritik lebt der schlichte Künstler seinem innern Gott, und seine Virtuosität ist mit seinem Leben verwachsen, wie die Bewegungen eines gesunden Körpers mit den Bewegungen einer gesunden Seele. Seine ungekünstelte, oft derbe Genialität ist die Geburt jenes sich selbst genügenden Bewußtseins, das stets unsre größten Männer auszeichnete. [...] **Wollte** er auch, er **könnte** von seiner Kunst nicht lassen, die ihm Geliebte und Lebensgefährtin geworden ist. Er würde sie nicht für **Kronen** hingeben, obgleich er oft für **Kronenthaler** musiciren muß. [...] Nach dem Urtheil des großen Haufens nichts fragend, ist ihm der Händedruck des Ebenbürtigen der liebste Sold”.

¹⁵⁰ Gooley 2006, p. 88.

¹⁵¹ The existing scholarship on Beethoven reception is, of course, vast; a classic text is Burnham 1995. For an important qualification of Burnham’s interpretation, though, see Mathew 2006.

aspects of the Beethoven worship. The true artist would never subordinate his art to anything, least of all to money; he is the truly heroic, free individual, the itinerant virtuoso's polar opposite. Almost needless to say, the class made up of these heroes is the smallest one by far.

But the third class, "effusive" and "sacrosanct", which "floats only in the higher and aristocratic circles", is even more clearly opposed to the second. The virtuosi of this class are "children of the spirit of the times, coddled and spoiled by it". Though appointed to guard an abused art, they choose to forfeit their salvation, as well as their artistic innocence, for but "one smile of the snake-goddess Fortune". They are the "fallen angels" of music.¹⁵² It may not be immediately clear what distinguishes the virtuoso of Gollmick's third class from his itinerant colleague of the first. It is their respective social groundings—bourgeois for the former and aristocratic for the latter. Their respective sins are different, but equally damning: the latter betrays his role as a model of a heroic, emancipated bourgeois individuality by colluding with the hated, depraved, degenerate, but in Germany still powerful aristocracy; the former prostitutes music for money, tainting the one Western cultural practice supposedly free from political and economic oppression. Not only is a cherished cultural practice thereby tainted, but so is also the mode of cultural being that it was supposed to represent: free, autonomous, inherently worthy, irreducible to an exchange value. We might say that Gollmick's itinerant virtuosi really only unmasked that mode of being as an escapist bourgeois fantasy—that they merely showed that, as David Gramit has put it, "serious music still needed to be sold",¹⁵³ but

¹⁵² "Das heutige Virtuosenwesen", p. 183: "Diese ganz entgegengesetzt ist die **dritte Classe**, die überschwängliche, unantastbare, die nur in höhern und aristocratischen Sphären schwebt. Virtuosen, die hierzu gehören, sind Kinder des Zeitgeistes, von ihm verhätschelt und verzogen. Leider haben wir es hier mit solchen zu thun, die unter andern Umständen Berufene gewesen wären, die mißbrauchte Kunst zu beschützen, die aber für ein Lächeln der Schlangengöttin Fortune ihr Seelenheil, oder was bei dem Künstler eins und dasselbe ist, ihre Kunstschuld verschrieben haben. [...] Ein Engel der Tonkunst, aber—ein gefallener!"

¹⁵³ Gramit 2004, p. 90.

Gollmick obviously did not feel that way. It was apparently easier to scapegoat the virtuosi, than to face up to the impossibility of such a free life in capitalism, even in its incipient stages.

The virtuoso was seen, then, as so much more than an excellent performer of music: he could be a model of free, enterprising, bourgeois subjectivity, but he could also degenerate into an abject entertainer, an abuser of the sacred art of music for the sake of such base purposes as entertainment and money-making; he could be admired as an almost super-human hero, but also dreaded as an inhuman, unnatural freak; he could be celebrated as an embodiment of nearly super-human achievement, but also dismissed as a dull, lifeless automaton. Perhaps most importantly of all, he could be respected as a faithful performer-interpreter, purveyor and guardian of great music, but equally or even more so, he could be despised for violating the sanctity of *Tonkunst*, subjecting it to unworthy purposes (that is, to any purpose other than itself), such as “pecuniary gain” and “endeavour after fame and honour”, as Hegel put it. Between c. 1815 and c. 1850, virtuosity and music obviously meant so much more than they do today. Music, understood as *Tonkunst*, symbolized free subjectivity, whether utopian or actual, primordial or transcendental; hence the conspicuous privileging of composition over performance, discussed near the beginning of this chapter. Hence also the denigration of virtuosity as essentially a class of performance, even though the figure of the virtuoso could be and often was, as we saw above, regarded as a heroic embodiment of free subjectivity, symbolized by music. But inasmuch as virtuosity came to be perceived as a threat to *Tonkunst*, it had to be criticized, opposed, and ultimately disciplined, by the imposition of interpretation as the ideal of musical performance. For it was *Tonkunst* as symbolic of free subjectivity that had to be upheld, against virtuosity; in other words, virtuosity could only be tolerated as its faithful

servant, that is, interpreter. In addition, virtuosity needed to remain recognizable as essentially human—hence the anxiety over virtuoso “automata” and the imposition of “expression” and “expressivity”, so as to preserve that irreducibly human core of music in performance. It all then comes back, one way or another, to the philosophic issues of human subjectivity and of music as symbolic of it, discussed in Chapter One. Many of these issues, along with some fresh ones, will concern us regarding the criticism of virtuosity in composition; but that is a matter for the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

VIRTUOSITY IN COMPOSITION

For roughly a century and a half now, our modern virtuoso-interpreters have been performing—*interpreting*—music composed by other people, members of the Western musical canon: Domenico Scarlatti, J. S. Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, Brahms, Schönberg, among others, but hardly ever their own. In fact, very few modern virtuosi have excelled in composition as well. But as was noted in the Introduction, things were very different in the first half of the nineteenth century: at that time, virtuosi performed their own music equally if not more often than that of other composers. In fact, as we saw in the preceding chapter, most of them aspired to be recognized as composers, not as “mere” virtuosi, reflecting the higher cultural standing of composition than that of performance. The fact that many of them, toward 1850 and especially after, increasingly decided to perform music by other composers instead of their own, has very much to do with the rise of the Western musical canon at this time, the impact of which on the critical reception of virtuosity will be discussed below. But since most of the figures discussed in Chapter Two did double as composers, a dissertation on the critical reception of instrumental virtuosity between *c.* 1815 and *c.* 1850 must also consider the reception of virtuosity in composition, apart from performance. That is our topic in the present chapter.

We shall look mostly at the same people, but focusing on their reception as composers, not as performers. We will be revisiting some of the same issues raised in Chapter Two, such as the notions of expression/expressivity, originality/idiosyncrasy, and moralist injunctions against virtuosity in its critical reception, as they pertain to composition. However, the present chapter

will also introduce some additional problems exclusive to the criticism of virtuosity in composition, such as those pertaining to nineteenth-century aesthetics of composition, valorization and devaluation of certain music genres, and formal analysis. For clarity's sake, we will proceed, as in the previous chapter, by way of several subheadings, as listed in the Table of Contents above.

“Mere frivolous eartickling amusement” and German “metaphysical studies”: An Overview of General Music Aesthetics in Journalist Criticism of Instrumental Virtuosity, c. 1815–c. 1850

Whether radical, like Schumann's *Neue Zeitschrift*, or conservative, like Fink's *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, or following an opportunistic *juste milieu* line of its own, like Schlesinger's *Revue et Gazette*, the leading music periodicals of the day reflect most of the general aesthetic views of music discussed in Chapter One, especially those of Schelling and the early Romantics, concerning music as an arcane and disembodied art and its newly secured privileged place in the hierarchy of the arts, which stemmed from its alleged special expressive powers. Thus Schumann, writing as “Eusebius” in an early issue of the *Neue Zeitschrift*, notes that even the best contemporary musicians seldom remain in the public's focus for longer than a decade, due to “the lightning speed of the development of music toward a higher poetic freedom, which no other art has equaled”.¹ A later contributor to the London *Musical World* signed “H. G.”—the author of the *Music World* article likening virtuoso concerts to freak shows, discussed

¹ Eusebius [Robert Schumann], “Die Davidsbündler. I. Hummel's Pianofortestudien. 1.”, *NZM*, 5 June 1834, p. 74: “Bei der Blitzesschnelle der Entwicklung der Musik zur höhern poetischen Freiheit, wie keine andere Kunst ein Beispiel aufstellen kann, muß es wohl vorkommen, daß selbst das Bessere selten länger als vielleicht ein Jahrzehend im Munde der Mitwelt lebt”.

in Chapter Two—seems to agree with Schumann and credits his nation with raising music “from the mere frivolous, eartickling amusement which other nations seem to have considered it, to the dignity of a powerful element of civilization”, thanks—notably—to their “metaphysical studies”, which “have enabled them to discover that all human thoughts and affections can be expressed and communicated through the medium of tones as well as words”.²

Writing along similar lines, an anonymous reviewer of Paganini asserts in the *Neue Zeitschrift* that music “is a mysterious poetry, poetry of the mysteries in organic nature”.³ Reviewing some new pieces by Henri Herz five years earlier, an anonymous contributor for the *Revue et Gazette* opines that “like all the arts, music must be *poetry* clothed in beautiful and graceful forms, it must represent inner life, it must embellish the most beautiful that nature has to offer”. But, the critic warns, “in music, the content must ennoble the form and, consequently, up to a certain point music must be not just animated, but even dominated by a limitless freedom”. The notion of being “dominated by a limitless freedom” may strike one as oxymoronic. But this somewhat paradoxical concept seems to resonate with some of Friedrich Schlegel’s pronouncements on the problem of stylistic and structural limitations in art, such as his Athäneums-Fragment No. 297: “A work is cultivated when it is everywhere sharply delimited, but within those limits limitless and inexhaustible; when it is completely faithful to itself, entirely homogeneous, and nonetheless exalted above itself”.⁴ Back to Herz’s anonymous reviewer: the composer, it seems, must not impose artificial formal constrictions on his music, so as to avoid stifling the free expression of what may only be expressed in music. Perhaps true to the longstanding French dislike for complex contrapuntal writing, the reviewer specifically

² H. G., “Letters from Vienna”, *MW*, 21 March 1846, pp. 132–33.

³ [Unsigned], “Paganini. (Schluß.)”, *NZM*, 12 August 1840, p. 52: “Musik ist geheimnißvolle Poesie, Poesie der Mysterien in der organischen Natur”.

⁴ Schlegel 1991, p. 59. My thanks to Prof. James Webster for referring me to this Schlegel aphorism.

cautions against the “mania of contrapuntal imitation”, which sometimes makes “the most poetic text degenerate into inanities”.⁵ Writing for the same journal two years later, the French critic and dramatist Ernest Legouvé similarly asserts that “music is always something of a hieroglyphic language, even for those who know it best”.⁶

The unsigned contributor of an article on modern pianism in an 1842 issue of the *Neue Zeitschrift* also comments on the innate arcane qualities of music: “Whatever [music] shows us, by presenting itself, still lies in the twilight of subjective consciousness and resolves itself to a concrete phenomenon”. But like so many other commentators before and after him, the author goes on to turn the severest limitation of music into its greatest advantage:

But it manifests its shortcoming (from this viewpoint) in preferable light, since it is exactly there that it finds its endless charm. Before all the other arts, it is given to music to form its own shapes into reality; it develops its kingdom of eternally transforming and changing, floating here and there, ebbing and flowing magic children of fantasy, those mysterious beings, which, visible to no one and audible only to initiated ears, weave and produce, animate and bestir all. That is its world, those are its dramaturgic bounds.⁷

Similar views are almost as easy to find in the *Neue Zeitschrift*'s conservative archival, the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. The journal's main editor of fourteen years, Gottfried Wilhelm

⁵ [Unsigned], “De la critique musicale.”, *RGMP*, 8 November 1835, p. 364: “Ainsi que tous les arts, la musique doit être *poésie*, revêtue de belles et de gracieuses formes, elle doit représenter la vie intime, elle doit embellir encore ce que la nature offre de plus beau ; chez elle, le fond doit ennoblir la forme et, par conséquent, il faut jusqu'à un certain point qu'elle soit non-seulement animée, mais encore dominée par une liberté sans bornes. Si toutefois la manie des imitations de contrepoint faisait souvent dégénérer en niaiseries le texte le plus poétique, [...]”.

⁶ E. Legouvé, “Les concerts de MM. Liszt, Batta et Urhan”, *RGMP*, 5 March 1837, p. 81: “la musique est une langue toujours un peu hiéroglyphique, même pour ceux qui la savent le mieux”.

⁷ [Unsigned], “Das moderne Pianoforte. (Fortsetzung.)”, *NZM*, 23 December 1842, p. 207: “Was sie uns, sich allein überlassen, vorführt, liegt noch im Dämmerungsscheine des subjectiven Bewußtseins, vermag sich nicht loszulösen zur gegenständlichen Erscheinung. Aber sie thut ihre Schwäche von dieser Seite um so lieber kund, als sie in derselben gerade ihre unendlichen Reize erkennt. Ihr ist es vor allen anderen Künsten gegeben, die nach Realität nur irgendein Gestalten zu formen; ihr erschließt sich das Reich der sich wandelnden und wechselnden, auf- und niederschwebenden, kommenden und schwindenden Zauberkinder der Phantasie, jener geheimnißvollen Naturwesen, welche ungesehen und nur dem geweihten Ohre vernehmbar, weben und schaffen, Alles beleben und bewegen. Das ist ihre Welt, das ihr dramatischer Boden”.

Fink, includes in this 1840 review of several pieces by Chopin⁸ the following celebration of the mysterious character of music:

Where the word stops, there begins the domain of music. With it is the mysterious in league; the inexplicable and the ambiguous are its comrades; it is the language of feelings, which dreads any explications, which prefers twilight to the clear day.⁹

Fink's journal also regularly transmitted similarly romantic views of other authors, often the leading thinkers of the day, such as, for instance, Jean Paul's rendering of the mythological origin of music *in lieu* of the editorial introduction to the journal's volume for 1821, whereby "Jupiter" gave music to humans at the pleading of the "Genius" for a means to express feelings that would be superior even to tears.¹⁰ In another such introduction two years earlier, the journal presented Wackenroder's typically romantic, escapist view of music as an ephemeral refuge from the vicissitudes of earthly life and society, whereby the mind may win a fleeting glimpse of the next life, cleansed of all sin and conflict.¹¹ The 1822 issue offers a similar introduction, this time from Novalis, for whom music "speaks a universal language, through which the Spirit grows infinitely animated".¹²

But the journal was always ready to reassert its conservative leanings as well. Thus Solger's introduction of 1818 argues for "simple", "harmonious" music, "freely floating in the ether of ideas", "released from its materials and the countless vicissitudes of chance"; but whoever "plunges themselves" into "mere sentiment", Solger warns, "can neither worthily understand music, nor create it"; such people, he concludes, "abuse music by treating it as a

⁸ Sonata in B-flat minor ("Funeral March"), Op. 35; Second Impromptu in F-sharp major, Op. 36; and two Nocturnes, in G major and G minor, Op. 38.

⁹ G. W. Fink, "Friedrich Chopin [...]", *AMZ*, 8 July 1840, pp. 569–73: "Wo das Wort aufhört, da bricht das Bereich der Töne an. Mit ihr ist das Geheimniss im Bunde; das Unerklärliche und das Vieldeutige sind ihre Genossen; sie ist die Sprache des Gefühls, das die Erklärung scheut, die Dämmerung mehr liebt als den hellen Tag".

¹⁰ Jean Paul, "Zur Einleitung.", *AMZ*, 3 January 1821, pp. 10–11.

¹¹ Wackenroder, "Zur Einleitung.", *AMZ*, 6 January 1819, pp. 1–2.

¹² Novalis, "Zur Einleitung.", *AMZ*, 2 January 1822, pp. 1–2: "Die Musik redet eine allgemeine Sprache, durch welche der Geist frey, unbestimmt angeregt wird".

servant of sensuality”.¹³ The introduction to the journal’s volume for 1820, this time by Goethe, similarly censures those who seek only pleasure in art, as if it were food, thus mistaking mere effect for essence and condemning themselves to only ever fleeting satisfaction.¹⁴ In the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, as much as in other major music periodicals, these general views on the aesthetics of music surface time and again in reviews of individual composers and their works. Thus the anonymous reviewer of Ludwig Spohr’s two quartets, Opp. 30 and 33, commends the clear-cut contrapuntal structure of these two pieces, each “huddling against its principle theme, as in a patriarchal circle”, so different from the new (virtuosic) music, with its “incoherent heaps of random thoughts in desperate pursuit of originality, cascades of notes”, its excessive modulations, tiresome to the ear and the mind, its dazzling, but hackneyed technical skill.¹⁵ In a review of some of Hummel’s piano and chamber music, Fink similarly praises the composer for privileging the formal unity of his music to the sensual gratification it might offer, thus preventing sensuality from jeopardizing a coherent formal structure.¹⁶

Such instances are explored in much greater detail in the pages that follow. At this point, we may provisionally conclude by pointing out the music-aesthetic tropes that these critics, radical and conservative alike, apparently shared with the philosophers discussed in Chapter One: the ascendancy of music to, and its exclusivity at, the top of the aesthetic hierarchy of the

¹³ Solger, “Zur Einleitung.”, *AMZ*, 7 January 1818, pp. 1–2: “Die vollkommenste Musik wird also die seyn, worin das grösste Gewimmel und Gewirre von einzelnen Tönen in das einfachste und reinste Maas aufgeht, dass die Verwirrung vollkommen harmonisch wird, wie Shakespeare sagt. So wird das Besondere und Winzelne zu reiner Allgemeinheit erhoben, und schwebt frey in dem klaren Aether des Begriffs, abgelös’t von dem Stoffe und den unzähligen Bedingungen der Zufälligkeit; und dennoch wird es dadurch nichts Fremdes oder Neues, sondern es verklärt als solcher, und bleibt doch, was er war, und bleibt uns so nahe und so verwandt, wie er war. Die Seele nun, welche diese bunte und doch zugleich einfach klare Welt in sich aufnimmt, wir selbst klar und harmonisch mit sich selbst—Wer aber sich selbst hinabstürzt nur in das Mannigfaltige und die blossе Empfindung, der kann Musik weder würdig geniessen, noch hervorbringen; der missbraucht sie zur Dienerin der Sinnlichkeit”.

¹⁴ Goethe, “Zur Einleitung.”, *AMZ*, 5 January 1820, p. 1.

¹⁵ [Unsigned], “Recension.”, *AMZ*, 5 April 1820, pp. 235–37.

¹⁶ G. W. Fink, “Recensionen.”, *AMZ*, 4 January 1832, pp. 9–12.

arts (“the lightning speed of the development of music toward a higher poetic freedom, which no other art has equaled”, from “mere frivolous, eartickling amusement” to “a powerful element of civilization”), owing to its philosophic reconceptualization (in unspecified German “metaphysical studies”) into an abstract and arcane art (“hieroglyphic language”, “mysterious poetry”), which can and must freely express (“dominated by a limitless freedom”) what otherwise could not be expressed, complete with contributions from Goethe, Jean Paul, Wackenroder, and Novalis, and injunctions against “empty sensuality” and technique.

That critics (some critics, at least) did share those and other thinkers’ conviction that the abstract and autonomous art of music (*Tonkunst*) was somehow related to whatever it meant to be human, emerges from assertions such as this one, made by the *Neue Zeitschrift*’s correspondent from Paris: for Liszt and Chopin, the correspondent writes, music is “an art that lets men intimate their higher principle”.¹⁷ Compare that to Kant’s theorization of the aesthetic judgment as a sensuous manifestation of the subject’s transcendental freedom, or Hegel’s assertion that the subject “finds repeated in [the arts] his own characteristics”; or, on the less rational side of things, Schelling’s view of art and especially music as “an emanation of the Absolute”, or even Schopenhauer’s privileging of music as the only locus of absolute truth (music as the only “direct copy of the Will itself”), all discussed (and referenced) in Chapter One. Unfortunately, Schumann did not identify his Paris correspondent, so we cannot know anything about him for sure, whether he was French or a member of the large German expatriot community in Paris, how much of German Idealist philosophy he may have known, or whether he perhaps even attended Hegel’s hugely popular lectures on aesthetics, delivered at the

¹⁷ [Unsigned], “Correspondenz. Paris am März.”, *NZM*, 3 April 1834, p. 4: “Die Musik ist ihnen die Kunst, welche den Menschen sein höheres Princip ahnen läßt”.

University of Berlin in the 1820s.¹⁸ Nevertheless, his assertion that music “lets men intimate their higher principle” and similar statements made by other critics¹⁹ makes it tempting to surmise that they may have had at least some familiarity with Idealist philosophy (including aesthetics), especially since printed editions of the major texts were available in German and in French translations alike.²⁰

It is now time to unpack these music-aesthetic tropes and assess their impact on the critical reception of virtuosity in composition, beginning with a notion that was already discussed in the preceding chapter, as it pertained to virtuosity in performance: originality.

The “genuine Sarmatian” and his “defiant originality”: The Demands and Dangers of Originality, Part II

In composition as much as in performance, originality was a *sine qua non* for any favorable review, although, as we will see later on, it could hardly guarantee one. As we saw in the preceding chapter, virtuosi were expected to embody extreme individuality and originality; so too were their efforts in composition. Indeed, originality was often even synonymous with approbation. Thus Schumann, who was, of course, always benevolent to the young and radical

¹⁸ At this early stage of the *Neue Zeitschrift*, Schumann’s main correspondent from Paris was the young Hungarian composer-pianist Stephen (István) Heller. However, Heller was more typically signed as “Pariser Davudsbündler” or “Pariser Dblr.” and, besides, was not the only contributor to the *Neue Zeitschrift* based in Paris (Vosteen 2001).

¹⁹ Cf. [Unsigned], “Manchester.”, *MW*, 21 December 1850, p. 822: “[Beethoven’s music] makes you *think* and search for those inner depths of the mind, that the hearer is scarce conscious he possesses, until he feels them stirred by his wonderful power”.

²⁰ The availability of German Idealist philosophy in France, in translations and in the work of Victor Cousin, was already discussed in the Introduction above, in the context of the philosophical grounding of François-Joseph Fétis’s work in criticism. Also, Catteau 2005 lists the French translations of Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer that available in mid-nineteenth-century France.

and in whose criticism Chopin always had a special place, praises in an early review the composer's G-minor nocturne, Op. 15, reading it as "a most formidable declaration of war to an entire history"—an unequivocal sign of approbation in Schumann's criticism.²¹ However, originality was no less important to conservative critics. Fink devotes no fewer than eight pages of his journal to a lengthy review of Chopin's Twelve Grand Etudes, Op. 10, full of approbation. He begins by summarizing the general state of the genre, which has, in his assessment, degenerated into a senseless proliferation of cold mechanism unworthy of the art of music; in due course, we will encounter many similar opinions regarding that and other genres of virtuosic music. But Chopin's etudes stand out from this bleak landscape: "By Jupiter! What Chopin offers here is novel. We should affirm that we have no shortage of singular studies by any master; we are familiar enough with the entire production line in this genre: but we repeat, these studies are new, unique in their genre".²² Fink goes on to note that the etudes are extremely difficult and therefore fit for virtuosi only. He quickly qualifies his assessment, however, as so many of his colleagues typically did under similar circumstances, by asserting that the etudes' technical difficulties are not there for their own sake, that they are beautiful, "fulfill aesthetic requirements" in their "original invention, solid construction, and skillful development"; as such, they are "written in the musical spirit, a commendation that is not negligible and should not be seen as such".²³ In other words, Fink here seeks to redeem the virtuosity of Chopin's music by

²¹ 2. [Robert Schumann], "Anzeiger. (31) Kürzeres und Rhapsodisches für Pianoforte. [...] F r. C h o p i n, 3 Notturmi. Oe. 15", *NZM*, 12 May 1835, p. 156: "ich in ihr die furchtbarste Kriegserklärung gegen eine ganze Vergangenheit lese".

²² G. W. Fink, "Recension. Douze grandes Études pour le Pianoforte composées par Fréd. Chopin. Oeuv. 10.", *AMZ*, 5 February 1834, pp. 81–89: "Beym Jupiter! was hier von Herrn Chopin in diesen beyden Häften gegeben wird, ist neu. Wir glauben versichern zu dürfen, dass uns keines Meisters gut ausgefallene Etuden fehlen; wir sind mit der ganzen Folge dieser Erzeugnisse hinlänglich bekannt: dennoch wiederholen wir, die hier zu besprechenden sind neu, einzig in ihrer Art".

²³ *Ibid.*, "Jeder einigermaassen erfahrene Musikfreund wird sich sogleich selbst sagen: Doch wohl zuvörderst in neuen, schwierigeren Passagen und Figuren, in neuen Applicaturen, in Dehnungen und Zusammenziehungen der

invoking its originality, in this instance coupled with “solid construction” (more on which below).

Originality was often praised in highly moralistic terms, too, as a courageous, even heroic endeavor against the corrupt prevailing contemporary taste. Thus the unsigned reviewer of Cramer’s *La Retour à Londres*, a “grande sonate pour le pianoforte” for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, despite his dislike for programmatic titles discussed below, praises Cramer’s work because it shows that “fashion has no sway, or at least no significant sway, over him”.²⁴ Schumann’s *Neue Zeitschrift*, its comparatively radical stance notwithstanding, had no less scorn for the prevailing modern tastes. Thus in a review of Chopin’s G-minor piano trio, Op. 8, also another instance of the journal’s favorable predisposition towards Chopin and chamber music in general, Schumann marvels at how “spotless and aristocratic Chopin has emerged from the battle with the insidious shavelings and philistines, how he still strives, ever more effortlessly and artistically! [...] Chopin has already traversed various stages, always upright, always victorious”.²⁵ Although Schumann unfortunately does not tell us who those “insidious shavelings and philistines” are, perhaps he had Ludwig Rellstab in mind (among any others), who had

Hände und der Finger, überhaupt in neuen Spielfertigkeiten? Man hat recht; das Alles ist hier auf eine Weise anzutreffen, wie anderwärts nimmer. Wenn jedoch weiter nichts in diesen Etuden zu spüren wäre, als diese Dinge, die stets nur Aeusserlichkeiten bleiben und höchstens als Mittel zum Zweck angesehen werden können, so stände es für die Freunde dieses neuen Werks sehr übel. Das Alles kann sich in guten Rechenexempeln sehr wohl zeigen, die aller Schönheit oder jeder ästhetischen Anforderung baar sind. Mit Vergnügen haben wir diesen Studien innern Charakter zuzugestehen; jeder einzelnen originelle Erfindung, feste Haltung und sehr gewandte, eigenthümliche Durchführung. Sie sind also mit musikalischem Geiste geschrieben, ein Lob, das nicht gering ist, auch nicht seyn soll”.

²⁴ [Unsigned], “Recensionen. *La Retour à Londres. Grande Sonate pour le Pianoforte, comp. par J. B. Cramer. Oeuvr. 62.*”, *AMZ*, 24 June 1818, p. 451: “Ueber sie hat die Mode keine Gewalt, wenigstens keine bedeutende—wie sie denn auch eigentlich weder in der Mode, noch ausser derselben sind”.

²⁵ R. Sch. [Robert Schumann], “Trio’s. (Schluß.)”, *NZM*, 27 December 1836, pp. 207–208: “Und wie hat Chopin die Prophezeiung wahr gemacht, wie ist er unbefleckt und hochadelig aus dem Kampf mit heimtückischen Pfaffen und Ignoranten vorgegangen, wie strebt er noch immer, und nur einfacher und künstlerischer! [...] So hat Chopin schon verschiedene Stadien zurückgelegt, immer vollständig, immer siegreich”.

published a rather negative review of Chopin's nocturnes in an 1833 issue of his own music journal, the Berlin *Iris im Gebiete der Tonkunst*.²⁶

However, the reception of Chopin is particularly interesting in the present context, because it shows that originality could quite often be a liability as much as an asset. Probably more than for any other composer-virtuoso, throughout Chopin's career and beyond, in positive and negative reviews alike, the perceived idiosyncrasy of Chopin's compositional style was a mainstay in the reception of his music. Thus in a review written for the conservative *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, C. B. von Miltitz remarks on Chopin's "original path, which he takes in all his works" but cautions that one must "hear his singularity often enough" to come to a full appreciation of his music.²⁷ Similarly cautious is "G. C." of *La France musicale*, who notes that Chopin's

compositions lose much when performed by anyone other than him. Their harmony is hard, clashing, unnatural; their keys are bizarre, their modulations extremely frequent. That music is certainly original: rendered with perfection, it excites curiosity and often commands applause; but that genre suits only very few people and must not be overused, because it is full of perils and disadvantages.²⁸

Even Schumann's comparatively radical *Neue Zeitschrift*, usually sharing its editor's enthusiasm for Chopin, focuses, in an unsigned 1842 overview of contemporary nocturnes for the piano, on the composer's "extraordinary dark, mysterious, sometimes uncanny fantasy"; "He stuns and intoxicates", the reviewer continues;

²⁶ For a critical discussion of Rellstab's review of Chopin, see Kallberg 2003.

²⁷ C. B. von Miltitz, "Nachrichten. Dresden, d. 9. Febr.," *AMZ*, 29 April 1835, p. 263: "Chopin's originelle Bahn, die er in allen seinen Werken geht, ist bekannt. [...] Wir geben zu, dass man seine Eigenthümlichkeit oft hören müsse, dass er bisweilen sonderbar und etwas breit werde, allein diese diese Concessionen können auf das Urtheil über den Werth seiner Compositionen keinen Einfluss haben".

²⁸ G. C., "Manuel du pianiste-amateur. XVIII. Auteurs difficiles en dehors de l'école de Thalberg.," *FM*, 5 March 1848, pp. 68–70: "ses compositions perdent beaucoup à être exécutées par un autre que par lui. L'harmonie en est dure, heurtée, peu naturelle; les tons bizarres, les modulations d'une extrême fréquence. Cette musique-là a certainement de l'originalité: rendue avec perfection, elle excite la curiosité et commande souvent les applaudissements; mais ce genre ne convient qu'à bien peu de personnes, et l'on ne doit pas en abuser, car il est plein de périls et d'inconvénients".

he robs us of our wits with his mystic raging and rolling; he nearly buries us under the mighty, dark billows of his tones; he astonishes and dazzles us with his strange harmonic combinations, which cast an unsure, magic light on his melodies with his delicate melismas.

“Unfortunately”, the reviewer concludes, “the composer sometimes oversteps the bounds of the beautiful and the intelligible, in baroque, fantastic ways, reminiscent of the poetic caricatures of Victor Hugo”.²⁹ Apparently, in virtuosic composition as well as in performance, too much individuality and originality could be a bad thing.

Chopin’s perceived idiosyncrasy was often couched in otherworldly metaphors borrowed from contemporary literature, superbly discussed by Jeffery Kallberg.³⁰ For instance, Fink of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in an 1836 review of the two nocturnes Op. 27 details the most idiosyncratic aspects of Chopin’s style in composition and performance and remarks on the nocturnes’ “fabulous charm”, likening it to “the Elf King’s frolicking with his daughters”. Importantly, in the preceding sentence Fink opines that the nocturnes “once again will be most attractive to all the feminine-tempered hearts”.³¹ The feminizing import of these fairy tropes in Chopin reception as discussed by Kallberg will be taken up again, although in a slightly different context, in the following chapter. What should be emphasized here, however, is that these tropes often went hand in hand with comments on Chopin’s notoriously frail physique as well as a

²⁹ [Unsigned], “Das moderne Pianoforte. (Fortsetzung.)”, *NZM*, 23 December 1842, p. 210: “in unserer Zeit hat Chopin in seinen Nachtstücken Proben einer merkwürdig dunkeln, mysteriösen, zuweilen unheimlichen Phantasie gegeben. Er betäubt und berauscht; er benimmt uns die Sinne mit seinem geheimnißvollen Tosen und Brausen; er begräbt uns gleichsam unter den mächtigen, dunkeln Wogen seiner Klänge; er überrascht und blendet durch sonderbare, harmonische Combinationen, die auf den Gesang mit seinen zierlichen Melismen ein ungewisses, magisches Licht werfen. Schade nur, daß der Componist bisweilen über die Grenzen des Schönen und Faßlichen hinausgeht, in baroken, gesuchten Weisen an die poetischen Zerrbilder Victor Hugo’s erinnernd”.

³⁰ Kallberg 1998, pp. 62–86.

³¹ G. W. Fink, “Werke für das Pianoforte. Deux Nocturnes pour le Pianof.—par Fréd. Chopin. Oeuv. 27.”, *AMZ*, 20 July 1836, p. 473: “Darum werden diese neuen Nocturnen, wie die ältern, so verschieden sie auch von jenen sind, immer wieder vor allen weiblich gestimmten Herzen höchst anziehend sein. Es ist ein märchenhafter Reiz darin, etwa wie wenn der Elfenkönig mit seinen Töchtern lockt”.

wholesale pathologization of the man, somewhat comparable to that of Paganini, which was discussed in Chapter Two. Thus the unsigned author of the *Revue et Gazette* obituary asserts that

perhaps no artist had the physique of his own talent, like he did. As much as he was frail in his body, his style was delicate: a bit more, and he would have evaporated into the impalpable and the imperceptible. [...] Chopin was nicknamed the Ariel of the piano. Had Queen Mab desired to have a pianist, she would have certainly chosen Chopin.³²

Here, those fairy tropes are used to represent the otherworldliness both of Chopin's physique and his talent. But as the author concludes, it seems that this was a less than healthy otherworldliness:

the slightest touch was an injury, the slightest noise a burst of thunder, the slightest scent of a rose a poison. Seeing him so meager, so thin and pale, for a long time we believed he was close to dying and yet, we were used to the idea that he might live on forever like that. Still, he was to leave us too soon, since he was only thirty-nine when his final hour rang.³³

Similarly, Heinrich Heine's unsigned correspondent writes in the *Neue Zeitschrift* of Chopin's feeble health, which began deteriorating as soon as his "spiritual qualities started to develop" and in the same measure; "This feebleness, this feeble nervous condition", the correspondent continues, "made an impact on the works of the budding artist and with the years grew more and more pronounced". Chopin is original "and his originality is natural, not at all contrived, labored, forced", the author allows; but, either due to the approval of the "huge crowds, who will admire anything unusual, distorted as ingenious", or because the "creative power in the frail man did not suffice", Chopin has failed, in the author's opinion, to develop his initial originality.³⁴ Even

³² [Unsigned], "Nécrologie. Frédéric Chopin.", *RGMP*, 21 October 1849, p. 334: "Jamais peut-être aucun artiste n'eut plus que lui le physique de son talent, Autant il était frêle de corps, autant il était délicat de style : un peu plus, il s'évaporerait en impalpable et imperceptible. [...] On surnommait Chopin l'Ariel du piano. Si la reine Mab eût voulu se donner un pianiste, c'est à coup sûr Chopin qu'elle choisi".

³³ *Ibid.*: "le moindre contact serait une blessure, le moindre bruit un éclat de tonnerre, le moindre senteur de rose un poison. En le voyait si chétif, si maigre et si pâle, on l'avait longtemps cru près de mourir, et puis, on s'était habitué à l'idée qu'il pouvait vivre toujours ainsi. Pourtant il devait nous quitter avant l'âge, puisqu'il n'avait que trente-neuf ans lorsque sa dernière heure a sonné".

³⁴ [Unsigned], "Vertraute Briefe. [An der Dichter **Heinrich Heine** in Paris.]", *NZM*, 3 July 1838, pp. 1–2: "In demselben Maße aber als seine geistigen Eigenschaften sich zu entwickeln begannen, nahm seine Gesundheit ab, und ließ das schlimmste für sein Leben besorgen. ... Diese Schwächlichkeit nun, dieser nervenschwache Zustand hat

Schumann, his liking for Chopin notwithstanding, will admit in a slightly later review of his preludes that “he is and remains the boldest and proudest poetic spirit of the time. But [his piano music] also contains much that is morbid, febrile, forbidding”.³⁵ What all these responses to Chopin’s music share is their respective authors’ rationalization of its perceived idiosyncrasies by means of pathologizing the composer. In Chapter Two, we saw a similar tendency in the reception of Paganini’s virtuosity in performance; now we see it in the reception of virtuosity in composition. Like Paganini before him, Chopin (or, rather, his music) was simply perceived as too *other*, too idiosyncratic, too abnormal. It then seemed only natural to explain its perceived abnormality by pathologizing the composer himself, whose frail physique and untimely death of consumption conveniently appeared to corroborate the interpretation.

Much of Chopin’s perceived morbidity was “deduced” from his “exotic” Eastern-European (Slavic, Polish) ethnic and geographic origins.³⁶ His is the “defiant originality of a genuine Sarmatian”,³⁷ which is apparently how Schumann heard the abrupt switch from the

auch auf die Schöpfungen des angehenden Künstlers Einfluß gehabt, und sich mit den Jahren sogar immer mehr in ihnen ausgesprochen. [...] Chopin ist originell und seine Originalität ist eine natürliche, keine gemachte, mühsame, erzwungene. [...] Ob der Beifall der großen Menge, die alles Außerordentliche, Verzerrete, als geistreich bewundert, die Schuld trägt, daß der Meister die echte Präge (den Styl) der oft an seinen Werken zu erkennen war, nicht weiter ausgebildet, sondern sich ganz dem Kunstkniff (der Manier) ergeben, die schon versteckt in seinen früheren Arbeiten lag, oder ob die Schöpferkraft in dem schwächlichen Manne nicht ausreichte, lasse ich hingestellt sein”.

³⁵ R. S., “Phantasieen, Capricen etc. für Pianoforte.”, *NZM*, 19 November 1839, p. 163: “Er ist und bleibt der kühnste und stolzeste Dichtergeist der Zeit. Auch Krankes, Fieberhaftes, Abstoßendes enthält das Heft”.

³⁶ Carew 1992, p. 228: “morbidity has been laid at the door of Chopin’s Polish ancestry, reinforced in the association of these qualities with the tribulations of the country during the nineteenth century”. Cf. Chechlińska 1992, p. 209: “The nineteenth century viewed Chopin primarily as a lyricist. This despite the widely held view (particularly in German criticism) of him as a ‘morbidly unhealthy’ composer prey to life-long suffering and homesickness”.

³⁷ According to Lawrence Kramer, the Sarmatians were “a legendary race of mounted hunter-warriors who supposedly ruled primeval Poland. In the nineteenth century, with Poland politically dismembered, the image of the Sarmatian band of brothers, natural aristocrats on horseback ‘equal before each other and invincible to foreigners’ [...], was an important source of nationalist nostalgia and revolutionary fantasy”, Kramer 2003a, p. 127. In fact, the Sarmatians were not entirely legendary: they did exist, most notably between the fifth century BC and fourth century AD, when they flourished in the territory that Greco-Roman chroniclers called Sarmatia, bordered by the Vistula,

Example 1: Chopin, Piano Sonata in B-flat minor, Op. 35, I, mm. 77–85

“Belliniesque” (in his view) secondary thematic area in the opening movement of Chopin’s “Funeral March” Sonata in B-flat minor, Op. 35, to the busy chordal closing group of the exposition, although there is nothing noticeably “Sarmatian” about it (see Example 1 above).³⁸ In Lawrence Kramer’s compelling reading of Schumann, the composer-critic here “constructs a metaphor of creative originality as a combination of feral energy and primitive nobility, a force from beyond the social and geopolitical boundaries of modern western Europe”.³⁹ The “genuine Sarmatian”, with his “defiant originality”, is thus the “real” Chopin, other, Eastern-European,

the mouth of the Danube, the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, and the Volga. They were an Iranian people and gave rise to the modern Ossetians. But this bit of history scarcely got into the way of the European exoticization of this non-European ethnic group, to which Kramer refers.

³⁸ 12. [Robert Schumann], “Neue Sonaten für das Pianoforte.”, *NZM*, 1 February 1841, p. 40: “sobald der Gesang geendet, blitzt wieder der ganze Sarmate in seiner trotzigen Originalität aus den Klängen heraus”.

³⁹ Kramer 2003a, p. 127.

Slavic, Polish, exotic but also somewhat primitive; the “Belliniesque” second theme, however beautiful and civilized, can therefore only be a put-on, a mask to hide, for a brief moment, the “genuine Sarmatian’s” “defiant originality”.

Chopin’s Polish origin was also used to excuse the perceived flaws in his writing. Liszt, for instance, in a review of an 1841 Chopin recital in Paris put it thus:

This something of a wild and abrupt [quality] that held over from his homeland, has found its expression in the brazenness of dissonance, in the strange harmonies, while the delicacy and grace that prevail in his personality revealed themselves in thousands of nuances, in thousands of ornaments of an inimitable imagination.⁴⁰

But not all were as positively predisposed to Chopin’s originality as were Schumann and Liszt. Chopin perhaps had his most vociferous detractors in the critics writing for the London *Musical World*. In 1841 this journal published a lengthy diatribe against the composer, bordering on the distasteful even by the appalling standards of nineteenth-century press. The unsigned author thus calls Chopin “a dealer in the most absurd and hyperbolic extravagances”, “very crude and limited a writer”, “an enthusiastic schoolboy [...] who *will* be original whether he *can* or not”, “an artistical nonentity”. Chopin is unable to persist in structures longer than sixteen bars—a trope that will keep haunting his British reception for the next hundred years, enriched with far-reaching misogynist interpretations (more on this in the following chapter). Thus Chopin’s music exhibits

a clumsiness about his harmonies in the midst of their affected strangeness, a sickliness about his melodies despite their evidently *forced* unlikeness to familiar phrases, an utter ignorance of design everywhere apparent in his lengthened works, a striving and straining after an originality which, when obtained, only appears knotty, crude, and ill-digested [...] a motley surface of ranting hyperbole and excruciating cacophony. When he is not

⁴⁰ F. Liszt, “Concert de M. Chopin.”, *RGMP*, 2 May 1841, p. 246: “Ce quelque chose de sauvage et d’abrupte qui tenait à sa patrie, a trouvé son expression dans des hardiesses de dissonance, dans des harmonies étranges, tandis que la délicatesse et la grâce qui tenaient à sa personne se révélaient en mille contours, en mille ornements d’une inimitable fantaisie”.

thus singular, he is no better than Strauss or any other waltz compounder; and being thus singular, he is by many degrees more intolerable, more tiresome, and ridiculous.⁴¹

This review provoked nothing short of an avalanche of angry back and forth between Wessel & Stapleton (Chopin's publishers in England), the journal, and many of its readers. But despite a few cautiously warm reviews later in the decade, *The Musical World* largely stood its ground, playing a major part in the generally negative English reception of Chopin throughout the nineteenth century.

Originality was thus *de rigueur* in virtuosic composition as much as it was in performance. As we saw in Chapter Two, virtuosi could be seen as embodying free subjectivity itself. Similarly, the aesthetically autonomous art of music, “an art that lets men”, as we saw at the beginning of this section, “intimate their higher principle”, could be taken to symbolize that free subjectivity. It is only logical enough, then, that musical works, too, were expected to be original and unique, just as free subjects were conceived to be. But that originality and uniqueness had to be kept within certain bounds. As we saw in the preceding chapter with regards to virtuosity in performance, those bounds were not only those of bourgeois propriety, but also, more importantly, of a type and degree of virtuosity that could be still be recognized as a human or seemingly superhuman achievement—amazing but nonetheless human, not non-human, that is, demonic, diabolical, or mechanical. As we are about to see, in composition, too, there were certain boundaries that virtuosi were expected to honor: those of pre-ordained aesthetic beauty in music. Whenever virtuosity got the upper hand and those limits were overstepped, even sympathetic reviewers tended to exoticize and pathologize their subjects.

⁴¹ [Unsigned], “Monsieur Frederic Chopin”, *MW*, 28 October 1841, pp. 276–77.

*The Human and the Mechanical in Composition: “Expression”/“Expressivity” and Virtuoso
Technique*

Apart from originality, another concept that played a key role in the critical reception of virtuosity in performance and composition alike was that of expression/expressivity. In composition, too, a crucial specific (or, perhaps, not so specific) demand that the critics put before virtuoso-composers was that their music should be “expressive”. In reviewing compositions, it appears that the critics were after the same subtle (not to say elusive) notion of expressivity that was discussed in Chapter Two, with regards to (virtuosic) performance. That music should be expressive was thus obligatory in most contemporary criticism, but few critics ever ventured to specify what exactly “expressive” meant, what was meant to be expressed, by whom, and how. As in the case of expressivity in performance, the critics’ reluctance to pin down expressivity could be seen as a deliberate effort to preserve something ineffable about music, something that could not be put either in words or in notes—a defining characteristic of (good) music, according to contemporary aesthetics, which would always save it as something more than a mere score or a meaningless configuration of pitches and timbres; just as the notion (or prerequisite) of expressive performance helped define the (virtuoso) performer as more than a merely robotic, pre-programmed reproducer of written music—therefore as a subject, a human agent with a subjectivity of his/her own to infuse into the performance. For instance, the author of an 1844 *Musical World* review of some piano etudes by Moscheles, here signed only as “D.” (probably the journal’s editor Davison), asserts that without expression, “music is a mere rattle of meaningless sounds”, but does not specify what or how exactly the said etudes of Moscheles

express.⁴² Similarly, one of the biggest compliments a piece of music could receive on the pages of the *Revue et Gazette* was to be likened—in expressivity—to poetry; Chopin was often the beneficiary in this regard, as in an 1839 review of his piano etudes written by the fellow pianist-composer Stephen Heller: “poems (that is the only title that pertains to the works of Chopin)”.⁴³ Of course, Heller remains silent on what exactly it is that Chopin’s “poems” express. But maybe that is the point: that they express what may only be expressed in wordless, instrumental music, not in language or in any other way.

But while critics were elusive about what constituted expressivity in composition, they were certainly forthcoming when it came to what did not. Thus G. W. Fink of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in 1836 warmly recommends the technically undemanding nocturnes nos. 14–16 (in C major, C major, and F major) by the Irish composer-pianist John Field, the “inventor” of the nocturne,⁴⁴ to all those pianists “who were formed in the good school and who have not sacrificed the intimacy of soulful perception to mechanics”.⁴⁵ Indeed, the bulk of contemporary music criticism suggests that for most critics “mechanics”, that is virtuosic technique—a defining characteristic of instrumental virtuosity—was the main enemy of the very art of music. A large number of these reviews suggest, explicitly or implicitly, that virtuosic technique, obviously a vital ingredient of all virtuosity, is simply incompatible with good, artistic music. Thus the unsigned Berlin correspondent for the *Neue Zeitschrift* draws a clear line

⁴² D., “Review.”, *MW*, 7 November 1844, p. 366.

⁴³ [Stephen] Heller, “Revue critique. Études pour le piano. MM. Taubert, Henselt, Chopin, Bertini.”, *RGMP*, 24 February 1839, pp. 59–62: “poésies (c’est le seul nom qui convienne aux œuvres de Chopin)”. Jim Samson has traced the trope of Chopin the hyper-expressive poet in the French reception of the composer after 1850; see Samson 1995, pp. 2–3. But pre-1850 French criticism of the composer shows that it was in operation earlier in the century, too.

⁴⁴ For more on the life and works of John Field, see Piggott 1974.

⁴⁵ G. W. Fink, “Werke für das Pianoforte.”, *AMZ*, 20 July 1836, pp. 471–72: “Spieler, die gute Schule gemacht u. im Mechanischen nicht die Innigkeit seelenvoller Auffassung verloren haben, mögen immerhin auf Field’s Nocturnen, die ältern sowohl als diese neuen, Rücksicht nehmen u. mit der grössten Genauigkeit dabei verfahren, bis sie völlig damit zu leisten im Stande sind, was ihr Schöpfer damit leistet”.

between virtuosity and musicality in a review of the Bohemian virtuoso Alexander Dreyschock's recital of his own music in the Prussian capital:

Mr. D[reyschock].’s eminent reputation preceded him, everyone spoke of his great skill, power, and stamina—especially in octave-playing, where he was even likened to Liszt, etc. But one heard *only of his virtuosity*, [whereas] no one spoke of his *musical* sense or character at all [emphasis added].⁴⁶

The correspondent then accordingly proceeds into a diatribe against Dreyschock's music, a rhapsody, two songs without words in C and F major, *Campanella*—an etude, and a “rather difficult” set of variations on an original theme. The critics writing for the *Neue Zeitschrift*'s conservative rival regularly made the same distinction, for instance the unsigned reviewer of a trio by Johann Nepomuk Hummel, who opens his review by noting that

the *Kapellmeister* has lately often been reproached for caring in his compositions more about *virtuosity* and the perfection of the *mechanical* in music than for new, rich ideas that would be fine in and by themselves, as well as for the satisfaction of the spiritual in this art [emphasis added].⁴⁷

Once again, *virtuosic*, *mechanical* composition is pitted against the truly musical and spiritual, one might also say the truly human in music. The reviewer is happy to note, though, that the present trio shows that the composer has changed his erstwhile “corrupt” ways.

Since virtuosic technique and therefore virtuosity itself were deemed inimical to genuinely artistic music, much of virtuosic music was dismissed as “mere bravura” and no art. Thus the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* reviewer of the Swiss leg of Liszt's *Album d'un Voyageur*, signed only as “K.”, asserts that the worth of these pieces is based

⁴⁶ [Unsigned], “Aus Berlin.”, *NZM*, 11 February 1840, p. 51: “Hrn. D. War ein bedeutender Ruf vorausgegangen, man sprach überall von seiner großen Fertigkeit, Kraft und Ausdauer—namentlich im Octavenspiel, worin er's sogar Lißt gleich thun sollte &c. Man hörte aber immer nur von seiner Virtuosität, von seinem musikalischen Sinn und Wesen sprach man gar nichts”.

⁴⁷ [Unsigned], “Recension.”, *AMZ*, 17 September 1823, p. 626: “Man hat Hrn. Kapellm. H[ummel]. den Vorwurf gemacht, er sey seit einiger Zeit in seinen Compositionen mehr auf Virtuosität und Vollendung des Mechanischen in der Musik, als auf neue, gehaltvolle, gleich an und für sich ausgezeichnete Gedanken und Befriedigung des Geistigen in dieser Kunst bedacht”.

solely in pianistic technique, the development of which is sought here in different ways, but not in any purely musical handling or treatment, which let themselves be tyrannized by the technique and thus cannot, if we may say so, keep sight of their artistic goal.⁴⁸

Liszt's archrival Thalberg received similar treatment in an 1839 review published by "W." in the *Neue Zeitschrift*. The review begins with a description of Thalberg's exquisite skills at the keyboard, but then proceeds into a condemnation of the music he performed at the recital, a fantasia on Rossini's *Moses* and another one on motives from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, as "a constant resignation of the composer in the virtuoso's favor, a continuing concession from the writing to the playing artist [...] For him, the originality of musical thoughts is subordinated to his striving for new instrumental effects".⁴⁹ Dreyschock fares even worse. The unsigned reviewer of his Grand Fantasia, Op. 12, dismisses it as "vulgar", "poor in imagination and melody", "a waste that seeks to impress with talentlessness and trivial commonplaces!". Has the young virtuoso, the reviewer asks, "no friend to tell him the truth, no one to oversee his finger-artistry, to make him aware of the soullessness and nullity of such music?" The review predictably ends with a juxtaposition of (Dreyschock's) virtuosity and "real art":

What Mr. Dreyschock has achieved as a virtuoso is another matter in itself; his leaps, his powerful control, the bravura with which he plays everything, may indeed delight for awhile. But the time is coming when even these arts will sink in price, and what will remain then of the virtuosi of this kind?⁵⁰

⁴⁸ K. "Recensionen.", *AMZ*, 8 February 1843, pp. 106–9: "Der Werth dieser Umschreibungen beruht allein auf der Technik des Pianofortespiels, deren Erweiterung auf verschiedene Weise hier versucht ist, nicht aber auf der rein musikalischen Behandlung oder Bearbeitung, welche sich von der Technik tyrannisiren lässt, und daher nicht ihr künstlerischen Ziel, wenn wir so sagen dürfen, im Auge behalten kann".

⁴⁹ W., "Tagesbegebenheiten.", *NZM*, 11 January 1839, pp. 15–16: "Seine Compositionen sind ein stetes Resigniren des Componisten zu Gunsten des Virtuosen, ein fortdauerndes Zugeständniß von Seiten des schreibenden Künstlers an den spielenden [...] Ursprünglichkeit des musikalischen Gedankens ist bei ihm dem Streben nach neuen Instrumentalwirkungen untergeordnet".

⁵⁰ [Unsigned], "Alexander Dreyschock, große Phantasie. Op. 12.", *NZM*, 30 July 1841, p. 34: "Gestehen wir es leider, es ist uns seit lange so etwas Abgeschmacktes nicht vorgekommen. Welche Armuth an Phantasie und Melodie, welcher Aufwand, mit dem uns hier die Talentlosigkeit imponiren möchte, welches Schönthun auf den trivialsten Gemeinplätzen! Hat die junge Virtuos gar keinen Freund um sich, der ihm die Wahrheit sagte, Niemanden, der seine Fingerkünsteleien übersehend, ihn auf das Seelenlose, Nichtige solcher Musik aufmerksam machte? [...] Was Hr. Dreyschock als Virtuos leistet, ist eine Sache für sich; sein Sprünge, seine Kraftgriffe, die

And by no means were virtuosi on the violin exempt from such critique: the Italian violinist and Paganini's pupil Camillo Sivori, for instance, was as good a target as any, whose violin concerto the unsigned author of an 1841 *Neue Zeitschrift* review dismissed as "tiresome bravura", "spiritless jugglery", "somersaults that amaze and amaze only", no more than "musical acrobatics".⁵¹

However, especial vitriol was reserved for those pieces that were judged to have been composed only for the purpose of showing off the composer-virtuoso's technical skill. Thus in a *Neue Zeitschrift* review of the Norwegian violinist Ole Bull's 1840 recital in Leipzig the journal's critic Carl Montag dismisses the unspecified pieces of Bull's own composition, which he played at the recital, as "mere carriers of his virtuosity", without an original idea or form. They are just another proof, the reviewer concludes, "how much of one's vitality modern virtuosity consumes".⁵² In another review published in the same journal, Thalberg fares only marginally better, since "to please and to shine is his top priority, composition is secondary to him"; were it not for the occasional "more noble beam", his compositions would hardly stand out among the "thousands of virtuoso botch-works that appear year in, year out, only to quickly disappear again".⁵³ Crucially, the accusations that are being hurled at Thalberg and Bull here are

Bravour, mit der er alles ausführt, können wohl eine Weile ergötzen. Aber es kömmt die Zeit, wo auch diese Künste im Preise sinken werden, und was bleibt dann dieser Art Virtuosen noch übrig?"

⁵¹ [Unsigned], "Erstes Abonnementconcert im Saale des Gewandhauses, d. 3 October 1841.", *NZM*, 15 October 1841, p. 124.

⁵² C. M. [Carl Montag], "Ole Bull in Leipzig.", *NZM*, 19 December 1840, p. 200: "Ole Bull's Compositionen sind nur die Träger seiner Virtuosität. Ohne eigentliche Idee und Form zusammengestellte Einzelheiten,—Schwierigkeiten, die zu besitzen er sich zur besondern Aufgabe gemacht, Cantilenen und Passagen, abgerissene Accorde, mit dazwischengeworfenen recitativischen Fragen und Antworten, verhimmelnden Flageolettönen u. s. w. Es scheint dies wieder ein Beweis zu sein, wie sehr die moderne Virtuosität alle Lebenskräfte in Anspruch nimmt".

⁵³ [Unsigned], "S. Thalberg [...]", *NZM*, 19 October 1841, pp. 126–27: "er will zuerst gefallen, glänzen, die Composition ist Nebensache. Blitze nicht hier und da zuweilen ein edlerer Strahl hervor, und sähe man in einzelnen Partien nicht einen sorglicheren Fleiß in der Ausarbeitung, seine Compositionen wären ohne weiteres den tausend andern Virtuosenmachwerken beizuzählen, wie sie jahraus jahrein zum Vorschein kommen, um bald wieder zu verschwinden".

that they subjected the (supposedly) autonomous art of music to virtuosity, or, as Hegel would put it, to “endeavour after fame and honour”.⁵⁴ And to compromise the autonomy of music arguably meant to compromise that of the subject, too, which the aesthetically autonomous art of music was supposed to symbolize. Thus virtuosity comes to jeopardize not only the art of music (*Tonkunst*), but also any conception of the subject as free and autonomous, symbolized by *Tonkunst*.

Still, not all virtuosic music fared badly, but in such relatively rare instances the reviewers often felt the need either to justify the high technical demands of the piece under consideration, or to point it out as a worthy example of a “legitimate” use of virtuosic technique in composition. Thus the unsigned reviewer of a programmatic fantasia by John Baptist Cramer and another one by Ignaz Moscheles admits that both “require very superior performers to execute them”, but asserts that “they do not exhibit any of those contemptible passages which have no other object than to display mechanical dexterity. They are difficult”, he concludes, “but this difficulty is an effect, not a cause”.⁵⁵ Similarly, for the anonymous reviewer of an unspecified set of piano studies by Chopin, one of his chief merits as a composer is that

with him, [technical] difficulties are only a means, and whenever he makes it most difficult, the effect is accordingly great. Great means, great effect, great rewards—indeed, where these three are found together, the artist needs our advice no more; with Chopin we certainly often find them united.⁵⁶

In one of his reports from Vienna in 1840, Carl Montag makes it explicit: “Difficulties are indeed the motto of every virtuoso, but the ingenious virtuoso will subordinate them to the

⁵⁴ Hegel 1993, p. 61.

⁵⁵ [Unsigned], “PIANO-FORTE. [...]”, *The Harmonicon*, March 1828, pp. 63–64.

⁵⁶ [Unsigned], “Etuden für das Pianoforte.”, *NZM*, 24 September 1839, pp. 97–98: “bei ihm ist die Schwierigkeit nur Mittel, und wo er die schwierigsten gebraucht, da ist auch die Wirkung danach. Große Mittel, große Wirkung, großer Gehalt—freilich wo dies sich zusammen findet, ist der Künstler auch unseres Rathes nicht mehr bedürftig; bei Chopin finden wir allerdings die drei oft vereint”.

highest purposes of all art, the refinement and ennoblement of the soul”.⁵⁷ And it is only ironic to see Thalberg, who was upbraided for sacrificing music to virtuosity in the 1841 *Neue Zeitschrift* review cited above, now praised for exactly the opposite, in a review written by Schumann himself, that same year: “Indeed”, Schumann writes, “genuine virtuosity gives more than mere skill and artistry”; Thalberg “belongs among those chosen and favored by fate”.⁵⁸ Like so many other critics before and after him, Schumann, too, remains silent here on what exactly makes virtuosity more than mere skill and artistry.

Overall, the picture resembles what we already saw in Chapter Two: “expression” and “expressivity” vouchsafe for artistic, aesthetically autonomous music, which must retain an ineffable, irreducibly human core—the quality of “expressivity”, deliberately kept elusive; virtuosic technique is its main enemy. Since virtuosic technique is also a defining feature of virtuosity, we might as well say that virtuosity itself was perceived here as the enemy of all aesthetically valuable music. As for what exactly “expression” and “expressivity” entailed in composition, as far as nineteenth-century journalist criticism of virtuosity went, we are still in the dark. But as in Chapter Two, the critics’ silence on the matter rather nicely agrees with the Romantic philosophic conceptions of music as an abstract and autonomous art (*Tonkunst*) that expresses what otherwise could not be expressed, including the freedom and autonomy (whether transcendental, primordial, actual, or utopian) of the human subject, itself symbolized by music thus conceived, as we saw in Chapter One. Virtuosity is then perceived as a threat to *Tonkunst*

⁵⁷ C. [Carl Montag], “Aus Wien. (Schluß.)”, *NZM*, 9 December 1840, pp. 186–87: “Schwierigkeiten sind zwar die Losung aller Virtuosen, aber die geistreichen unter diesen ordnen sie dem Hauptzwecke aller Kunst, Veredlung und Erhebung der Seele unter”.

⁵⁸ 13. [Robert Schumann], “S. Thalberg. Concert für den Pensionfonds der Musiker am 8ten Februar.”, *NZM*, 15 February 1841, p. 58: “Gewiß, wahre Virtuosität giebt mehr als bloße Fertigkeit und Künste; auch sie vermag es den Menschen abzuspiegeln, so daß es uns bei Thalberg’s Spiel recht klar wird, er gehört zu den vom Schicksal Vorgezogenen, Begünstigten: er steht in Reichthum und Glanz”.

and, by extension, to the conception of subjectivity that *Tonkunst* symbolized, on account of the alleged danger that virtuosic technique, a defining trait of virtuosity, posed to expressivity, a necessary and humanizing quality of all artistic music; hence the use of such epithets as “soulless” and “mechanical” to condemn music deemed not expressive enough. In the following section, we meet another guardian of the autonomy of *Tonkunst* and an ally of expression: formal construction in musical composition.

The “necessity of having a plan”: Virtuosity and Formal Construction

Its importance notwithstanding, “expressivity” was not the only criterion in journalist criticism of virtuosic instrumental music: equally important was a “sound” formal structure. While the former vouchsafed for the existence of an ineffable, human core in music (and, as discussed in Chapter Two, in performance), the latter signified music’s aesthetic autonomy: a “sound” formal structure was a sign that a piece of music followed its own, strictly musical rules of construction, in other words, that wordless instrumental music could still “make sense”, with no help from words or, as significantly, from a literary program. Only music that followed its own, musical rules of construction could rightly be described as autonomous—after all, “autonomy”, a borrowing from the Greek, literally translates into English as “self-rule”. Therefore, only music “self-ruled” by a “sound” formal structure could be said to be autonomous and, furthermore, only music of that kind could be taken to symbolize autonomous subjectivity. As we are about to see, contemporary journalist criticism shows that virtuosity had a complicated relationship with “sound formal construction”, as much as it did with “expression” and “expressivity”.

Unfortunately, critics of virtuosity were almost as reticent on what exactly constituted a “sound” formal structure as they were on the topic of expressivity. Thus the unsigned reviewer of some variations by the pianist Henri Herz laconically tells us in Fétis’s *Revue musicale* about the importance of “having a plan”:

We have often insisted on the necessity of having a plan, a principal and dominant idea in piano music, as well as in every type of music, and on the need to renounce the conception of the piano as solely a note-making machine. However, we did not want to deprive it of the brilliant, which is its essence; but we thought it possible to reconcile the spiritual needs with the performers’ pride.⁵⁹

The “conception of the piano as solely a note-making machine”, which Herz’s anonymous reviewer notes in the quoted excerpt, was indeed widespread at the beginning of the Machine Age; there will be more to say about it in the next chapter. The idea of the piano as “a note-making machine” may also remind us of the criticism of certain virtuosi, discussed in Chapter Two, as automata. In this instance, Herz is commended for following the advice of the *Revue musicale* in constructing his music around a “principal and dominant idea”, thereby producing not a mechanical but “excellent” set of variations, a compliment that he seldom harvested for his compositions from the *Revue musicale*, or from any other major journal.⁶⁰ Now even though the *Revue musicale* and other journals that are perused here targeted, if not exclusively the connoisseurs, then certainly not the musically illiterate either, their dealings with musical texts would scarcely qualify as analytical by today’s standards, with the exception of a few reviews

⁵⁹ [Unsigned], “Annonces. [...] *Variations brillantes pour le piano forte*, sur la dernière valse de C.-M. De Wéber [...] composées par Henri Herz [...]”, *RM*, September 1829, p. 168: “Nous avons souvent insisté sur la nécessité d’avoir un plan, une pensée principale et dominante pour la musique de piano, comme pour toute espèce de musique, et de renoncer à considérer cet instrument uniquement comme une machine à notes. Toutefois, nous ne voulions pas le priver du brillant qui est de son essence ; mais nous pensons qu’il est possible de concilier les besoins de l’esprit et l’amour-propre des exécutans”.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*: “M. Herz nous a compris ; car dans le nouveau morceau qu’il vient de faire, et que nous annonçons, on remarque un goût exquis dans la disposition d’un sujet gracieux, dans le choix des motifs de variations, et dans les détails de l’harmonie ; le mouvement final est rempli de feu et de brillant ; enfin, dans son genre, il nous semble que cette nouvelle production de M. Herz est excellente”.

written by the likes of Schumann and Fétis. Therefore it is almost as difficult to pinpoint what exactly the critics meant by “sound” formal structures (or by “mechanic virtuosity”, for that matter), as it was to extract the exact meaning of “expressivity” in musical composition and performance. Still, it does seem from a large number of reviews that pieces composed in easily identifiable forms that had grown conventional by the 1820s, such as the (as yet un-codified) sonata form and different kinds of rondo and simpler ternary forms, were more likely to meet with critical approval than others. Some critics, such as, perhaps unsurprisingly, the ultra-conservative Fink of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* went as far as to openly prefer clear structure to novelty and originality, as he makes it clear in a review of some Hummel piano etudes in an 1835 issue of his journal. “There is not a spark of the new romantic in these studies”, Fink admits but then asks, laying bare his conservative leanings: “Why should there be? No one, who would create a good school, can create one with the new romantic”. Not only is there “nothing of the new romantic in these etudes”, Fink continues, but nor is there “anything really new in the new romantic itself”. “And still”, he insists, “they are good, very good, and very useful, full of what is best for a broadly edifying school”; Hummel’s studies will teach one the necessary forms, which are indispensable to unity and formal clarity.⁶¹

⁶¹ G. W. Fink, “Recensionen.”, *AMZ*, 11 March 1835, pp. 164–66: “Darin haben die Leute ganz Recht, wenn sie behaupten: In diesen Etüden ist auch kein Funke von der neuen Romantik. Eins haben sie aber dabei vergessen, sich zu fragen, ob sie darin sein soll? Mit der Romantik macht kein Mench Schule, der eine gute Schule machen will. [...] Wir behaupten von diesen Etüden nicht blos in Uebereinstimmung mit Jenen, dass nichts neu Romantisches in ihnen ist, sondern uach noch dazu, dass in der Art derselben nicht einmal etwas eigentlich Neues vorkomme. Und dennoch sind sie gut, sehr gut und sehr nützlich, völlig das, was für eine weiter auszubildende Schule das Beste ist. Da hat man die nothwendigen Formen einzuüben dass sie rund und nett, im Starken und Zierlichen, der Sache treu und sicher gehalten, vor die Sinne treten; dass der Zusammenhang eines wechselnden Periodenbaues einer Idee klar und schön in einer bestimmten, abgeschlossenen Weise irgend ein Ganzes gebe, das in seinen innersten Geisterverhältnissen nicht zu hoch oder zu tief gestellt sein darf, damit die Aufmerksamkeit auf die äussere Abrundung des Bildes oder des Gefühls das Vorherrschende bleibe, dem sich zu tiefe Erregungen nicht entgegenstellen und, zu früh aufgenöthigt, die noch in Aeussern befangenen Seelen nicht umnebeln und verwirren, anstatt sie zu erleuchten und freu zu machen”.

Fink's and other critics' valuation of "sound" formal structures also conditioned their opposition, almost unanimous, to program music, which of course affected their reception of virtuosic music, given that so much of it carried programmatic titles. One finds a general hostility to program music, both in principle and in reviews of individual pieces alike, whether the reviewer happens to like them or not. For instance, the unsigned reviewer of J. B. Cramer's *Le Retour à Londres*, Op. 62, a "grande sonate pour le pianoforte", "indeed a fortunate sonata in every respect", tells his readers that he cannot detect whether the sonata's title is just that or whether Cramer actually wants it to suggest anything more specific in the concept of the piece, but that it does not matter anyway, since "a good sonata is welcome whether it has a title or not".⁶² The author of an already cited *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* review of the Swiss leg of Liszt's *Album d'un voyageur*, signed "K.", tells us explicitly why program music must be regarded with suspicion:

When concerned from that point, music gains an allegorical character, because it is no longer self-sufficient, it wants to signify something else as well. [...] Indeed, even when detached from this context [that is, from its program], it must still only be a beautiful, autonomous piece of music [...] In instrumental music, titles are somewhat dangerous. They hold some allure for the thinker, but they take away some of music's deepest secrets.⁶³

⁶² [Unsigned], "Recensionen.", *AMZ*, 24 June 1818, p. 449: "Ob die Ueberschrift, *le Retour* etc., ein blosser Titel, ein äusseres Erleiderungsmittel deren Unterscheidung ist, oder ob Hr. Cr. in den Ausdruck des Werks etwas Bezügliches gelegt haben will, das weiss der Rec. nicht; wenigstens kann er das Letzte nicht entdecken. Es hat aber auch damit nichts auf sich: eine treffliche Sonate ist, wie ein trefflicher Mensch, willkommen, habe er einen besondern Titel oder nicht, und laute dieser, wenn er ihn hat, wie er wolle. Eine treffliche Sonate aber ist diese wahrhaftig, und in jeder Hinsicht; ja unter den cramerschen eine der vorzüglichsten der neuesten Zeit überhaupt— wie sicher Niemand bestreiten wird, der weiss, wie man recht eigentlich für das *Pianoforte* schreiben, und wie man recht eigentlich *Pianoforte* spielen soll".

⁶³ K. "Recensionen.", p. 107: "Die Musik, wenn sie auf diesem Punkte angelangt ist, gewinnt einen allegorischen Character, denn sie ist nicht mehr sich selbst genug, sie will noch etwas Anderes bedeuten. [...] Nur muss es freilich, auch ganz von diesem Zusammenhange gelöst, ein schönes, selbständiges Musikstück sein [...] Die Ueberschriften der Instrumentalmusikstücke sind etwas Gefährliches. Sie enthalten einen Reiz für den Denker, aber sie nehmen der Musik etwas von ihrem tiefsten Geheimnisse".

Crucially, any piece of music that must rely on a program to make (structural) sense, as it were, is “no longer self-sufficient”, he tells us, no longer “autonomous”. François-Joseph Fétis, the leading French critic of the day, takes a similar position in a review of some programmatic pieces by Frédéric Kalkbrenner that the pianist played at a Conservatoire concert in Paris: “Whether in principle or in particular cases, I am not at all a partisan of imitative music [...] The necessity of a program to make the composer’s ideas intelligible seems to me a flaw that is inseparable from that genre of music”.⁶⁴

Of course, at the time when these reviews were written, the really big battles over program music were yet to be fought, especially in German-speaking music aesthetics.⁶⁵ But as these reviews suggest, the issue was already being problematized, especially with regards to virtuosic music, because much of music composed and performed by virtuosi carried programmatic titles. Again, at stake was the aesthetic autonomy of music: as the reviews discussed above show, its critics regarded program music as less than autonomous, on account of its reliance on an extra-musical program for its *raison d’être* and guiding principle; by contrast, truly autonomous music could only refer to itself and follow its own, strictly musical principles of formal construction. And since virtuosity was so intimately linked with program music, this was a critique not only of program music, but also of virtuosity itself. In other words, both program music and via it virtuosity seemed incompatible with aesthetically autonomous music.

⁶⁴ Fétis, “Nouvelles de Paris. Conservatoire de musique. Premier concert (5 février).”, *RM*, 11 February 1832, p. 15: “Soit système, soit disposition particulière, je ne suis point partisan de la musique imitative [...] La nécessité d’un programme pour faire comprendre les idées du compositeur me semble un défaut inséparable de ce genre de musique”.

⁶⁵ Of course, the antagonism between Eduard Hanslick and the so-called New German School first comes to mind. But as is well known, Schumann was no less critical of the concept of program music, as his famous review of Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique* attests. Biddle 1999 is an excellent gender-critical discussion of that review.

Accordingly, those works that were demonstrably autonomous in their formal construction, such as sonatas, duly received positive reviews, sometimes complete with detailed analytical or quasi-analytical descriptions. After all, one of the critics quoted above did tell us that a sonata was “always welcome, whether it had a title or not”. One such work was Thalberg’s “Grand” C-minor sonata, Op. 56, his only completed effort in that genre. Published in 1845 by Schlesinger in Paris and Breitkopf & Härtel in Leipzig, the sonata is also one of his most substantial piano works: it comprises four movements in a common sequence of tempi (*Allegro moderato—Scherzo pastorale: Allegretto moderato—Andante cantabile—Finale agitato*), totaling 959 bars, or, at those tempi, about 21 minutes’ worth of music. At 379 bars in $\frac{2}{4}$ time, or about six and a half minutes of music, the opening movement is the most sizable of the four. Example 2 below contains the opening of the sonata (the introduction: mm. 1–12, the primary theme: mm. 13–25, and its chordally embellished restatement: mm. 26–34), through the beginning of the bridge section. Reflecting, perhaps, the rigidifying tendencies diagnosed about much of mid-nineteenth-century sonata writing,⁶⁶ the opening movement of Thalberg’s sonata is a fairly conventional, if not the most inspired, sonata form, with the secondary thematic area in the relative major (E-flat), transposed to the tonic minor in the recapitulation. The development section, only 91 measures long, does not have very much to offer in the way of motivic working, save, perhaps, for a “false recapitulation” of the opening theme in F minor, starting at measure 188 and followed by a lengthy dominant pedal in the tonic, preparing the way for the “real”

⁶⁶ Cf. Rink 2001: “Typical sonatas reveal a slavish adherence to a predetermined, formulaic and essentially static tonal architecture, as well as an emphasis, sometimes excessive, on melodic and thematic material generally lacking the potential for truly dramatic development. Often the music seems stillborn and predictable”.

Allegro moderato. *poco ritard.*

9

16

21

p *pp* *p* *f* *cres.* *f* *sempre f*

8^{va}

Example 2: Sigismond Thalberg, Grand Piano Sonata in C minor, Op. 56, I: *Allegro moderato*, mm. 1–45

26

ff *ff*

31

ff *8va* *dim.* *p*

36

41

p

(Example 2 continued)

recapitulation, which begins in measure 232, whereupon the entire exposition is restated in the tonic key. Outside the compact development section, there is practically no motivic working, unlike some other efforts in the sonata-form principle, such as the opening movements of Beethoven's late piano sonatas, or Liszt's B-minor sonata. The entire movement appears to have been composed with the guiding idea to showcase Thalberg's impressive virtuosic skill, featuring relentless (though not quite Chopinesque) *moto perpetuo* figuration throughout and extremely busy chordal writing in both hands, huge leaps (up to a twelfth, e.g. mm. 13, 27, and 29) in legato and chordal passages alike, etc. A telltale feature of the movement is perhaps the number of times Thalberg repeats his themes, so as to introduce ever busier, more virtuosic, chordally embellished variations every time (for instance, compare the two statements of the opening theme, starting in mm. 13 and 27, respectively)—hence also the disproportion between the relatively long exposition and recapitulation sections and the comparatively short development. In a nutshell, a virtuosic sonata had to sound difficult, but still tuneful, which did not leave much room for ambitious motivic working.

The two middle movements are, at five and four and a half minutes (216 measures in $\frac{6}{8}$ at *Allegretto moderato* and 129 measures in $\frac{3}{4}$ at *Andante cantabile*) respectively, somewhat shorter than either the opening or the finale; they are both ternary structures, the Scherzo in the dominant minor (G minor) with the final return of the opening theme in G major, and the Andante in A-flat major. Since they are both (comparatively) slow movements, they are obviously less virtuosic than either the opening or the finale, the more traditional loci for showcasing virtuosity, but by no means are they “easy”: for instance, note in the “Scherzo pastorale” the chordal thematic writing and the figuration in the accompaniment, easily spanning two octaves (Example 3, mm. 93ff). Although the Andante is slower than the Scherzo, it is not for that reason any less

virtuosic: in this movement, Thalberg makes ample use of Sébastien Érard's then-newly invented double-escapement mechanism, which enabled the tremolo-like writing of mm. 36–43 (Example 4); the movement also showcases an invention of Thalberg's own, his celebrated “three-hand effect”, achieved by situating the melodic line, figural accompaniment, and the bass in three distinct registers, as in mm. 44–45.⁶⁷ Also note that at this point, uncharacteristically for Thalberg, the thematic-melodic line is fairly simple, without the massive chordal support in the same hand that we saw in the opening movement—that is because here, as in other instances of Thalberg's three-hand texture, the right hand had to stay (relatively) free to play the mid-register figuration notated on the lower staff, while the left hand is busy with the parallel octaves in the bass. The “Finale agitato” is another sonata form much like the opening, with the secondary thematic area in the relative major (E-flat major), transposed to the tonic minor in the recapitulation; there is also an additional unrelated thematic episode in B minor in the development. At about six minutes (235 measures in *c* at *Allegro vivace quasi presto*), it is just a little shorter than the opening movement and quite as virtuosic; in Example 5 for instance, note the wide leaps, *moto perpetuo* figuration, and chordal thematic writing in mm. 43ff, which we already saw in the opening movement.

All in all, Thalberg's sonata is in terms of its large-scale structuring as well as that of individual movements pretty conventional and not very ambitious—though that would certainly not apply to the degree of pianistic virtuosity one must have to give it justice in performance. For instance, there is no visible attempt at through-composition, prominent in a number of mid-

⁶⁷ However, according to Isabelle Béance-Zank, Berlioz claimed that Thalberg had merely assumed the three-hand texture from the English harp virtuoso and composer Elias Parish Alvars (1808–1849), its real originator, and adapted it to the piano; see Béance-Zank 1995.

(Allegretto moderato)

Measures 86-90 of the Scherzo pastorale. The piece is in 6/8 time and C minor. The tempo is *Allegretto moderato*. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with the instruction *cantabile*. The right hand plays a melody with a slur, and the left hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment. Pedal markings (*Ped.*) and asterisks (*) are present in the left hand.

Measures 91-94. The right hand continues with chords and a slur. The left hand has a continuous eighth-note accompaniment. Pedal markings (*Ped.*) and asterisks (*) are present. The instruction *con espress.* is written above the right hand. A dynamic marking of *f* is present at the end of the system.

Measures 95-98. The right hand plays chords with a slur. The left hand continues with the eighth-note accompaniment. Pedal markings (*Ped.*) and asterisks (*) are present. A dynamic marking of *p* is present in the right hand.

Measures 99-102. The right hand plays chords with a slur. The left hand continues with the eighth-note accompaniment. Pedal markings (*Ped.*) and asterisks (*) are present. Dynamic markings of *p* and *ff* are present in the right hand.

Example 3: Sigismund Thalberg, Grand Piano Sonata in C Minor, Op. 56, II: "Scherzo pastorale", mm. 86–102

(*Andante cantabile*)

ff

38

Ped.

40

dim.

con grazia

43

marcato

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for a piano piece in 3/4 time, C minor. It consists of four systems of music. The first system (mm. 35-37) shows a piano accompaniment with a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The tempo is marked '(Andante cantabile)' and the dynamics are 'ff'. The second system (mm. 38-40) continues the piece, with a 'Ped.' (pedal) marking in the left hand. The third system (mm. 40-42) features a 'dim.' (diminuendo) marking and a 'con grazia' (with grace) instruction. The fourth system (mm. 43-45) includes a 'marcato' (marked) instruction. The score is written for piano with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs).

Example 4: Sigismond Thalberg, Grand Piano Sonata in C minor, Op. 56, III: *Andante cantabile*,
mm. 35–45

(Allegro vivace quasi presto)

41 42

43 44 45 46

p *sf* *ff* *cresc.* *ff* *sf* *ff* *ff* *maestoso* *ff* *maestissimo* *ff* *maestissimo*

Example 5: Sigismond Thalberg, Grand Piano Sonata in C minor, Op. 56, IV: “Finale agitato”, mm. 39–48

century sonatas, most famously Liszt's. Still, it is likely that Thalberg composed his sonata to showcase not only his virtuosity, but also, as Liszt was going to do,⁶⁸ his proficiency in the culturally more prestigious art of abstract, original composition (as opposed to operatic and other kinds of transcriptions, so dear to piano virtuosi of the time) and at that in the most "respectable", Beethovenian genre of piano music (as well as in the pre-eminently "Beethovenian" key of C minor), thus partaking in the "classicizing" strain of nineteenth-century music.⁶⁹ According to John Rink, "Beethoven's influence encouraged a new appreciation of the sonata as one the most 'distinguished' forms [...] For younger composers, the sonata offered a perfect first work to launch a career in print".⁷⁰ Judging from the reviews of Thalberg's sonata published by the leading music periodicals at the time, his effort largely paid off.

A good example is an extremely positive review of the piece published by the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in 1845. Its anonymous author begins by introducing Thalberg as "by consensus the founder" of modern virtuosity, on a par with Liszt.⁷¹ But the reviewer appears to be considerably less impressed with Thalberg's achievements in composition—up to the sonata: "As a composer, apart from some pretty songs, he has so far appeared only in those works that stand in tightest unity with his virtuosity. His fantasies on Moses [i.e. Rossini's *Moïse et Pharaon*], den Hugenotten [i.e. Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*], Don Juan [i.e. Mozart's *Don*

⁶⁸ Samson 2003 and Gooley 2004. For a more substantial discussion of Liszt's B-minor sonata as paradigmatic of his self-reinvention into a composer, see Rea 1978.

⁶⁹ Webster 2001: "Two broad strains may be identified in 19th-century music: a 'Romantic' one, focussing on vocal music, programme music and the characteristic piece for piano; and a 'classicizing' one, focussing on the traditional genres of absolute music".

⁷⁰ Rink 2001.

⁷¹ [Unsigned], "Nachrichten. S. Thalberg: Grande Sonate pour le Piano. Op. 56.", *AMZ*, 19 February 1845, pp. 117–18: "Den Ruhm einer eigenthümlichen Richtung als Virtuoso, deren Stifter er ist und die unzählige Nachahmer gefunden hat, genießt jetzt Thalberg übereinkömmlich, und wird in dieser Hinsicht Liszt als dem ebenbürtigsten Rivalen gegenübergestellt".

Giovanni] are charged with his singular playing technique”.⁷² But the present work is about to change all that:

Now he is about to surprise us with a work departing from his direction, departing, we say, in that it relinquishes the benefit of those light and random permissive forms and rejoins the style of the preceding, that is, Hummel’s, school. A sonata entails a more severe regularity of construction, of the building and combining of themes, of the proportions between individual sections. To break free from those severe demands was the desire of the young generation [...] What Thalberg brings us here is likewise proof that all the brilliance of modern virtuosity may find its balance, without forfeiting the main features of the form, in a sonata in the brilliant style [...] It should therefore be seen as an advance in Thalberg’s development as a composer.⁷³

This compact but rich passage demands some commentary. First, there is a clear devaluation of “those light and random permissive forms” that stand “in tightest unity with his virtuosity” in favor of a historic, Beethovenian, and pre-eminently un-virtuosic (or perhaps even anti-virtuosic?) genre of what we might call “absolute music”. Second, a sonata “entails a more severe regularity of construction”: in other words, this genre of long and highly distinguished historical standing is also a *locus classicus* of good, respectable music. Third, to “break free from those severe demands”, the reviewer tells us, “was the desire of the young generation”, that is, of young, aspiring composer-pianists such as Thalberg. Their purported “desire” to “break free from those severe demands”, presumably by shunning the sonata in favor of “those light and random permissive works” that are in “tightest unity with [...] virtuosity”, could be read in terms

⁷² “Nachrichten. S. *Thalberg*: Grande Sonate pour le Piano. Op. 56.”: “Als Componisten hat er bisher, ausser in einigen hübschen Liedern, sich nur in solchen Werken, die mit seiner Virtuosenrichtung im engsten Zusammenhange standen, gezeigt. Seine Fantasieen aus Moses, den Hugenotten, Don Juan u. s. w. Sind auf jene ihm eigenthümliche Technik des Vortrags berechnet”.

⁷³ *Ibid.*: “Gegenwärtig überrascht er uns durch ein von jener Richtung abweichendes Werk, abweichend, sagen wir, indem es der Vortheile jener leichten und vielfache Willkür zulassenden Formen sich begibt, und sich wieder dem Style der vorhergegangenen, nämlich Hummel’schen Schule anschliesst. Eine Sonate verlangt einmal strengere Gesetzmässigkeit der Anlage, der Ausführung und Verbindung der Themata, des Verhältnisses zwischen den einzelnen Theilen. Von jenen strengen Forderungen sich zu befreien, dies war das Verlangen des jungen Geschlechts [...] Was uns Thalberg hier bringt, ist gleichfalls ein Beweis, dass aller Glanz moderner Virtuosität sein Recht finden kann, ohne dass man die Grundzüge der Form aufgebe, eine Sonate im brillanten Style [...] Sie ist mithin in Thalberg’s Entwicklung, als Componisten, ein Fortschritt zu nennen”.

of the traditional (and positive) viewing of the virtuoso as an embodiment of free, enterprising subjectivity, in this instance trying to express his freedom in music, by means of shunning the pre-ordained forms of old for the sake of unfettered originality. But that is not the view of Thalberg's reviewer (unsurprisingly, perhaps, given that he was writing for a conservative publication). Instead, he commends Thalberg for showing that "all the brilliance of modern virtuosity may find its balance, without forfeiting the main features of the form, in a sonata in the brilliant style": in other words, Thalberg is being praised for subjecting his virtuosity—bodily, sensuous, excessive, irrational—to the rational design of a sonata. In fact, what the reviewer celebrates is Thalberg's apparent decision to subject his own (virtuosic) subjectivity to a pre-ordained formal procedure, valorized as a carrier of aesthetic autonomy and worth. The genre of the sonata, along with Thalberg's present effort in it, is valued as a successful bid to discipline the sensuous, bodily excess of virtuosity and bring it back under the control of reason, represented here by a highly regulated and complex formal construction.

As though to demonstrate its complexity, Thalberg's anonymous reviewer then launches into lengthy, quasi-analytical descriptions of each movement, with special emphasis on the opening sonata form, understandably enough, due to that movement's larger size and structural complexity. Without, of course, ever explicitly calling it a sonata form—by 1845 A. B. Marx's naming and codification of the sonata form had hardly achieved the universal status it commands today—the reviewer pretty accurately goes through all the major structural divisions of the movement: the twelve-bar introduction, "where appears a figure that often returns later on in the movement, which one should not, however, treat as the theme, since in the thirteenth bar it already becomes the accompanying figure to a more tuneful theme, which we may treat as the

actual subject”.⁷⁴ The reviewer then duly mentions the G-minor episode and the E-flat-major theme (which we might call the secondary thematic area), which, after two variations (basically chordal restatements of the theme, as noted above, likely meant to showcase Thalberg’s virtuosity), “leads to the end of the first part”—or, in modern terms, to the end of the exposition.⁷⁵ Perhaps understandably, due to its smaller size and not in any way very interesting content, the reviewer then spends little time on the “ensuing harmonic development” (“harmonic” is an apt description here, since there is not much in the way of motivic working in the development section), but he does mention the “false reprise” of the opening theme in F minor as still a part of the development section, revealing, perhaps, a conception of the sonata form surprisingly close to ours. Although the reviewer never invokes it by name, he apparently does have a pretty clear idea of what a textbook sonata form is supposed to do, since he deals with the recapitulation only by noting that the development “finally reaches the tonic, with which begins the repetition of the first part in *good order*” (emphasis added)—with the originally E-flat-major theme now transposed to the tonic C minor.⁷⁶ The reviewer concludes by noting the high technical demands of the opening movement, particularly for the left hand. He then spends less time on the second and third movements, although he does treat some performance-practice issues in the third movement, complete with a musical example. There is another example in the description of the finale, to show, in the reviewer’s opinion, the orchestral quality of the writing in that movement, and another one, to illustrate the wide leaps in the left hand throughout.

⁷⁴ “Nachrichten. S. Thalberg: Grande Sonate pour le Piano. Op. 56.”, pp. 117–18: “Der erste Satz, Allegro moderato, C moll, beginnt mit zwölf Tacten, worin eine im Stück oft vorkommende Figur auftritt, die man aber nicht für das Thema zu halten hat, da sie im dreizehnten Tacte schon Begleitungsfigur zu einem mehr gesangvollen Thema wird, welches wir als das eigentliche Subject betrachten können”.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*: “Auf Es dur angelangt, wohin eine Episode, G moll, leitet, erhalten wir ein zweites höchst einfaches Thema, das zweimal variirt, zum Schlusse des ersten Theiles leitet”.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*: “In der nun folgenden harmonischen Durchführung, worin wir das Thema in F moll finden, wird besonders wieder jenem episodischen Gedanken begegnet, bis dann endlich die Tonika und damit die Parallelstellen zum ersten Theile wieder in ihr gutes Recht treten”.

The reviewer concludes by noting that the “entire sonata belongs to the more important musical editions at present”.⁷⁷ Not only that conclusion, along with the critic’s wholesale positive response to the sonata, but also the sheer length of the article and the relatively high degree of analytical detail, complete with sizable note examples, signify the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*’s high respect for the piece. A note of caution must be inserted here: in Germany, Thalberg’s sonata was published by Breitkopf & Härtel, the proprietors and publishers of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. As noted in the Introduction, large music-publishing houses, such as Breitkopf & Härtel and Schlesinger, hardly refrained from using the music journals they owned to market their sheet music and in-house composers (as well as to lambast those of their competitors) and the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* was no exception in this regard. However, what matters in the context of this dissertation is not so much the praise itself, but the terms of the praise: as noted above, Thalberg’s sonata, though in itself quite virtuosic as we saw above, is praised as an instance of virtuosity brought under rational control by means of the sonata principle, a formal procedure of long and distinguished historical standing.

That the quality of the praise lavished on Thalberg’s sonata by the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* was not only motivated by its proprietors’ commercial interests is further attested by a strikingly similar review of the same piece published by *The Musical World* on January 2nd, 1845. Had the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* review actually predated the *Musical World* review and not the other way around, one would have ample reason to suspect *The Musical World*’s editors of lifting their review from the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* and publishing it in English translation without attribution—a common practice between English

⁷⁷ “Nachrichten. S. Thalberg: Grande Sonate pour le Piano. Op. 56.”, pp. 117–18: “Die ganze Sonate gehört zu den bedeutenderen musikalischen Erscheinungen der Jetztzeit”.

and Continental sources at the time (but not the other way around). The English reviewer thus begins by extolling the merits of the sonata and other respectable forms of “music developed”, as opposed to the smaller, inferior forms of virtuosic music:

The concoctor of fashionable *morceaux*—the fantasia and variation-writer of the day—the king of passage-makers, has at last, in a classical fit, set to work upon a *sonata* [...] Let us congratulate M. Thalberg on his resolution of departing, for awhile, from the senseless jog-trot of the *Fantasia* school. [...] How delightful is music in form—music developed—music whose character does not change every eight bars—music, in fact, wherein the *outline* and *continuity* are the most important features! The *sonata* for the pianoforte, like the *symphony* for the orchestra, is the highest exhibition of musical art. A *grand sonata* only differs from a *symphony* inasmuch as it is devoted to a single instrument, or to two instruments in *concertante*. It has its four long movements, the development and elaboration of which prove the capabilities of the writer to attempt it. Without placing M. Thalberg on a level with Mozart, Beethoven, Dussek, Weber, or Mendelssohn, who have produced the greatest masterpieces extant in the *sonata* form, we at once pronounce a warm eulogium on this his first attempt at classical composition.⁷⁸

Again, the same valuation of the sonata that we saw in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*—“music developed”, “*outline* and *continuity*”—at the expense of virtuosity: the “fashionable *morceaux*”, “the senseless jog-trot of the *Fantasia* school”; in fact, unlike his German colleague, the English reviewer quite explicitly states that the “*sonata* for the pianoforte [...] is the highest exhibition of musical art”. Like his German colleague, the reviewer then proceeds to describe each movement, although with less approbation and attention to structural detail. Thus the opening movement

depends more for interest on the cleverness of its workmanship than on the beauty of its *motivi*. The first subject, so called, is merely a *figure*, which, in a variety of manners, forms a bass throughout the movement. The second *motivo* in E flat is hardly dignified enough for its position. The *triplets* rather injure by a dance-like effect, than relieve by a temporary modification of character.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ [Unsigned], “Reviews. ‘*Grande Sonate*’—*pour le piano*—SIGISMUND THALBERG. Op. 56”, *MW*, 2 January 1845, p. 4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

To do justice to Thalberg, it must be said that the English reviewer's criticism does not seem warranted, since it is fairly obvious that Thalberg's first theme (or "subject", as the critic has it) begins only in m. 13 (see Example 2 above), whereas the preceding twelve measures serve to prepare its arrival, landing on the dominant in m. 10. The first theme is therefore not "merely a *figure*", though the reviewer correctly observes that the said *figure* forms the basis of the ensuing left-hand accompaniment. As for the secondary theme (the "second *motivo* in E flat"), its melodic writing does, perhaps, leave something to be desired; for instance, note the rather unfortunate sounding melodic tritone in the top line, Example 6, mm. 78–80.

The second movement, however, "is perfect"; its "*motivo* [i.e. the opening theme] is quaint and pretty", its "*trio* [the contrasting middle section] in B flat [...] is so clever and effective that it cannot but please universally".⁸⁰ But the third movement is judged less positively: it "is M. Thalberg's own—no one else could or would have written it. For what it is, a simple phrase, elaborately surcharged with accompaniment, we can find no fault in it. To the enthusiastic Thalbergist, it will prove a *bonne bouche*. To us, it wants the charm of invention".⁸¹ In all fairness, Thalberg's melodic writing in that movement is hardly of the most eventful kind, as might be gleaned from Example 7 below. The final movement, again, attracts more benevolence from the reviewer: it "is by many degrees superior to any of the other movements, except the *scherzo*". But the critic's conservative leanings grow prominent again in his objection to the B-minor episode in the development section:

⁸⁰ "Reviews. 'Grande Sonate'—pour le piano—SIGISMUND THALBERG. Op. 56", p. 4.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

(Allegro moderato)

78

Example 6: Sigismond Thalberg, Grand Piano Sonata in C minor, Op. 58, I: *Allegro moderato*, mm. 71–85

The *episode*, in B minor, is agreeable and ingenious, but we object to it on the score of its *mode*;—we can see no possible relation between B minor and C minor. Such extravagant carelessness of the relations of key are never committed by the great masters; and in writing a sonata, M. Thalberg cannot do better than take their works as models.⁸²

But its “greatly expanded system of tonal relations” was precisely one of the most salient features of nineteenth-century sonata writing;⁸³ moreover, such “extravagant carelessness of the relations of key” did, *pace* Thalberg’s anonymous English reviewer, find its way into the piano sonatas of such “great masters” as Beethoven. It seems that some of the critic’s positions regarding sonata writing might be described as conservative even by mid-century standards.

⁸² “Reviews. ‘Grande Sonate’—pour le piano—SIGISMUND THALBERG. Op. 56”, p. 4.

⁸³ Webster 2001.

Andante cantabile

p
marcato il canto

Ped. *

6

cresc-

Ped. *

11

f *dim.* *sf* *dim.*

16

dolce con tenerezza

Example 7: Sigismond Thalberg, Grand Piano Sonata in C minor, Op. 58, III: *Andante cantabile*, mm. 1–20

Still, all those perceived flaws in Thalberg's sonata writing notwithstanding, *The Musical World* devoted an unusual amount of attention, highly positive at that, to Thalberg's sonata, just as the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* was to do a few months later that year. The anonymous English critic tells us why:

We have bestowed more than usual attention on this composition, for two reasons. Firstly, it is a *sonata*, and (from whose pen we care not a fig) we always take off our hats to a *sonata*—for does not a *sonata* make us think of Beethoven? Secondly, it is an indication of a new and favorable turn in the studies of one of the greatest pianists of the age, who hitherto (with abilities for a higher aim) has solely used his pen for the acquirement of that evanescent popularity which is contingent on the production of happy trifles, to the neglect of the *fiat of posterity*, which only approves of efforts that tend to the ennoblement of art. For these reasons we welcome its appearance [...]⁸⁴

It is essentially the same position as that of the German review discussed above, only explicitly stated: a sonata—any sonata—is by default more valuable than those “happy trifles”, that is, the small piano forms characteristic of contemporary virtuosic music. It seems as though the sonata *qua* genre and formal procedure is here valorized as an end in itself, even over and above the otherwise supreme goal of expressivity. As the reviewer makes it plain, a large part of this automatic valuation of the sonata comes from its association with Beethoven, which Thalberg (as well as Liszt) must have realized himself, when he decided to attempt that Beethovenian genre in a likewise Beethovenian key. But the link to Beethoven is not the only ground for valorizing the sonata here: the other was already stated at the outset of the review and discussed above—the sonata as a *locus classicus* of “music developed”, “wherein the *outline* and *continuity* are the most important features”, the piano sonata as “the highest exhibition of musical art”. As in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* review discussed earlier, the sonata is valorized here as a way to discipline virtuosity, to keep it under rational control and, moreover, as a means of securing

⁸⁴ “Reviews. ‘Grande Sonate’—pour le piano—SIGISMUND THALBERG. Op. 56”, p. 5.

the aesthetic autonomy of music, whereby a piece of music is constructed along a set of fixed, preordained, and strictly musical rules, with no help of a program, text, or any other such non-musical “admixture”, as E. T. A. Hoffmann would put it.

Thalberg’s decision to compose a piece in such a “respectable” genre as the sonata endeared him to French critics, too, no less than it did to their English and German colleagues. Writing for *La France musicale*, the powerful critic Castil-Blaze thus notes that “critics have advised Mr. Thalberg more than once to write a serious work, a sonata [...] It seems that Mr. Thalberg has listened and, so as to silence them, changed his manner, abandoning his favored traits in order to enter the route traced for him by his adversaries”.⁸⁵ The same sonata was twice reviewed in Maurice Schlesinger’s *Revue et Gazette* as well, who held publishing rights for France. Needless to say, it was praised both times, but again, mostly for the simple reason that it is a sonata. The first of these two lengthy, quasi-analytical reviews was published in March of 1845; its author was signed by the initials “J. M.”, which possibly stood for German exiled priest, leftist singing teacher, and later founder of the London *Musical Times*, Joseph Mainzer. “J. M.” duly begins by commending Thalberg for seeking to re-popularize the sonata, apparently an enterprise worthy in itself: “It is a trait of a veritable artist, to use his famous and justly popular name to re-popularize what has been unpopular for thirty years: the sonata!”⁸⁶ Like his English and German colleagues, he then provides a detailed rundown of each of the four movements. The same journal published another review of the same sonata just over a year later,

⁸⁵ Castil-Blaze, “Concert de M. Thalberg.”, *FM*, 13 April 1845, pp. 113–14: “La critique a conseillé plus d’une fois à M. Thalberg d’écrire des ouvrage sérieux, des sonates, des concerts taillés sur les patrons donnés par la grande école des clavecinistes. Il paraît que M. Thalberg est sensible à la critique, et, pour la forcer à se taire, ce maitre a changé de manière, abandonnant ses traits favoris pour entrer dans la route que ses adversaires lui traçaient”. For more on François-Henri-Joseph Blaze *dit* Castil-Blaze, see Ellis 1995, pp. 27–30 and Newark 2001.

⁸⁶ J. M., “Revue critique. Grande sonate pour le piano par Thalberg.”, *RGMP*, 2 March 1845, p. 65: “C’est le trait d’un véritable artiste, de faire servir un nom célèbre et justement populaire à repopulariser ce qu’il y a de plus impopulaire depuis trente ans : la sonate !”.

this time under Henri Blanchard's name. Blanchard begins his largely positive review of Thalberg's piece by celebrating what he sees as the resurrection of the sonata, the re-establishment of the style and taste for so long perverted "par le caprice, la fantaisie et l'air varié".⁸⁷ The rest of the review proceeds down the well-trodden path of a detailed and highly positive quasi-analytical description of each movement.

It should be noted here that Thalberg's sonata was not the only one to be received in this way. Despite the stylistic idiosyncrasies of Chopin's music, especially his sonata writing, Chopin's B-minor piano sonata, Op. 58, was received along the same lines in this 1846 review published in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. Again, as in Thalberg's case, Breitkopf & Härtel were the publishers; but again, it is the terms of the praise that matter, not the praise itself.

The reviewer duly begins by extolling the merits of the sonata form:

The sonata form maintains its authority over the countless small forms of salon pieces, bred by the fashionable taste. Since it traverses, in three or four movements, an entire scale of feelings, it affords the composer not only an opportunity to display his rich and persevering creative talent, but also demands great mastery in covering more extended forms.⁸⁸

Again, the same binary opposition between the sonata and the (virtuosic) small forms, this time also associated with the salon, in much of contemporary German criticism the home of the merely fashionable (as the reviewer himself points out), the light, the French, and the effeminate.⁸⁹ As in the other two examples discussed above, the author of this review then launches into a similarly quasi-analytical, if not as detailed, description of each of the four

⁸⁷ Henri Blanchard, "Revue critique. Sonate de Sigismond Thalberg.", *RGMP*, 8 March 1846, p. 77.

⁸⁸ [Unsigned], "[Chopin]: Sonate pour le Piano. Op. 58.", *AMZ*, 4 February 1846, pp. 74–75: "Die Form der Sonate behauptet mitten unter den zahllosen, durch den Modegeschmack hervorgerufenen kleinen Formen der Salonstücke ihre Autorität. Sie bietet, weil sie in ihren drei oder vier Sätzen eine ganze Scala von Empfindungen durchläuft, dem Componisten nicht blos Gelegenheit, seine reichere und ausdauernde Erfindungskraft zu bewähren, sondern sie fordert auch grössere Meisterschaft in Bewältigung ausgedehnterer Formen".

⁸⁹ This theme and especially its impact on the reception of Chopin in Germany has been treated most notably by Andreas Ballstaedt; we will return to it in Chapter Four.

movements of the sonata. Describing the opening movement, he duly notes the prominence of the second, D-major theme, “a genuinely Chopinesque tuneful cantabile”, without, however, going into much detail (that is, without noting its central position in the development section, or the fact that only the second theme is recapitulated, in B major, whereas the opening theme is entirely omitted from the recapitulation).⁹⁰ As for the second movement, a Scherzo, the reviewer notes that it is “rather pianistic” and looks like a piano etude, especially useful in practicing endurance in playing arpeggiated figuration, but does not mention the overall form of the movement, or the enharmonic modulation from the opening E-flat major to B major, the key of the contrasting middle section, which might actually be the most interesting structural point in the movement:⁹¹

[SCHERZO: Molto vivace]

Example 8: Fryderyk Chopin, Piano Sonata in B minor, Op. 58, II: *Scherzo*, mm. 54–67

⁹⁰ “[Chopin]: Sonate pour le Piano. Op. 58.”, pp. 74–75: “Der erste Satz ist auf reiches Figurenwerk gebaut, das dem zweiten Gedanken, einem ächt Chopin’schen liedmässigen, von Triolen unterstützten Cantabile, gleichsam zum Rahmen dient. Es ist dieser in den beiden verwandtesten Durtonarten auftretende Gedanke (die Grundtonart des Stückes ist H moll) der Ruhepunkt in dem ganzen sehr bewegten Tonbilde”.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75: “Das Scherzo ist sehr clavirmässig, erinnert uns, mit Ausnahme des an vorgehaltenen Noten reichen gesangmässigen Alternativs, an die Gattung der Etude; zur Uebung in der Ausdauer in gebrochenen Figuren sehr empfehlenswerth”.

Similarly, the third movement's simple ternary form fails to attract any more sustained attention from the reviewer, except that he spends an inordinate amount of time on the last chord. The critic notes that it "will perplex many a theorist, [since] it is perhaps one of the most vague and blurred that has ever been written, namely this", where he duly provides a note example featuring the final chord of the movement, a B-minor chord in root position, in which the fifth (F#) is preceded by an appoggiatura (G), that is, a B-minor sixth-degree chord in the first inversion followed by the tonic root (Example 9); why the critic found it so perplexing is not immediately clear.⁹²

[Largo]

Example 9: Fryderyk Chopin, Piano Sonata in B minor, Op. 58, III: *Largo*, ending

⁹² “[Chopin]: Sonate pour le Piano. Op. 58.”, pp. 74–75: “Das Largo, worin der eingeschaltete Satz in der Unterdominante uns übrigens am Wenigsten zugesagt hat, ist kurz zusammengedrängt, nach Art der Nocturnen, und ist bei Wiederkehr des Hauptsatzes jede breitere Ausführung vermieden und in der Begleitung eine kleine Variation angebracht. Der Schluss wird manchen Theoretiker stutzig machen, er ist einer der unbestimmtesten, verschimmendsten, die vielleicht je geschrieben worden sind [...] da des Ohr das G als übermässige Quinte auffassen und deren Fortschritt nach Gis erwarten muss, während jetzt es gleichsam ohnmächtig in den Dreiklang der Grundtonart zurücksinkt. Wir sind der Meinung, dass, wenn die übrigen Stimmen an einander gebunden liegen bleiben, statt dass der Componist die beiden Accorde von einander abgelöst haben will, die Wirkung noch reizender sein müsste”.

His remarks on the finale, a fast and difficult rondo, are restricted to its technical demands, and the review ends with the conclusion, often made with regards to Chopin's music then as it is now, that the sonata is better suited to the smaller, more attentive artistic audience of a salon than to a large concert hall.⁹³

All five of these cases exhibit the same pattern: despite their considerably different stylistic features, both Thalberg's and Chopin's sonatas are given inordinate amounts of positive press simply because they are sonatas, on account of the cultural prestige granted to the genre and formal procedure, due to its Beethovenian lineage and utility in keeping virtuosity under control. Furthermore, the sonata is also valorized inasmuch as it appears to promise that a piece composed under that rubric will be constructed along strictly musical rules, those of the sonata principle, without resorting to a program, text, or some other extra-musical source of guidance. As it was noted already near the beginning of this section, only a piece of music constructed along strictly musical rules could be deemed aesthetically autonomous and, as such, symbolize free subjectivity. With its penchant for improvisation and altogether freer formal structures, virtuosity was perceived as a threat to such a rational(istic) conception of musical composition: therefore it had to be brought under rational control, by means of "sound" formal structures, of which the sonata principle, the "most important principle of musical form [...] from the Classical period well into the 20th century",⁹⁴ with its unique Beethovenian lineage, seemed best-suited to the task of disciplining virtuosity.

⁹³ "[Chopin]: Sonate pour le Piano. Op. 58.", p. 75: "Auch ist sie für öffentliche Concerte überhaupt weniger, als für kleinere, aufmerksamer Kunstbetrachtung gewidmete Salons geeignet".

⁹⁴ Webster 2001.

The “happy trifles” and the “dignified forms”: Genres of Virtuosity in Reception

The five reviews just examined valorized the sonata as opposed to the supposedly inferior small genres of virtuosic music, “those light and random permissive forms”, “fashionable *morceaux*”, “happy trifles”, “small forms of salon pieces”, and the like. But what specific genres did those “happy trifles” exactly comprise? In one of the reviews, Henri Blanchard specifies: “le caprice, la fantaisie et l’air varié”, which “have for so long corrupted and perverted musical taste and style”. The caprice, the fantasia, and the variations were among the mainstay genres of early and mid-nineteenth-century virtuosic music. Blanchard was by no means the only critic to denounce them: a large number of French, German, and English reviews from the time suggest that most critics shared his view. The unsigned author of an 1836 *Revue et Gazette* review of a “caprice” by Henri Herz situates the work among “this bastard genre of music comprising variations, fantasias, romances, quadrilles”; in “this deluge of frivolous works that inundate us”, he continues,

the quantity is the opposite of quality. Also, there is no point in searching for noble inspiration in there, for the élan of genius, for those aesthetic thoughts that move, because they come from the soul. If, by chance, we find there some talent, we are always sure to re-encounter the routine, that mortal enemy of the arts, which demeans them down to craft.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ [Unsigned], “Revue critique. Deuxième caprice pour le piano sur la Folle de Grisar, par Henri Herz, op. 83.”, *RGMP*, 27 March 1836, p. 101: “On pourrait avec justice appliquer à ce genre bâtard de musique que se compose de variations, fantaisies, romances, quadrilles, l’épithète de *facile* qu’un auteur, dans un moment de boutade, donna à l’une des deux écoles de littérature. La qualification serait d’autant plus exacte, que dans ce déluge d’ouvrages frivoles dont nous sommes inondés, la quantité est en raison inverse de la qualité. Aussi, il n’y faut point chercher de nobles inspirations, d’élans du génie, de ces pensées esthétiques qui émeuvent, parce qu’elles viennent de l’ame [*sic*]. Si, par hasard, on y trouve quelque talent, on est toujours sûr d’y rencontrer la routine, cette ennemie mortelle des arts, en ce qu’elle les rabaisse jusqu’au métier”.

It is a serious matter, therefore: virtuosic genres threaten no less than the art of music itself, which comes “from the soul”. The unsigned author of an 1840 London *Musical World* review of Chopin’s F-sharp-major Impromptu, Op. 36, expresses similar scorn for the “new” forms:

An essential point in this, which may be termed the *exhibitive*, class of pianoforte-writing, seems to be the purposed avoidance of the *sonata*, *concerto*, or other regular forms of composition, and the adoption of the *fantasia*, *impromptu*, or some other vagrant affair of a similar kind in which lack of the attributes of scholarship is excused by the undefined nature of the work. Regularity of structure is easily dispensed with in an undertaking which has no recognized form; and thus are produced, with incredible rapidity, compositions for the pianoforte, intended merely as tests of manual dexterity, and which may be described as having beginnings and ends, but for the most part containing nothing between their extremes save scraps of themes uncouthly intermingled, and long streams of passages of which the difficulty is pretty generally understood to be the chief recommendation.⁹⁶

The main point of this line of criticism is that virtuoso-composers such as Chopin subject the aesthetically autonomous art of music to a purpose other than itself, namely to showcasing their virtuosity. Again, virtuosity is posited as an enemy to *Tonkunst*. To qualify as aesthetically worthy and autonomous, music must follow its own formal rules, those of the “*sonata*, *concerto*, or other regular forms of composition”; but pieces of virtuosic music follow not the rational rules of formal construction in music but those of virtuosity instead, because they are “intended merely as tests of manual dexterity”. When music is subjected to virtuosity, it is no longer autonomous. Even older composers with longer standing than Chopin’s was in 1840, such as his onetime teacher Kalkbrenner, were regularly condemned for composing in virtuosic genres. Thus the unsigned *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* reviewer of an unspecified set of fantasias by Kalkbrenner deplores the genre and urges the pianist-composer to return to his erstwhile path of righteousness: “Why does Kalkbrenner, who followed a more elevated course before, now live

⁹⁶ [Unsigned], “REVIEW. Impromptu pour le Pianoforte, composé par Frédéric Chopin”, *MW*, 16 July 1840, p. 45.

only to satisfy the demands of fashion! There are fantasias in abundance. Why does Kalkbrenner not think of the dignified forms of sonatas etc.?”⁹⁷

But such relatively mild exhortations often turned serious. Those virtuosi who composed “merely” virtuosic music so as to make money, implicitly violating Hegel’s injunction that art be not subjected to “pecuniary gain”, were dealt with much more harshly, complete with accusations of “prostituting” music, accusations of the kind we already saw leveled at itinerant virtuosi, the “fallen angels” of music toward the end of Chapter Two. Thus the unsigned reviewer of one of Czerny’s countless sets of piano etudes (this one was the hyper-prolific composer’s Op. 500) for the *Neue Zeitschrift* accused him of a “lack of character, vain aspirations, unworthy view of art”, of pursuing, like a theater actor, nothing higher than fame, and finally, of “demoralizing youth”, by making his pupils into “golden calves” and not “priests of the divine in art”;⁹⁸ note here the Schellingian romantic dichotomy between the Israelites’ lapse into paganism (the “golden calves”) and the idea of art as religion (the “priests of the divine in art”). The same journal published a lengthy satirical piece on “Thalberg’s Concerts”, in which the pianist-composer is ridiculed for caring for money only; the article ends by likening Thalberg to a “bourgeois, pleased by winning a game of dominoes at the coffeehouse”.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ [Unsigned], “Recensionen. Compositionen für Pianoforte. F. Kalkbrenner.”, *AMZ*, 2 February 1841, p. 95: “Warum nur Kalkbrenner, der früher einer höheren Richtung nachstrebte, doch den Forderungen der Mode so sehr zu Gefallen lebt! Phantasieen gibt es in Ueberfülle. Warum denkt Kalkbrenner nicht wieder an die gediegenen Formen der Sonaten u. s. w.?”

⁹⁸ [Unsigned], “Pianoforte-Schulen.”, *NZM*, 16 April 1851, pp. 123–25: “Dies ist die Gesinnungslosigkeit, das eitle Trachten, die unwürdige Ansicht von der Kunst, die sich allerwärts im Buche kund giebt, vorzugsweise aber da hervortritt, wo es galt, an die Würde und Hoheit derselben zu mahnen. [...] Nach Art der Schauspieler brillante Abgänge liebend, glaubte er nicht höher greifen zu können, als wenn er sein Werk mit der Unsterblichkeit schlösse, nicht mit der Unsterblichkeit der Kunst, sondern mit der des Künstlerruhmes. [...] Also nicht Priester des Göttlichen in der Kunst, denen Hingebung die höchste und letzte Pflicht trachtet er aus seinen Zöglingen zu machen, sondern goldene Kälber, denen er mit salbungsreichen Ernste als letztes Ziel ihres Strebens in der Ferne das Volk zeigt, welches götzendienerisch um sie herumtanzet. Das ist Demoralisation der Jugend”.

⁹⁹ [Unsigned], “Thalberg’s Concerte.”, *NZM*, 27 May 1842, p. 172: “[...] vergnügt wie ein Bürger, der im Kaffeehause eine Partie Domino gewonnen”.

Ironically, even Liszt, whom one could easily criticize along the same lines, deplored what he saw as a wholesale commodification of the arts, in his famous “Lettre d’un bachelier ès-musique”:

What do we typically see in our days? Sculptors? No, manufacturers of sculptures. Painters? No, manufacturers of paintings. Musicians? No, manufacturers of music; in short, there are *artisans* everywhere, but no *artists*. And that is cruel pain for those who are born with the self-pride and wild independence of the true children of art.¹⁰⁰

Of course, we are meant to infer that Liszt is one of those gifted, wildly independent and for that reason suffering children.

What these writers were reacting against (even when they profited from it, as Liszt did) was what French composer and critic Amédée Méreaux diagnosed in an 1845 issue of the *Revue et Gazette* as the “competitiveness and mercantilism” of modern music, which “too frequently replaced true merit and conscience”.¹⁰¹ As we saw in the Introduction, a key purpose of the philosophic conception of music as aesthetically autonomous was to construct a domain of life supposedly impervious to the pervasive, devaluing impact of market forces: unlike a mere commodity, aesthetically autonomous music was perceived as having an inherent value of its own, not an exchange value, much like the free subject was posited as appreciable in itself. And as usual, virtuosity ends up on the wrong side of the debate: instead of serving the art of music, the above-quoted critics tell us, it subjects music to the altogether base purposes of “pursuing, like a theater actor, nothing higher than fame” and “pecuniary gain”. In virtuosity, as it were, philosophy meets economy; through virtuosic performance, public and paid, Music becomes

¹⁰⁰ F. Liszt, “Lettre d’un bachelier ès-musique”, *RGMP*, 16 July 1837, p. 340: “Aussi que voyons-nous le plus habituellement de nos jours ? Des statuaires ? non, des fabricants de statues. Des peintres ? non, des fabricants de tableaux. Des musiciens ? non, des fabricants de musique ; partout des *artisans* enfin, nulle part des *artistes*. Et c’est encore là une souffrance cruelle pour celui qui est né avec l’orgueil et l’indépendance sauvage des vrais enfants de l’art”.

¹⁰¹ Amédée Méreaux, “Revue critique.”, *RGMP*, 12 January 1845, pp. 12–13: “A notre époque où l’art, comme la littérature, se jette en moule, où la concurrence et le mercantilisme remplacent trop fréquemment le mérite réel et la conscience [...]”.

music, *Tonkunst* becomes *Musik*, in other words, music as a metaphysical conception degenerates into a commodity, a product of a commodified cultural practice. The philosophical narrative of music crashes into the crudeness of music's historical-materialist empirical reality.

By contrast, those composers who were deemed the true “priests of the divine in art” received commensurate approbation. One such figure was the French violinist-composer Charles Baillot, whom the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* honored with an eight-page biography written by Harry Hoertel—a token of respect that the journal did not extend to many musicians. Hoertel here describes Baillot as one who saw “*the fantasia*, this scourge of art, arise, escalate, even threaten to bring everything under its dominion” and “arose against it [...] with the tenacity of an unswerving belief”.¹⁰² At times, though, even a fantasia could receive some praise, provided that the reviewer could defend it as something more than a “mere” fantasia; such was the case with Stephen Heller’s Piano Fantasia, Op. 54, in an 1846 *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* review signed only “A. K.”. “Due to its strong construction, planned composition”, the reviewer writes, “this piece of music could at least bear a title other than that of fantasia, under which so many composers today unite incoherent fragments”.¹⁰³ Following a quasi-analytical description of the piece meant to demonstrate its structural complexity and thus prove that it is indeed, unusually, a praiseworthy fantasia, “A. K.” implies a broader conclusion about virtuosic music in general: “The whole is no ordinary virtuosic piece; it has more content and is not at all

¹⁰² Harry Hoertel, “Baillot.”, *AMZ*, 26 October 1842, pp. 841–49: “Er sah *die fantasia*, diese Geißel der Kunst, entstehen, um sich greifen, ja drohen, Alles unter ihre Botmässigkeit zu bringen, und wenn er gegen sie aufstand, so geschah dies nur, indem er sich mit der Beharrlichkeit einer unerschütterlichen Ueberzeugung, durch sein Beispiel sowohl, als dur die herrlichen Vorschriften seiner Méthode nouvelle, darselben entgensetzte”.

¹⁰³ A. K., “Recensionen.”, *AMZ*, 15 July 1846, p. 470: “Diesen Musikstück könnte, bei seiner festen Construction, seiner planmässigen Anlage, allenfalls einen anderen Titel als den der Fantasie, worunter so viele heutige Componisten zusammenhanglose Fragmente vereinigen, vertragen”.

calculated towards quick amusement”.¹⁰⁴ It seems as though critics like “A. K.” regarded not only the fantasia as a major virtuosic genre, but also all of virtuosity as simply incompatible with aesthetically worthy music.

Other major virtuosic genres received their fair share of criticism, too. Alongside the fantasia, perhaps the most maligned of these were the variations. The unsigned *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* correspondent from Prague explicitly likens the contemporary variations to that most corrupt of genres, the fantasia: “In the latest Babylonian confusion of the musical art, the variations have often strayed towards the character of the fantasia, ostentatiously trying to present to us a potpourri as a fantasia”.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, the reviewer of some variations by Henri Herz in the comparatively radical *Neue Zeitschrift* goes so far as to assert that no other genre has produced “more stupor” and that “one can hardly grasp the poverty, which blossoms here from the ground, and the vulgarity, which is not even ashamed of itself anymore”.¹⁰⁶ A ridiculing critique of Herz and his variations then duly follows. A couple of variations by the French pianist and piano-maker Camille Pleyel fare no better at the hands of an anonymous reviewer in London’s *Harmonicon*: one “has no quality to distinguish it from the mass of common-place matter which annually comes from the hands of the engraver, and finally passes into those of the cheesemonger”, the other “may be described in nearly the same terms. We rarely now see the

¹⁰⁴ “Recensionen.”: “Das ganze ist kein gewöhnliches Virtuosenstück, es hat mehr Inhalt und ist durchaus nicht auf flüchtige Unterhaltung berechnet”.

¹⁰⁵ [Unsigned], “Nachrichten. Prag.”, *AMZ*, 13 January 1836, p. 25: “In der neuesten babylonischen Verwirrung der musikalischen Kunst verirrt sich die Variation aber eben so oft in den Charakter der Phantasie, als sich uns dagegen ein Potpourri prahlden als Phantasie darstellen will”.

¹⁰⁶ [Unsigned], “Variationen für Pianoforte.”, *NZM*, 23 August 1836, p. 63: “Denn gewiß ist in keinem Genre unsrer Kunst mehr Stümperhaftes zu Tag gefordert worden—und wird es auch noch. Von der armseligkeit, wie sie hier aus dem Grunde blöhr, von dieser Gemeinheit, die sich gar nicht mehr schämt, hat man kaum einen Begriff”.

word *variations*, without suspecting that the goddess of dulness has had some share in the work”.¹⁰⁷

The piano etude, also a major virtuosic genre, was not spared either. Thus the unsigned *Neue Zeitschrift* reviewer of Thalberg’s twelve etudes, Op. 26, “cannot attach any more value to such pieces than to the commonest of songs”, since “an artwork requires more” than just technical skill. Like most contemporary works in that genre, the critic continues, Thalberg’s etudes bring nothing new in the way of compositional invention; since pleasing his audiences is his only goal, perhaps Thalberg simply cannot compose otherwise.¹⁰⁸ But just as some fantasias could attract critical approbation despite their suspect generic designation, as we saw in the case of Stephen Heller’s fantasia above, so some critics kept an open mind to the etude, too. One of them was Schumann’s friend, the composer and critic Oswald Lorenz, who wrote for the *Neue Zeitschrift* a mostly positive review of Charles de Bériot’s Six Brilliant Etudes, Op. 16. Lorenz thus asserts that “every genre is good, except the tedious”, even the etude, provided that it have its own, autonomous aesthetic worth as a work of art and not merely serve as a tool for practice or virtuosic display.¹⁰⁹ Since Bériot’s studies, in Lorenz’s opinion especially nos. 1, 2, and 5, fulfilled those criteria, the *Neue Zeitschrift* duly rewarded them with a positive review.

Whereas these small virtuosic genres received the bulk of critical scorn, the concerto, the other major “big” genre of virtuosic music, did not share the sonata’s prestige. A good example of the critical reception of the concerto is Schumann’s signed substantial article solely devoted to the genre, published in early 1839. He begins by noting the continuous “development” of piano

¹⁰⁷ [Unsigned], “[...] A National Danish Air with Variations for the Piano-Forte, by Camille Pleyel [...] 3. “*Di tanti palpiti*”, arranged with Variations for the Piano-Forte, by Camille Pleyel [...]”, *The Harmonicon*, April 1826, p. 75.

¹⁰⁸ [Unsigned], “Etuden für das Pianoforte.”, *NZM*, 11 August 1837, p. 47.

¹⁰⁹ O. L. [Oswald Lorenz], “Für Violine. **Ch. de Bériot**, 6 brillante Etuden für die Violine mit willkürlicher Begleitung des Pianoforte.”, *NZM*, 6 March 1840, pp. 78–79.

music, due to the preponderance of talented pianist-composers, such as Bach, Handel, Mozart, and Beethoven, and also owing to the more recent technological perfection of the instrument itself. However, he then argues that these developments have had an undesirable effect on the modern piano concerto, demonstrable in the ever looser bond between the soloist and the orchestra. We must wait, Schumann concludes with resignation, “for a genius who will show us a new, brilliant way to reunite the orchestra with the piano”.¹¹⁰ Still, in the very next sentence, even though he is writing an article on the concerto, Schumann manages to land a casual slap over the smaller forms, too, the face of contemporary virtuosity:

One thing, however, may we at least ask from the young composers: that they substitute that earnest and worthy concerto form with earnest and worthy solo pieces, not with caprices or variations, but with beautifully rounded, fully characterized allegro movements, which one could at least play as the opening of a concert.¹¹¹

Until such time, Schumann concludes, we will have to resort to the old concerti of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, and a few encouraging recent specimens, such as the “recent concerti of **J. Moscheles** and **F. Mendelssohn-Bartholdy**” (emphasis in the original), that is, Moscheles’s eighth piano concerto (“Pastorale”) in D major, Op. 96 (1838) and Mendelssohn’s second piano concerto in D minor, Op. 40 (1837). Interestingly, Schumann does not mention any of Chopin’s music for piano and orchestra (including the two concerti), despite his well-publicized respect for the Polish composer.

¹¹⁰ R. Schumann, “Das Clavier-Concert.”, *NZM*, 4 January 1839, pp. 5–7: “Und so müssen wir getrost den Genius abwarten, der uns in neuer glänzender Weise zeigt, wie das Orchester mit dem Clavier zu verbinden sei, daß der am Clavier herrschende den Reichthum seines Instruments und seiner Kunst entfalten könne, während daß des Orchester dabei mehr als das bloße Zusehen habe und mit seinen mannichfaltigen Charakteren die Scene kunstvoller durchwebe”.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*: “Eines aber könnten wir billig von den jüngeren Componisten verlangen: daß sie uns als Ersatz für jene ernste und würdige Concertform, ernste und würdige Solostücke gäben, keine Capricen, keine Variationen, sondern schön abgeschlossene charaktervolle Allegrosätze, die man allenfalls zur Eröffnung eines Concertes spielen könnte”.

But critics reserved their harshest treatment for the arguably most virtuosic genre of all: the improvisation. An indispensable trade for every virtuoso, especially for revered German keyboard virtuosos such as C. P. E. Bach, his father, and the long line of his venerable German models (most notably Georg Böhm, Dietrich Buxtehude, and Johann Adam Reincken), not to mention Mozart and Beethoven, by the 1830s, at least as far as most contemporary critics were concerned, improvisation had become suspect, as merely a vehicle for the self-display of “empty” virtuosity with no perceivable musical structure to uphold it. By contrast, as Mary Sue Morrow has demonstrated, not only was C. P. E. Bach not criticized for improvising, he was praised for it and, moreover, in his case such criticism would have been unfair, as his surviving fantasias (those he wrote down), with their carefully woven tonal structures, show.¹¹² But for C. P. E. Bach and his contemporaries, including Kant, music was still inseparable from musical performance, as we saw in Chapter One, which made it entirely permissible to blend composition and performance the way C. P. E. Bach did. But this was not so for his nineteenth-century successors.

In the case of Liszt and his rivals, the fairness of the criticism leveled at their improvisations is difficult to assess, because those were seldom written down and most of them are therefore lost. But whether that criticism was fair or not is beside the point. What matters in the present context are the terms of the criticism, as in the criticism of Thalberg’s and Chopin’s sonatas. For improvisation, for long a mainstay of instrumental virtuosity, was devalued precisely as the polar opposite of order, epitomized in the sonata; crucially, improvisation appeared to allow the irreducibly sensuous, bodily, and therefore, as we saw in Chapter Two, suspect act of performance to encroach on the preserve of the rational and thus privileged art of

¹¹² Morrow 1997, especially pp. 45–65 and 99–133.

composition.¹¹³ A work of music, say a fugue or a sonata, composed according to the rational principles of musical construction and thus autonomous (literally “self-ruled”) and independent of performance could symbolize, as we saw in Chapter One, the rational and autonomous human subject, not enslaved to its bodily existence. But in improvisation, music appears to come not from the mind but from the virtuosic body itself; worse still, unlike “properly” composed music, it is not fixed in score, dies as soon as the last note is sounded, and thus seems even more ephemeral than the body that produces it. Improvisation allows the virtuoso to shine as an individual endowed with amazing skill, but only at the expense of the aesthetic autonomy of *Tonkunst*, the rational, disembodied art of music.

At any rate, that appears to have been the thinking behind much of contemporary criticism leveled at improvisation. The unsigned correspondent from Berlin for the *Revue musicale*, reviewing an 1828 Hummel recital in that city, faithfully transmits the predominantly negative stance on improvising in contemporary criticism:

We must say it: although this virtuoso’s talent is of a character almost always to disarm the critics, it is no less true that we must deplore the usage of improvisation by pianists today and the error in which they fall more or less voluntarily. An improvisation once used to be a free fantasy of the imagination, a genuinely spontaneous creation by the artist; nowadays, it is a series of more or less complicated embroideries on a well-known theme, most often on a popular aria.¹¹⁴

The reviewer is at least partly right, inasmuch as most of these improvised “fantasias” were indeed based on whatever happened to be the most popular arias of the most popular operas at the moment, such as Meyerbeer’s *Robert le diable* or *Les Huguenots*. That virtuosi typically

¹¹³ Richard Leppert offers a useful discussion of improvisation in Leppert 1992, p. 117.

¹¹⁴ [Unsigned], “Nouvelles étrangères, Berlin, 29 mars”, *RM*, April 1828, p. 262: “On doit le dire : quoique le talent de ce virtuose soit de nature à désarmer presque toujours la critique, il n’en est pas moins vrai qu’on doit déplorer l’usage que font de l’improvisation les pianistes d’à présent, et l’erreur dans laquelle ils tombent tous plus ou moins volontairement. Une improvisation était autrefois une fantaisie libre de l’imagination, une véritable création spontanée de l’artiste ; aujourd’hui, c’est une suite de broderies plus ou moins compliquées sur un thème des plus connus, le plus souvent sur des airs populaires”.

chose such material to improvise on is understandable, because that is what the public's insatiable appetite for the most popular operas of the day demanded. What most critics complained about, though, was not so much the choice of themes as the (perceived) lack of thought in putting them together. Thus the unsigned *Musical World* reviewer of one of Moscheles and Ernst's joint recitals in London in 1844 confesses that “(entre nous, reader,) we would not give a pin to hear the best extemporaneous performance that was ever extemporaneously performed;—music without *thought* has no interest for us”.¹¹⁵ As a result of this overall hostility to improvisation, virtuosi, even the most popular ones, were often upbraided for as little as including improvisation in their recitals at all. Thus the *Revue musicale* reviewer of an 1829 Liszt recital, signed only “E. F.”—possibly Edouard Fétis at a very young age—cries out in frustration:

Oh, Mr. Liszt! Why haunt us with your endless improvisations! When one has a talent such as yours, is it not unfortunate to see it wasted on ridiculous things that must bring you criticism from every man of taste. [...] There were a few fortunate ideas in what you played, but drowned in a deluge of notes.¹¹⁶

Similarly, the unsigned reviewer of an 1833 Henri Herz recital at Boulogne for the same journal praises the pianist but then asks: “But why did Mr. Herz, who had so far pleased a good part of the audience, have the unfortunate idea to play an improvisation? Nowadays, improvisations astonish no one who knows their secret”.¹¹⁷ Thus improvising, longtime a staple of virtuosity in concert, fell as a victim to a changed aesthetics of music, which more and more submitted the

¹¹⁵ [Unsigned], “Miscellaneous. Concert of Moscheles and Ernst”, *MW*, 13 June 1844, pp. 197–98.

¹¹⁶ E. F., “Nouvelles de Paris. Soirée musicale donnée par M. Oury, dans les salons de M. Dietz, le mardi 15 décembre”, *RM*, 18 December 1829, p. 496: “Ah ! M. List [*sic*]! pourquoi nous poursuivre avec vos éternelles improvisations ! quand on a un talent comme le vôtre, n'est-pas fâcheux de le voir prodiguer ainsi sur des choses ridicules qui doivent vois attirer la blâme de tous les hommes de goût. [...] il y avait quelques idées heureuses dans ce que vous avez joué, mais noyées dans un déluge de notes”.

¹¹⁷ [Unsigned], “Nouvelles de Départemens. Boulogne.”, *RM*, 31 August 1833, p. 247: “Mais pourquoi M. Herz que s'était fait jusque là une belle part de mérites dans l'opinion de ses auditeurs, a-t-il eu la malheureuse idée de jouer une improvisation ? Les improvisations n'étonnent plus personne aujourd'hui qu'on en sait se secret”.

subjectivity of the performer to that of the musical artwork itself, embodied in its formal structure.

While improvisation was roundly condemned, chamber music was, alongside the sonata, probably the only genre that critics unanimously held in the highest esteem. Whereas the designation “chamber music” had by this time already exchanged and accumulated a number of often conflicting meanings over a period of some two hundred years, reviews show that by the early nineteenth century, “chamber music” had acquired its modern meaning of soloistic ensemble music involving at least two performers, whereby “no two players play the same music at the same time”.¹¹⁸ It is fairly well known that already by the late eighteenth century chamber music had come to connote “a repertory grounded in the intellect”, seen as “the epitome” of “serious music”.¹¹⁹ Therefore, it enjoyed an extremely high level of cultural prestige in contemporary European critical discourse of music and the criticism of virtuosity was no exception in that regard. Considered intimate and intellectual, for a large number of nineteenth-century composers and critics alike “chamber music became [...] the most important vehicle for musical art”.¹²⁰ Within this highly revered musical practice, the pride of place belonged to the string quartet, “widely regarded as the supreme form of chamber music”;¹²¹ alongside the symphony and the sonata, it became one of the three central genres of nineteenth-century art music.¹²² A genre for *Kenner* and not *Liebhaber*, the string quartet has served many a composer, since Haydn’s Op. 9 (1769), as a testing ground of sorts for the most ambitious and experimental solutions in abstract composition, notably, of course, Beethoven. It was a genre of abstract,

¹¹⁸ Baron 1998, p. 6.

¹¹⁹ Bashford 2001.

¹²⁰ Baron 1998, p. 297.

¹²¹ Eisen 2001.

¹²² Dahlhaus 1989, p. 78

aesthetically autonomous music *par excellence* and also, once could say, a social ideal of a middle- and upper-class cultural practice, whereby four equally proficient instrumentalists blend together in a harmonious whole, yet without sacrificing any of their individuality. By the 1840s, when “there were chamber music concerts in many European centres”, the string quartet’s august position had been secured.¹²³

The string quartet’s prestige is likewise conspicuous in much of contemporary criticism of virtuosity. Thus Henri Blanchard, for instance, lauding the first concert of the journal that employed him, juxtaposes the big public concerts of earlier times with the more intimate gatherings of chamber-music lovers, to highlight the greater merits of the latter:

The time of monster concerts is past: we do not like the tumultuous musical assemblies anymore, the noisy, stunning festivals. These exceptional manifestations, this pomp of art, almost always leave something to be desired: to the true connoisseur, they do not bring the sensation of a quartet by Haydn, Mozart, or Beethoven, *la musica di camera*, as the Italians say, this music of close intimacy that permits you to grasp all the nuances, all the delicacies of harmony and the composer’s thought.¹²⁴

Five years later, Blanchard will again write in the same journal that the “string quartet is the source of all good chamber music, and even of well-written orchestral music”.¹²⁵

It might be objected here that the reception of the string quartet and other genres of chamber music bears little relevance to the reception of virtuosity, since chamber music is by definition un-virtuosic, perhaps even anti-virtuosic: “The purpose of the music is to provide

¹²³ Bashford 2001.

¹²⁴ Henri Blanchard, “Premier concert de la « Gazette musicale »”, *RGMP*, 5 December 1841, p. 544: “Le temps des concerts monstres est passé : on n’aime plus les tumultueuses réunions musicales, les festivals bruyants, étourdissants. Ces manifestations exceptionnelles, ces pompes de l’art sont presque toujours incomplète d’ailleurs : elles ne valent pas, pour le vrai connaisseur, l’audition d’un quatuor de Haydn, de Mozart ou de Beethoven, *la musica di camera*, comme disent les Italiens, cette musique de presque intimité qui vous permet de saisir toutes les nuances, toutes les finesses de l’harmonie et de la pensée du compositeur”.

¹²⁵ Henri Blanchard, “Préface des concerts de la saison et coup d’œil sur les violonistes.”, *RGMP*, 1 November 1846, p. 349: “Le quatuor pour instruments à corde est le fond de toute bonne musique de chambre, et même de toute partition à grand orchestre bien écrite”.

serious ensemble, not the virtuosic member of one member of the ensemble”.¹²⁶ While much of standard-repertory chamber music does require perhaps only a little less than virtuosic proficiency from those who would perform it adequately, it still does not provide one with an opportunity to shine by herself, as virtuosi did, merely accompanied by another two, three or however many performers; rather, chamber music and string quartets in particular were traditionally seen as more akin to a conversation among mutually respecting friends.¹²⁷ But that is precisely the point here. Critics of virtuosity valorized chamber music precisely because it required virtuosi to keep their virtuosity at bay, to work with their partners, not over and above them. In other words, chamber music was valorized not only as intellectual, abstract, and autonomous, but also, and equally so, as inherently anti-virtuosic. In chamber music, at least when properly performed, virtuosity (that is, performance in all its irreducible sensuousness) could not eclipse the work, the product of the rational, intellectual art of musical composition. In chamber, the aesthetic autonomy of music was secure and along with it, the conception of free, rational subjectivity that it symbolized. The virtuoso could not threaten it, with his virtuosity, grounded in the body; rather, he was obliged to submit to it, sacrificing his virtuosity on the altar of *Tonkunst*.

Accordingly, when virtuosi took part in performances of chamber music, they were praised precisely inasmuch as they kept their virtuosity under the lid, as it were. Thus the *Revue et Gazette* reviewer of an 1840 Paris chamber concert, signed only “A. M.”, singles out “the

¹²⁶ Baron 1998, p. 6.

¹²⁷ Much scholarly work has been done in recent times to historicize, problematize, and critique those received notions of chamber music in general and the string quartet in particular. For instance, Nancy November has shown that as late as 1800 there was still no unified conception of chamber music, which was in French music aesthetics mostly seen as a tableau, a sonic-visual performative event, whereas German theorists viewed it as an essentially intellectual and purely musical anti-display genre, a *Cabinetstück*; November blames the prevalence of this latter conception for what she sees as modern scholarship’s rather narrow view of chamber music. See November 2008, 2004, and 2003; see also Webster 2005 and 1974.

performers' complete self-effacement to let the merit of the idea resurface" as "the highest degree of their talent".¹²⁸ Similarly, the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung's* unsigned correspondent from Vienna reports in 1839 that the Norwegian violin virtuoso Ole Bull, who seldom harvested positive reviews in this or any other major music periodical, surprised everyone with his "sacrificing, self-denying" performance of Mozart's "D-minor quartet".¹²⁹ Conversely, whenever a violinist failed to keep his virtuosity at bay in the performance of a chamber work, the critics were quick to censure him for it, even if it meant criticizing an otherwise favorite artist. Such a fate befell the Bohemian violinist Heinrich Ernst, otherwise a darling of German and English criticism, after a quartet recital he gave in Leipzig in the fall of 1844. The critic for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, possibly Ludwig Rellstab, asserts that in quartets, "the first violin must not ever be the main part or the solo instrument" (thus ignoring, perhaps deliberately, the entire subgenre of the *quatuor brillant*) and blames Ernst for forsaking that principle, thereby misdirecting the audience's attention onto himself and away from the work.¹³⁰ The reviewer then concludes that this once again proves that "even the greatest violin virtuosi are not always the finest quartet players as well", "the reasons for which are easy to find and have often been expounded".¹³¹ "L. R." does not tell us what those well-known reasons are,

¹²⁸ A. M., "De la musique de chambre. Première matinée de MM. Alard et Chevillard.", *RGMP*, 16 January 1840, p. 40: "le plus haut degré de talent pour les exécutants est de s'effacer complètement pour faire ressortir le mérite de la pensée".

¹²⁹ [Unsigned], "Nachrichten. Wien.", *AMZ*, 14 August 1839, p. 647: "er mit aufopfernder Selbstverleugnung diesen Tonschöpfungen angedeihen liess". The reviewer does not specify whether it was K173 or K421 that Ole Bull performed.

¹³⁰ L. R., "Nachrichten. Leipzig.", *AMZ*, 20 November 1844, pp. 786–90: "In Quartetten soll zwar die erste Geige keinesweges eine Principalstimme, ein Soloinstrument sein [...] Es war auch wohl mehr der grössere Ausdruck des geistigen Erfassens der Composition, der uns als zum Ideal eines Quartettspielers gehörig vorschwebte, und den wir deutlicher zu erkennen gewünscht hätten, als das extensive Geltendmachen der Rolle, welche die erste Violine im Streichquartett zu übernehmen hat".

¹³¹ "Nachrichten. Leipzig.", p. 789: "Und in Bezug hierauf ist die schon oft gemachte Wahrnehmung noch unwiderlegt geblieben, dass nämlich gerade die anerkannt grössten Violinvirtuosen nicht immer auch die ausgezeichnetsten Quartettspieler sind. Die Gründe dazu sind leicht zu finden und schon zu oft erörtert worden, als dass eine Wiederholung derselben hier angemessen sein könnte".

but Berthold Damcke, composer and the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*'s correspondent from Saint Petersburg, reviewing the Belgian violinist Henri Vieuxtemps's quartet performance in Russia's Imperial capital in 1848, goes into some more detail:

Vieuxtemps is what one so seldom finds in great virtuosi, an exquisite quartet player. He knows how to keep his virtuosity mostly within appropriate bounds [...] and is at the same time such a well-educated and thinking artist (again a *cosa rara* for a virtuoso!), that he knows how to pursue the direction of any composition down to its deepest fibers and bring its gentlest nuances to clear light.¹³²

This kind of casual disparaging of virtuosi (“a well-educated and thinking artist”—“a *cosa rara* for a virtuoso!”) is nothing new by this point, of course. What is more important to note here is this and other critics' valorization of chamber music precisely on account of its perceived incompatibility with virtuosity.

Another reason for the valuation of chamber music was, as noted above, its status as the intellectual music *par excellence*. As such, it came to be seen as a prime locus for *Tonkunst*, on a par with the sonata, as discussed in the preceding section, or perhaps even more so than the sonata, inasmuch as a compositional effort in that genre, such as Thalberg's, as we saw, could still be motivated by the composer's desire to showcase his virtuosity, whereas in chamber music the virtuoso had to defer to his partners and ultimately to the work itself. Decidedly anti-virtuosic, chamber music could thus be valorized as both abstract and autonomous music *par excellence* and at once as the most remote from virtuosity. As such, chamber music arguably came closest to an ideal embodiment of *Tonkunst* and, by extension, of the free, rational subject that *Tonkunst* symbolized. By contrast, the genres of virtuosity, first and foremost the seemingly

¹³² B. Damcke, “Nachrichten. Aus St. Petersburg.,” *AMZ*, 12 January 1848, p. 23: “*Vieuxtemps* ist, was man bei grossen Virtuosen so selten findet, ein ausgezeichneter Quartettspieler. Er weiss seine Virtuosität meistens in den rechten Schranken zu halten [...] und ist zugleich ein so gründlich gebildeter und denkender Künstler (wieder bei einem Virtuosen eine *cosa rara*!), dass er der Tendenz einer jeden Composition bis in die tiefsten Fasern zu folgen versteht und zu die leiseste Nüance zur klaren Anschaulichkeit bringt”.

irrational and irreducibly corporeal art of improvisation,¹³³ had to be condemned on account of their perceived incompatibility with those aesthetic-philosophic ideals, dismissed, as they were, as less than autonomous, guided by such extra-musical concerns as programs and showcasing virtuosity. And implicitly at least, with its genres was virtuosity condemned, too.

“Strong conceptions” and “mighty frames”: Virtuosity in Composition and Canon-Formation

The fate of virtuosity in composition was sealed in the 1830s and '40s by the emergence of what J. Peter Burkholder has termed “the historicist mainstream”,¹³⁴ or, in Lydia Goehr’s famous phrase, the founding of the “imaginary museum of musical works”—the growing critical power of an incipient canon of a few dead composers and their works. Of course, as William Weber and others have shown, canons and canonicity were far from a new thing in European music by 1830; in England Handel’s oratorios had been canonized since the 1740s, in France Lully’s *tradédies en musique* since the 1670s.¹³⁵ But neither the reverence of Handel and later Haydn in England, nor that of Lully and Rameau in France, had come close to the mythical proportions that the worship of Beethoven was reaching in both countries during the 1830s, no less than in German-speaking Europe. The apotheosis of Beethoven made it increasingly difficult for virtuoso composers to be recognized as both original and worthy successors, measured as they

¹³³ Carl Dahlhaus sees the triumph of “logical” forms over the “skeletal” technique of improvisation as a major factor in the demise of Lisztian virtuosity around 1850: “Once the dialectic of predefined continuity and improvised, or quasi-improvised, momentary effects gave way to thematic manipulation as the principal arbiter in the evolution of instrumental music, any form of virtuosity nourished on the legacy of improvisation was threatened in its very essence”; see Dahlhaus 1989, p. 138.

¹³⁴ Burkholder 1983.

¹³⁵ For instance, see Weber 1989, 1994, and 1999; Bergeron and Bohlman (eds.) 1992; and Citron 1993, pp. 1–44.

were with such an outsized yardstick. Thus in a rather amusing instance, the unsigned *Musical World* reviewer of an 1837 London concert of an unspecified “much-talked-of posthumous quartett [*sic*]” by Beethoven is happier to doubt himself than the great master:

With all its many phrases and passages of distinguished beauty, we must honestly confess, that hitherto we have not been able to perceive any distinctness or continuity of design in this singular composition. The fault probably lies with ourselves, and most willingly would we prefer it should be so, than that a great man should underwrite himself.¹³⁶

As we saw above, however, the journal was far less charitable to the compositional idiosyncrasies of Chopin and other contemporary virtuoso composers.

The prevailing feeling among critics was that few contemporary composers, if any, lived up to the standard set, in critical opinion, by Beethoven. For instance, that view is implicit but clear enough in the following assessment from Fétis:

To be an artist following one’s heart and despite all, to stay true to one’s mission received from nature, one needs a strong, passionate soul, foreign to the needs of luxury, to the fantasies of fashion; one must live in art and hold it above all else. Beethoven was placed in such conditions; but Beethovens are so few! The best-skilled, the most apt have followed the flow, and instrumental music has been shrinking every day for thirty years.¹³⁷

Some virtuosi, such as, most notoriously, Liszt, knew how to harness Beethoven’s high standing for their own purposes. For instance, in “Another Few Words on the Subjection of Musicians”, a prequel of sorts to his famous “Lettre d’un bachelier ès-musique”, he thus “confesses”:

¹³⁶ [Unsigned], “Concerts. Quartet Concert”, *MW*, 17 March 1837, pp. 10–11.

¹³⁷ Fétis, “Revue critique.”, *RGMP*, 21 August 1836, pp. 296–97: “Pour être artiste selon son cœur et en dépit de tout, pour rester fidèle à sa mission, quand on en a reçu une de la nature, il faut une âme forte, passionnée, étrangère aux besoins du luxe, aux fantaisies de la mode ; il faut vivre dans l’art, et qu’il tienne lieu de tout. Beethoven était placé dans ces conditions ; mais il y a si peu de Beethoven ! Les plus habiles, les plus heureusement organisés ont suivi le torrent, et la musique instrumentale a été se rapetissant chaque jour depuis trente ans”.

Often, perceiving the inane silence that followed the performance of the most beautiful works by Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert and observing, on the other hand, the noisy transports caused by pitiable bagatelles, I wailed and despaired.¹³⁸

Pace Liszt, those “pitiable bagatelles” were usually his own. The story of Liszt’s shrewd programming practices, whereby he typically coupled Beethoven’s music with his own, has been told by Dana Gooley and James Deaville.¹³⁹ Liszt’s charity recitals for the sake of erecting a Beethoven monument in Bonn were likewise at least partly an exercise in self-promotion; if pronouncements from his friends at the *Revue et Gazette* and *La France musicale* are anything to go by, the exercise must have been a successful one. *La France musicale* thus wrote: “It required a full-hearted artist, a generous artist, Liszt, to come up with the idea of honoring that illustrious memory; without him, the little town of Bonn would have never dreamt of glorifying the immortal genius out in the open, under its gloomy skies”.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, *La France musicale*’s main rival commended Liszt for having, in addition to his admirable talent, “a noble heart” and “an exquisite taste”, manifest in programming works by Beethoven only.¹⁴¹

Occasionally, contemporary virtuoso composers were deemed worthy successors of the great. Thus Schumann, reviewing John Field’s “Nocturne pastorale” as “Eusebius”, honored the Irish composer along with Chopin as able carriers of music’s progress in the wake of Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, Bach, and Handel.¹⁴² But even in such cases, the praise could turn more

¹³⁸ F. Liszt, “Encore quelques mots sur la subalternité des musiciens.”, *RGMP*, 15 November 1835, p. 371: “Souvent, en m’apercevant de l’inepte silence qui suivait l’exécution des plus belles œuvres de Beethoven, de Mozart, de Schubert, et en observant d’autre part les bruyants transports qu’excitaient de misérables bagatelles, j’ai gémi et désespéré”.

¹³⁹ Gooley 2004, pp. 145–51 and Deuille 1997, p. 95.

¹⁴⁰ C. B., “Fêtes de Bonn. Monument de Beethoven.”, *FM*, 17 August 1845, p. 261: “Il a fallu qu’un artiste de cœur, un artiste généreux, Listz, vint donner l’idée d’honorer cette illustre mémoire ; sans lui, la petite ville de Bonn n’aurait jamais songé à glorifier l’immortel génie éclos sous son ciel ténébreux”.

¹⁴¹ K., “Concert de F. Liszt pour le monument de Beethoven.”, *RGMP*, 2 May 1841, pp. 247–48: “C’est que, voyez-vous, outre son admirable talent, possède encore un noble cœur. [...] Un goût exquis avait présidé au choix du programme, uniquement composé de morceaux de Beethoven”.

¹⁴² Eusebius [Robert Schumann], “John Field, Nocturne pastorale p. 1. Pfte.”, *NZM*, 27 June 1835, pp. 29–30.

demeaning than flattering. Thus the unsigned reviewer for Fétis's *Revue musicale* of an early Chopin recital in Paris, having noted the young pianist's remarkable originality, concludes that

This is not at all to say that Mr. Chopin is endowed with a mighty frame like that of Beethoven, or that in his music there are those strong conceptions that characterize that of the great man: Beethoven made piano music; but here I speak of pianists' music [...]¹⁴³

Chopin is here trampled underfoot by Beethoven's "mighty frame" and "strong conceptions"; Beethoven's is "la musique de piano", Chopin's merely "la musique des pianistes". Not just Chopin, but hardly any virtuoso composer stood a chance against such an outsized image of Beethoven. The works of Beethoven and, to a lesser extent, those of a few other canonized composers, were made to represent the pinnacle of art, its supposedly timeless and inherently worthy essence, and could therefore also be taken to symbolize a free subjectivity that transcends its fleeting bodily existence. No virtuoso could successfully compete with that metaphysical import of canonized music.

The devastating (for Chopin) comparison of the frail Polish composer with Beethoven's "mighty frame" also rings some pretty audible gender overtones, a staple of Chopin reception throughout the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth. That, however, is a topic for the following chapter. Before moving on to the impact of nineteenth-century gender ideologies on the reception of Chopin and other virtuosi, we must briefly summarize the major points made in the present chapter. In a nutshell, the overall conclusion would be that the critical reception of virtuosity in composition was determined by its perceived incompatibility with the philosophic conception of music as a rational, intellectual, and aesthetically autonomous art, symbolic of free

¹⁴³ [Unsigned], "Concert de M. Chopin de Varsovie.", *RM*, 3 March 1832, pp. 38–39: "Ce n'est point à dire que M. Chopin soit doué d'une organisation puissante comme celle de Beethoven, ni qu'il y ait dans la musique de ces fortes conceptions qu'on remarque dans celle de ce grand homme : Beethoven a fait de la musique de piano ; mais je parle ici de la musique des pianistes [...]"

subjectivity. First, we saw that that conception of music—*Tonkunst*—was very much current in contemporary journalist criticism of instrumental virtuosity. Then, we saw that virtuosic composition, just like virtuosic performance, was expected to embody individuality and originality, but only within certain bounds; violating those bounds typically invited censure and pathologization. Another topic shared with the reception of virtuosity in performance was the dichotomy between expression/expressivity in music and virtuosic technique, that is, virtuosity itself: while the notions of “expression” and “expressivity”, deliberately kept elusive, were valorized as guardians of the ineffable, human essence of music, virtuosic technique, and therefore also virtuosity itself, were portrayed as their mortal enemy. In addition to expression/expressivity, “sound” formal construction was also deployed to guard the aesthetic autonomy of music; that imperative was then used to bring the sheer bodily excess of virtuosity under rational control. In turn, the valorization of “sound formal construction” conditioned that of the sonata and chamber music, anti-virtuosic by default, and the devaluation of all the trademark genres of virtuosity, first and foremost the “lawless” pursuit of improvisation. Finally, the growing critical power of the musical canon—a repertory of works deemed timeless and as such arguably symbolic of transcendent subjectivity—dealt a fatal blow to virtuosity in composition, inasmuch as it grew increasingly hard not only for virtuosi but to composers in general to resist its stifling pressure. As if that were not enough, the few virtuose who dared to compose also had to contend with the even more formidable challenges of nineteenth-century gender ideologies. But that is a subject for the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER FOUR

GENDER AND THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF VIRTUOSITY

European nineteenth-century philosophy was a man's world, not only in terms of the gender identities of all the main thinkers, but also, more importantly, in terms of their conceptions of subjectivity, which was invariably, implicitly and explicitly, gendered male. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel explicitly restricts the real, *actual* subjectivity to men:

[O]ne sex remains identical with itself and does not advance to the contrast between universal and particular, whereas the other produces the unity of universal and particular through its own activity. Man and woman. The one remains in this totality, while in the other there is disunion, rupture, and the unity is brought about later. [...] This disunion, desire, and need to overcome them, fall to the man. Need, the struggle against the outer world fall to the man. [...] Strength, might, and power fall to the man, a universal that is willed, in contrast with which other individualities are related as merely singulars. [...] The objective undertaking befits the man. To this belongs the higher universality, the labor of spirit to know what is rational, and to realize the rational in the outer world. The conduct of the state is business of the man. This is the labor of spirit that brings the rational, the universal end to consciousness.¹

The quoted passage makes it clear that the striving, combative subjectivity of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* may only be male, even though Hegel does not explicitly specify its gender there (perhaps because he takes it for granted): only men get to engage the other (who is likewise gendered male), transcend that antagonism, and achieve self-identity, that is, synthesis with themselves in their *actual* subjectivity, whereas women remain trapped in their isolated and therefore unrealized subjectivity; in Hegel and beyond, “women have no place in the public sphere”.² Both in the quoted segment and, more explicitly, in his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel's

¹ Hegel 2007, pp. 100–101.

² Morgan 1999, p. 113. However, it must be noted here that a number of Hegel's feminist critics have attacked his gendering of the public/private binary; for instance, see Judith Butler's deconstructive point, made in her *Antigone's Claim*, that the supposedly masculine public sphere depends for its very existence on the abjected private sphere, constructed as feminine: “The public sphere, as I am calling it here, is called variably the community, government,

gendering of subjectivity enables him to rationalize men's monopoly on politics, philosophy, and the arts and sciences and, on the other hand, women's confinement to the family and domesticity in general.³

Likewise Schopenhauer, his hostility to Hegel notwithstanding, reserves the notion of genius, in his understanding the human subject's ability to transcend its subjectivity in aesthetic contemplation, to men: "Women may have great talent, but no genius, for they always remain subjective".⁴ In Christine Battersby's somewhat blunt formulation: "Genius, apparently, required a penis".⁵ Battersby perused a large number of key eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary and philosophical sources to demonstrate that the ruling contemporary conception of genius was far from gender-neutral: "The genius was a male—full of 'virile' energy—who *transcended* his biology".⁶ As we just saw, both Hegel and Schopenhauer, despite their differences, believed that only men could reach that transcendence; of course, according to Schopenhauer, that could only be a rather fleeting kind of self-transcendence on the part of the subject, whereas for Hegel, it was the lasting telos of the subject's progressive path of ever-decreasing sensuality, toward the total spirituality of absolute knowledge. But Battersby also points out that in the eighteenth century, no less than in the nineteenth, "genius was seen as a distinctively male form of mental

and the state by Hegel; it only acquires its existence through *interfering* with the happiness of the family; thus, it creates for itself 'an internal enemy—womankind in general. Womankind—the everlasting irony [in the life] of the community", Butler 2000, p. 35.

³ According to Ludmilla Jordanova, medicine and the natural sciences were at least as instrumental in rationalizing women's mandatory domesticity as philosophy was: "women's occupations were taken to be rooted in and a necessary consequence of their reproductive functions, teleologically understood in terms of roles rather than organs. Men's jobs were unrestricted. Women's capacity to bear and suckle children was taken to define their physical, psychological and social lives. Men were potential members of the broadest social and cultural groups, while women's sphere of action was the private arena of home and family. As wives and mothers, women's role in the family—the natural basis of social life—was central and its importance was registered in extensive contemporary debates on the subject"; see Jordanova 1989, p. 29.

⁴ Schopenhauer 1891, Vol. III, p. 159.

⁵ Battersby 1989, p. 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

strength”.⁷ For Kant, as much as for Hegel or Schopenhauer, “there could be nothing in any way female or effeminate about genius itself”.⁸ The notion of genius was thus marshaled to uphold “the belief in the natural differences and complementary roles of men and women”, which had, according to Christopher Parker “become the common sense of the middle class” by the 1830s.⁹ The reification of gender, in Joan Wallach Scott’s words “a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated”,¹⁰ served to restrict the domain of public, political, and military life, business, and the professions to men and to confine women to domesticity and the private sphere, in Hegel and beyond.

Much like Hegel’s account of subjectivity, instrumental¹¹ virtuosity of the first half of the nineteenth century was a man’s world, too.¹² Virtually all of the major and minor piano virtuosos were men, as were all the violin virtuosos without exception. For most of the nineteenth century (and the eighteenth and seventeenth, for that matter), the violin was simply off limits to women, in private and (especially) in public performance alike.¹³ Musicologists and other students of the nineteenth century have often noted that the violin was a forbidden instrument for women; Lawrence Kramer thus notes that even though “the violin in the nineteenth century, in a certain

⁷ Battersby 1989, p. 83.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁹ Parker 1995, p. 5.

¹⁰ Scott 1999, p. 45.

¹¹ As discussed in the Introduction, this dissertation concerns the critical reception of virtuosity in instrumental music only and not in opera, which has of course operated a rather different aesthetic and gender politics since its inception.

¹² See, though, Beatrix Borchard’s discussion in Borchard 2004. She mounts a compelling argument for regarding the virtuoso as a “feminine artistic type” due to the self-displaying inherent to all virtuosity, but argues that men like Paganini and Liszt, assisted by their male critics, successfully “usurped” virtuosity from women.

¹³ Steblin 1995 is a useful and informative survey of the gender stereotyping of musical instruments in Western culture from the Renaissance to the late nineteenth century. Steblin perused a wealth of iconographic (e.g., frescoes, manuscript miniature illuminations, paintings, sculptures, etc.) and textual documents (e.g., literature, treatises, reviews, etc.) to conclude that women’s associations with some instruments (such as the piano) and not others (e.g., the violin), with some patterns in the practice of music (such as private, amateur performance) and not others (e.g., composition and professional, public performance) served to bar women from any type of music-making that might connote independence (such as virtuosity) or cultural or political power (e.g., composing, running opera houses, concert series, music periodicals, etc.).

strain of throbbing lyricism, often represented feminine gracefulness, sentiment, or sensibility”, “it was considered indecent for women to play the instrument”.¹⁴ Maiko Kawabata, musicologist and an able violinist herself who has probably produced the most interesting work regarding violin virtuosity, similarly notes that the violin “had long been considered an ‘inappropriate’ instrument for a woman”, chiefly “because it was thought to compromise her decorum. Physical exertions that would have seemed natural, even desirable, among male performers were impermissible, transgressive when undertaken by females”.¹⁵

Pace Kramer, Kawabata convincingly argues that this was precisely *because* the violin was gendered feminine, that is, as Kramer puts it, because it “represented feminine gracefulness, sentiment, or sensibility”. To put it simply, nineteenth century’s mandatory heterosexuality made it inappropriate for a woman to play a “feminine” instrument:

Though known for centuries as the “king of instruments”, the violin in our period was widely viewed as a “feminine” instrument. How it switched genders is not known. Nevertheless, whether because of the soprano range of the instrument, or because of its curvy “feminine” form, the violin was often in metaphor a woman or girl. [...] The violin was understood as a feminine agent, responding to (if victimized by) masculine control. [...] The suggestion that “heroic” male violinists carried the implication of rampant heterosexuality is strengthened by observing that women’s performances carried taboo connotations of homosexuality [...] Women violinists battled against the perceived impropriety of publicly handling a symbolic feminine body (as well as a phallic object) and of the vigorous arm movements required to play.¹⁶

By extension, Kawabata continues, the spectacle of (masculine) virtuosity on the (feminine) violin could be seen as a thinly veiled pornographic staging of (heterosexual) intercourse and insemination, performed by a virile virtuoso on the curvaceous body of the violin, by means of the newly redesigned—and thus re-phallicized, as it were—concave “Cramer” bow:

¹⁴ Kramer 1997, p. 238.

¹⁵ Kawabata 2004, p. 105.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 104–105.

While the violin embodied a woman and “spoke” in her voice, it was the long, hard, straight bow, an instrument of male power and domination, that brought her to sound. The function of the bow deepens its comparison with the sword [...], the sword being a symbol of masculine (phallic) power and an instrument for inflicting harm. [...] It was as if the player inseminated the body of the violin by assaulting it with the bow. [...] The wooden box needed to give the illusion of “coming to life”, of being animated, for the image of the player’s virtuoso power to be sustained.¹⁷

In line with the dominant contemporary conception of genius as comprising both “masculine” (e.g., rational construction, epic narrativity, etc.) and “feminine” qualities (e.g., sensibility, lyrical expression, etc.) but always in a male subject,¹⁸ music in virtuosic performance on the violin might similarly be described as the offspring of the (heterosexual) marriage of the male violinist and his feminine instrument, which, of course, automatically barred women from violin virtuosity. Later, we will turn to some interesting questions that such male-centric and heterosexist conceptions of genius and musical performance pose regarding composition when undertaken by women and the hyper-masculine discourse around violin virtuosity. Before that, though, we need to take a look at the gender positioning of the piano.

A comparatively young instrument, the piano offers a markedly different picture regarding its gender positioning. The violin was and to a large extent still is a handmade product of craftsmanship; to that extent, it is a highly individualist instrument—many a violin is said to be endowed with a “soul” of its own, while some violins, like Paganini’s, were seen as (somewhat monstrous) outgrowths on the bodies of their virtuosic owners. By contrast, the piano was, as we know, seen as a machine and product not so much of craftsmanship, but of industrial design and mass production, even at this early stage of its history. As a machine, Noah Adams

¹⁷ Kawabata 2004, pp. 104–105.

¹⁸ Lawrence Kramer discusses this conception of genius as “a nineteenth-century cliché that defines the genius as a man whose rich humanity embraces a feminine aspect”; nonetheless, that bi-gender idea of genius was reserved for men: “There is no parallel category for women”, Kramer 1997, p. 63. For a feminist critique of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conceptions of genius, see Battersby 1989.

notes, “it lacks much personality”;¹⁹ furthermore, the gender of a large and unwieldy machine was not as obvious (to its nineteenth-century operators) as that of the high-pitched, fragile, and curvy violin. The gender ambivalence of the piano *qua* machine raises interesting questions regarding its relationship with early-nineteenth-century piano virtuosi and virtuose, which are addressed below. However, that ambivalence does not mean that the piano was not associated with one gender more than with the other: the instrument was closely associated with women. In Richard Leppert’s words, there was a “nearly universal association of the piano with women”.²⁰

But paradoxically, a vast majority of nineteenth-century virtuosi were men; in James Parakilas’s summary: “learning the piano has been like learning to cook: girls did it as a matter of course, whereas the relatively few boys who did it got the jobs and the glory. As a result, learning the piano has been a highly gender-specific activity, but specific to each gender in a different way”.²¹ The seeming paradox looks much less paradoxical when one remembers some of the basic tenets of nineteenth-century gender ideology in the West, some of which we already saw in Hegel above: the professional public sphere, including politics, business, artistic creativity, and, among other things, professional, public virtuosity, was reserved for men, whereas women were confined to domesticity in the guise of home-making, child-rearing, and a few species of “feminine accomplishments” deemed appropriate for a respectable non-working-class lady. To be sure, some moderate command of the piano was certainly among the desirable accomplishments for middle- and upper-class ladies of a “marriageable age”, alongside painting, sewing, and the like. But this was strictly non-public and therefore un-virtuosic music-making, where a “middle-class woman seated at the piano embodies refinement and accomplishment as

¹⁹ Adams 2001, p. 1.

²⁰ Leppert 1992, p. 114.

²¹ Parakilas 2001a, p. 116.

she performs to friends, family, and potential husbands, who applaud and murmur their approval to one another”.²² In Lawrence Kramer’s biting summary: “A good bourgeois wife is always also a musician—but a bad one”.²³ As Richard Leppert points out, locating itself “almost exclusively among amateurs as a female [*sic*] instrument”, the piano served as a “visual-sonoric simulacrum of family, wife, and mother”.²⁴

However, a bourgeois girl’s keyboard skills were more than a simple hobby or pastime: as an obligatory feminine accomplishment, they were a marker of respectable femininity; furthermore, inasmuch as a proficient girl’s “performance may earn her a husband”, one could argue that pianistic virtuosity was part of a commodity exchange for men and women alike, since for the former it resulted in monetary remuneration, whereas for the latter marriage was the goal:

[A] woman’s drawing room performance was a form of commodity exchange in which her performance signaled availability, a man responded to her music insofar as it was social indicator of femininity and readiness for domestic life, and the two parties mutually recognized that the purpose of the performance was eventual marriage.²⁵

The crucial difference is that for most women, piano skills were not an avenue towards a professional career in public pianistic virtuosity, but only to a more or less rewarding marriage. And as soon as that goal was reached, the newly wed lady’s pianism usually came to an end, replaced by the more pressing duties of home-making and child-rearing.²⁶ (Perhaps one might make a similar argument concerning Thalberg’s own lucrative marriage and retirement in Italy,

²² McNeely 2009.

²³ Kramer 1997, p. 172.

²⁴ Leppert 1992, pp. 111 and 105. For more on the piano as an agent of the compulsory domesticity for women in the nineteenth century, see Kuhlmann 2004.

²⁵ McNeely 2009.

²⁶ Freia Hoffmann argues that female child prodigies had a pioneering role in helping bourgeois women break out of domesticity around 1800; however, Hoffmann notes that this was only because most nineteenth-century Europeans saw children as asexual; see Hoffmann 1984. In seeming contrast with Hoffmann, though, Katherine Ellis notes that “[e]ven while still child prodigies, female pianists found their critical reviews encumbered by issues of gender” (Ellis 1997, p. 367). For more on the history of amateur pianism as a bourgeois feminine accomplishment, see Eyerman 1997.

but that only came after a long and extremely successful worldwide career.) It is likewise symptomatic that neither of the two major early-nineteenth-century *virtuose* were married at the time of their greatest successes on the virtuoso circuit: Marie Pleyel, *née* Moke, divorced the pianist, publisher, and piano-maker Camille Pleyel in 1836 and Clara Schumann, *née* Wieck,²⁷ made a name for herself whilst still single, performed, for awhile, with her husband, and resumed her brilliant career upon Robert Schumann's incapacitation in 1854.²⁸ And while music "performed a critical function for women throughout the nineteenth century", as McNeely asserts, "by allowing a point of entry for them into the paid professional realm and determining the extent of their participation in musical culture throughout the century",²⁹ their participation was typically restricted to teaching and some limited criticism, whereas composition and public virtuosity, save but a few exceptions, remained off-limits.³⁰

The remainder of this chapter discusses some recurrent gender tropes in the contemporary criticism of early-nineteenth-century instrumental virtuosity. Since the "masculine, in short, is as much a spectacle as the feminine",³¹ the chapter begins with a discussion of the ideals of virtuosic (hyper-)masculinity extolled in most criticism, which is then contrasted with the ideals of the "feminine charms" and the like in critical responses to the virtuosities of Moke and Wieck. It must be noted here that, even though Moke and Wieck were far from the only two *virtuose*

²⁷ For clarity's sake, both *virtuose* will henceforward be referred to by their respective maiden names.

²⁸ Amazingly, Rita Benton's compact article on Moke in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* remains the celebrated virtuosa's only modern biography (Benton 2001), although, thankfully, a lot of information (alongside much interesting interpretation, discussed below) may be found in Katherine Ellis's "Female Pianists and Their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris" (Ellis 1997). By contrast, Wieck has fared much better in modern scholarship, possibly because she, unlike Moke, excelled not only in virtuosity, but also in composition—which is likewise discussed below. A number of excellent monographs have been produced, most notably, perhaps, Nancy Reich's *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* (Reich 2001).

²⁹ McNeely 2009.

³⁰ For a historical analysis of the gender-ideological strategies by which women have been kept out of professional composition and performance, see Citron 1993.

³¹ Adams 1995, p. 11.

active between 1815 and 1850,³² they were the only two who successfully persisted on the virtuoso circuit for a number of years during this period and regularly attracted the critics' attention in Germany, France, and England alike. Why these two women were so much more successful than others is part of the story that the present chapter is meant to tell and will be addressed in due course. Last but not least, the special case of Chopin's reception shows that, in Christopher Parker's words, there was "a fair amount of unease about gender roles once the issue had been opened". In the end, what emerges is the conclusion that the virtuose and, to a lesser extent, Chopin, were treated quite differently from other virtuosi, not so much because their virtuosity was essentially different, but rather due to their critics' perceptions of their gender identities. Richard Leppert is certainly right when he asserts that the "virtuoso was a troublesome paradox: he was the literal embodiment of extreme individuality, but one that ran risk of exceeding the demands of bourgeois decorum, reserve, and respectability",³³ but as it turns out by the end of this chapter, even though at least two piano virtuose—Moke and Wieck—were apparently every bit as good as any of their male colleagues, only *male* virtuosi were seen as "literal embodiment[s] of extreme individuality" because, to put it simply and refer to Hegel once more, individuality and subjectivity themselves were gendered male. Towards the end of this chapter, we will see that, somewhat surprisingly, this was not entirely detrimental to the critical reception of the two only major female stars on the virtuoso circuit.

³² For their names and whatever little biographical information is available on these other, less well-known virtuose, see Ellis 1997, Sabin 1998, and Ellsworth 2003.

³³ Leppert and Zank 1999, p. 259.

Generals, Heroes, and Gods: Virtuosity qua Heroic Hyper-Masculinity

Surveying contemporary descriptions of early-nineteenth-century virtuosi, one risks falling under the false impression that these were not men of flesh and blood, but visitors, perhaps from Greco-Roman mythology and recent military history: this is a world overpopulated by heroes and gods, Zeuses/Jupiters and Herculesees, Caesars and Napoleons. Maiko Kawabata has already discussed the hyper-masculine heroicization of violin virtuosi in contemporary criticism: “By the 1830s and into the 1840s it had become a commonplace to compare virtuosi with military rulers”, Kawabata writes; “solo violinists were understood to be emblematic of military heroism”.³⁴ Kawabata describes post-Napoleonic violin virtuosity in Europe as “a culture of performers and audiences who understood violinists as emblems of military heroism. [...]

Virtuoso violin performance was richly nuanced—aurally and visually—with codes of military heroism. Violinists [...] wielded their bows like swords and commanded armies of orchestral musicians, inviting comparison with military leaders, ancient and modern. Reviewers proclaimed them the Scipios, Alexanders, and Napoléons of the violin.³⁵

Kawabata asserts that those “heroic codes worked particularly well on the violin”,³⁶ due to the violin virtuoso’s necessarily upright and usually quite animated posture in performance, the military and phallic symbolism of the newly straightened and lengthened “Cramer” concave bow (as opposed to the old convex, or arched, design), and the perceived resemblance between orchestras led by violin virtuosi and armies commanded by their valiant military leaders:

The new image of violinists as military heroes can be attributed [...] to the emerging symbolism of the bow as a sharp weapon. [...] Not until the 1780s and 90s did the bow begin to resemble a sword, thanks to a revolution in craftsmanship. The updated “Cramer” bow supplanted the old arched model; it was straighter, concave rather than convex, sharper at the tip, and thus came to resemble a sword or rapier. The bow could

³⁴ Kawabata 2004, pp. 99–100.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 90–91.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

thus be transformed into a sharp weapon in the popular imaginary. [...] it was by wielding his instrument of command and leading the armylike orchestra that the solo violinist assumed the figurative role of an army general [...] The sight of a violinist-general commanding and regulating the bow strokes of ranks and ranks of violinists seated at the forefront of the orchestra made the violinist a more compelling leader of the orchestra than another solo instrumentalist could be: the “military” image of the violinist emanated less from the violin than from the bow.³⁷

And of course, as we already saw above, the “Cramer” bow doubled up as not only a militaristic, but also as a potent phallic symbol: by wielding it on (against?) the high-pitched, curvaceous, “feminine” body of his violin, the male virtuoso could be viewed as “inseminating” it so as to give birth to music, his masculinity “performed or even confirmed by the act of wielding and applying the bow”.³⁸

Turning to piano virtuosi, we see a rather similar picture, despite their physical grounding at the keyboard and the absence of the phallic, sword-like bow. Thus is Thalberg celebrated as a “hero of pianism”, his famous aristocratic poise whilst performing even the most difficult virtuosic passages notwithstanding.³⁹ Harmonies spring out of his chief rival Liszt’s hands “just like Minerva [sprang] out of Jupiter’s head”.⁴⁰ Reporting from Berlin on the pages of the *Revue et Gazette*, Ludwig Rellstab likens the young Vieuxtemps, still in his teens, to “Hercules in the cradle”.⁴¹ The same journal repeatedly carried rhapsodic and somewhat even eroticized descriptions of Liszt as, in Heine’s words, “transported, thunderous, volcanic, fiery like a

³⁷ Kawabata 2004, pp. 100–101.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

³⁹ Unsigned, “Lieder und Gesänge.”, *NZM*, 1 February 1839, p. 69: “Heros des Pianofortespiels”.

⁴⁰ [Unsigned], “Vermischtes.”, *NZM*, 12 April 1841, p. 122: “man wollte, man mußte doch nur die Hand sehen, aus der diese Gluth emploderte, aus der diese Harmonie gleichwie Minerva aus Jupiters Haupt hervorstiegen”.

⁴¹ L. Rellstab, “Correspondance particulière. État de la musique à Berlin.”, *RGMP*, 24 June 1838, pp. 263–64 : “Le premier artiste de marque, dont nous ayons eu la visite était M. Vieuxtemps, de Bruxelles, que l’on pourrait encore appeler un enfant, car 16 à 17 ans ne comptent guère. Mais Hercule au berceau étouffa les serpents qui s’approchaient de lui, et c’est ainsi que nous avons vu ce jeune artiste accomplir une tâche herculéenne”.

Titan”.⁴² In a somewhat later issue Blanchard dubs Liszt “the Pompey, the [Mark] Anthony, the Moreau⁴³ of the piano” and Thalberg “the Caesar, the Octavian, or the Napoleon”.⁴⁴ Some critics openly asserted that virtuosity, a heroic, militaristic, and therefore quintessentially masculine pursuit, was inappropriate for ladies. For instance, banker, composer, and Schumann’s correspondent Carl von Kaskel (1797–1874) cautioned all ladies in his friend’s journal to shun the obviously masculine world of virtuosity: “May the ladies [...] swiftly and willingly leave the mounting of battle-horses to the manly heroes and bring us the pretty image of **musical peace!** May they bring us the **dignified, pleasant, and noble**, and provide us with the subtlety, spirit, and natural simplicity, which are the beautiful preferences of their sex [emphasis original]”.⁴⁵

Women should thus defer to “the manly heroes” of virtuosity. To demonstrate their heroic masculinity, those manly heroes were expected to beat their adversaries into submission: other virtuosi,⁴⁶ their instruments, assisting orchestras (when present), the music they performed, and their largely female audiences. It must be emphasized here that critics typically extolled virtuosi not simply for outdoing a rival, demonstrating superb skill at the piano, blending with the orchestra in perfect harmony, or performing a piece of music exquisitely; rather, they were

⁴² Henri Heine, “Lettres confidentielles. II.”, *RGMP*, 4 February 1838, p. 43: “Liszt, emporté, orageux, volcanique, fougueux comme un Titan”.

⁴³ Jean Victor Marie Moreau (1763–1813), a renowned French republican general.

⁴⁴ Henri Blanchard, “Soirée de musique sacrée chez madame la princesse de Belgiojoso. Matinée musicale donnée par M. Liszt.”, *RGMP*, 26 April 1840, p. 284: “Liszt vient de conquérir en Italie et en Allemagne une incommensurable célébrité. Il n’était naguère que le Pompée, l’Antoine, le Moreau du piano, vis-à-vis de Thalberg, qui en était le César, l’Octave ou le Napoléon. Plus de Pharsale, d’Actium à craindre pour Liszt ; il peut traiter d’égal à égal avec son heureux compétiteur : ils peuvent se partager le monde pianistique”.

⁴⁵ v. L. [Carl von Kaskel], “Mad. Marie Pleyel.”, *NZM*, 6 December 1839, p. 183: “Mögen die Damen [...] das Besteigen des Bataillen-Rosses doch den männlichen Heroen gern und willig überlassen und uns ihrerseits das schöne Bild des **musikalischen Friedens** verwirklichen! Mögen Jene [...] diese hingegen und **Gediegenes, Ansprechendes** und **Edles** bringen, und mit der Zartheit, mit dem Geiste und der natürlichen Einfachkeit, welche die schönen Vorzüge ihres Geschlechts sind, uns darreichen”.

⁴⁶ For this purpose, numerous “duels” were staged between the most prominent piano and violin virtuosi of the day, such as the famous one between Liszt and Thalberg hosted in 1837 by the Italian noblewoman Cristina Belgiojoso (1808–1871) in her Parisian salon and those between Paganini and the French violinist Charles Philippe Lafont (1781–1839). For more on the rivalry between Liszt and Thalberg, see Kleinertz 1993; for more on violin “duels”, see Kawabata 2004, p. 101.

extolled for *defeating* their rivals, *beating* their pianos into submission, *subjecting* their orchestras to their will, and *vanquishing* the most demanding virtuosic pieces. For instance, writing for the *Neue Zeitschrift*, a reviewer signed only as “W.”⁴⁷ transmits his impressions of the German pianist Adolf Henselt (1814–1889) on “his triumphant path, which lies, shining, before him”.⁴⁸ In the same journal, Robert Schumann describes Liszt’s performance of Weber’s famous *Concertstück* in terms of a military victory over the work and the orchestra:

As Liszt seizes the piece, with such power and greatness in expression, as if it were a charging platoon on the battlefield, so he charges from one minute to the next, rising until a point where he stands at the head of the orchestra and leads it jubilantly. At that point he appeared like a general, and the applause, in its power, was not unlike “Vive l’empereur”.⁴⁹

Writing along the same lines, Johann Ludwig Gebhard von Alvensleben (1816–95), a friend and collaborator of Schumann’s, aristocrat, composer, conductor, singer, and poet, describes for the *Neue Zeitschrift* Liszt’s 1842 recitals at the Berlin opera as “an opportunity to prove his triumphant forces in a battle with an accompanying orchestra and choir”.⁵⁰ Apparently, it was another battle that Liszt won singlehandedly, since “he invariably emerged as a brilliant conqueror, now and then reining in the orchestra and charging ahead with it”.⁵¹

⁴⁷ According to the list of pseudonyms used by the contributors to the *Neue Zeitschrift*, which is provided in Vosteen 2001, this “W.” could stand for Schumann himself or for Ernst Ferdinand Wenzel (1808–1880), a German pianist, piano teacher, and contributor to the *NZM*.

⁴⁸ W., “Adolph Henselt.”, *NZM*, 5 January 1838, p. 8: “Seine ganze Erscheinung—sie hat unser Inneres erfüllt, sein liebes Bild—es wird unauslöschlich in uns fortleben, unser Blick unverwandt ihm folgen auf seiner Siegesbahn, die glänzend vor ihm liegt”.

⁴⁹ R. S. [Robert Schumann], “Franz Liszt.”, *NZM*, 10 April 1840, p. 119: “Wie Lißt gleich das Stück anfaßt, mit einer Stärke und Großheit im Ausdruck, als gälte es eben einen Zug auf den Kampfplatz, so führt er es von Minute zu Minute steigend fort bis zu jener Stelle, wo er sich wie an die Spitze des Orchesters stellt und es jubelnd selbst anführt. Schien er an dieser Stelle doch jener Feldherr selbst, dem wir ihn an äußerer Gestalt verglichen, und der Beifall darauf an Kraft nicht unähnlich einem ‚Vive l’empereur’”.

⁵⁰ VIII. [Gebhard von Alvensleben], “Aus Berlin. Februar—März.”, *NZM*, 22 April 1842, p. 130: “Vom 16ten Februar an gewannen seine Concerte dadurch einen neuen Reiz, daß sie im Opernhause stattfanden, wodurch ihm Gelegenheit ward, seine siegende Gewalt auch im Kampfe mit einem begleitenden Orchester und Chore zu bewähren”.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*: “Wie er auch hier immer als der glänzende Sieger hervorging und das Orchester bald zügelte, bald mit sich fortriß”.

Faced with an orchestra who outnumber him by at least 25 to one, the virile virtuoso comes across even more heroic than he would have done in a solo recital: not only does the orchestra take nothing away from his brilliance, but rather, its docile members add to his larger-than-life image by obediently submitting to his amazing power. That is why the piano concerto has been described as “the metaphor of the isolated and individualized hero against the collective identity of the orchestra”.⁵² Hence also the link between virtuoso pianists and their concerts and “warriors and warfare”.⁵³ Similarly, Kawabata points out that the “martial spirit” of early-nineteenth-century violin concerti “evoked heroic marches and fanfares associated with military processions and the emblemization of the relationship between a valiant general and his troops”.⁵⁴ However, the piano virtuoso’s feat was even greater than that of his violin counterpart, for he had not only an orchestra to “rein in”, but also an imposing, large, and heavy instrument to tame, three or four times his size and weight, rather than the small and (seemingly) docile body of a violin.⁵⁵ But their size notwithstanding, pianos were often gendered feminine as well, just like the violin, as the strange use of the feminine definite article and pronoun makes explicit in this review of Liszt’s pianism found in *La France musicale*: “The [*La*] piano, this soulless instrument, has found a new language; at times, she [*elle*] might assume a passionate manner, or deploy, in a fiery brilliant passage, its most charming coquetry”.⁵⁶ Perhaps an act whereby a (hyper-)masculine virtuoso beat his instrument into submission could only be conceived of as

⁵² Leppert 2001, p. 209.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁵⁴ Kawabata 2004, p. 99.

⁵⁵ Katherine Ellis writes, referring to Liszt and Thalberg’s epic rivalry: “Of all mid-nineteenth century instruments, the concert grand piano was the most technology-driven; instrumental affirmation of masculinity was thus at its strongest in the piano and was epitomized in the gladiatorial combat of Liszt and Thalberg in 1837” (Ellis 1997, p. 361)

⁵⁶ Escudier, “Concert de Listz. [sic]”, *FM*, 21 April 1844, p. 125: “La piano, cet instrument sans âme, a trouvé un langage nouveau ; tantôt sa voix est timide et légère, comme la voix d’une blonde fille, tantôt elle prend un accent passionné, ou bien elle déploie, à travers un feu de notes brillantes, la plus charmante coquetterie”.

heterosexual and the docile instrument as feminine.⁵⁷ In this way, the piano virtuoso arguably came even closer to the ideal of the Industrial Age bourgeois subjectivity than the violin virtuoso: faced alone with an unwieldy, intimidating—and yet feminine—machine, he succeeds singlehandedly in bringing it under his control, and then exploits it to beat an entire orchestra into submission. It matters little that this could only be accomplished with the sturdier pianos, newly strengthened with iron framing by their English and French manufacturers, which in turn made them larger and heavier—the more unwieldy the piano seemed, the more impressive was the virtuoso’s control of it. That is why piano virtuosi like Liszt, imperiously holding his own before a large machine-like instrument and an orchestra, could serve as a figure for bourgeois “fantasies of omnipotence: over pianos, women, and concert audiences”.⁵⁸ But as far as most nineteenth-century critics were concerned, that figure could only be male, just as the ideal, self-made, and enterprising bourgeois subject, embodied in virtuosi such as Liszt, could only—remember Hegel’s assertions quoted above—ever be male.

In the brief passage just quoted above, Dana Gooley mentions Liszt’s perceived omnipotence not only over pianos, but also over “women and concert audiences”. Katherine Ellis, too, notes that “a quasi-sexual possession of the audience was an integral and necessary part of the performance”.⁵⁹ Thus a contributor for the *Revue et Gazette* signed “S***.” simply states that the initially reserved audience at a recital that Liszt gave with Berlioz “was *vanquished*. As soon as its defeat had been established, the conqueror-artist found himself in the

⁵⁷ Cf. the main claim of Lawrence Kramer’s *After the Lovedeath*: “the forms of selfhood mandated as normal in modern Western culture both promote and rationalize violence against women”; see Kramer 1997, pp. 1–2.

⁵⁸ Gooley 2004a, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Ellis 1997, p. 357.

heat of a furor, the intensity of which we could not determine”.⁶⁰ Likewise the audience at an 1839 Vienna recital: “Liszt’s audiences are a special kind of audience, because he makes them *his own*. For him, his audience has but one soul; they feel and think with him”.⁶¹ It is important to remember here that Liszt’s audiences, as well as those of most other virtuosi, were comprised of middle- and upper-class women and their attendants—for instance, remember Wagner’s portrayal of a typical virtuoso recital discussed in Chapter One. As the paradigmatic virtuoso, Liszt then arguably signified his bourgeois male critics’ *sexual* fantasies of omnipotence over women and concert audiences, who are repeatedly portrayed as submitting, willingly giving themselves over to the virile virtuoso, who “vanquishes” them, makes them “his own”, forcing them to “feel and think with him”. It must also be noted that Liszt’s audiences are, as it were, doubly feminized here: first in empirical terms, comprised, as they were, largely of women, but then for a second time, in conceptual terms as well, as a docile feminine body, willingly submitting to the virtuoso’s masculine power. “The more masculine the music”, Lawrence Kramer points, “the more it arouses the femininity within the listener’s masculine position, the more it lifts the constraints on emotional volatility, yieldingness, soul-merger, pleasurable subjection”.⁶² Seeing Liszt’s male critics endow his audiences—of which they were also members themselves—with excessive feminine docility, we may begin to suspect that they, too, willingly lapsed into “pleasurable subjection” in Liszt’s mighty hands, describing not only his feminine audiences’ erotic responses to him, but also their own.

⁶⁰ S***, “Concert de MM. Berlioz et Liszt.”, *RGMP*, 25 December 1836, p. 464: “le public était vaincu. Une fois cette défaite bien constatée, l’artiste vainqueur s’est trouvé au centre d’un foyer d’enthousiasme dont nous ne saurions déterminer l’intensité”.

⁶¹ G. Saphir, “Franz Liszt, après son premier concert du 19 décembre 1839, à Vienne.”, *RGMP*, 12 December 1839, p. 531: “Le public de Liszt est un public à part, par cela seul qu’il le rend *sien*. Ce public n’a pour lui qu’une âme ; il sent et pense avec lui”.

⁶² Kramer 1997, p. 108. For a similar take on music’s feminizing impact on the listener, see also Maus 1993.

Finally, before moving on to Liszt's female colleagues, we must briefly consider the music itself, as it were. For, likewise was music described as "conquered", "vanquished", and "subjugated", when performed by the likes of Liszt (but not, as we will see below, when performed by Moke or Wieck with comparable virtuosity). And it must be noted here that music, too, just like Liszt's audiences, was in this context gendered feminine. Richard Leppert asserts: "There can be no question about the cultural associations between music and the feminine in Victorian culture",⁶³ "at least since the eighteenth century, music and femininity were viewed interchangeably".⁶⁴ Likewise Richard Taruskin: "it was precisely from the early to the middle nineteenth century [...] that the stigma of effeminacy [...] began to attach itself to music".⁶⁵ However, one must take care to distinguish between the notion of music that Leppert is referring to here and that discussed in Chapter One: the former is more akin to Lawrence Kramer's notion of music as a cultural practice, the making and enjoying of music as sound, as a sensuous phenomenon; by contrast, the latter is *Tonkunst*, the autonomous, abstract, intellectual, and disembodied art of music, that is, of combining different pitches and timbres in temporal and harmonic configurations, according to music's own rules (pertaining to counterpoint and voice-leading, harmony, instrumentation and orchestration, formal construction, etc.). In this clearly gendered binary, in essence comprising privileged and normative, intellectual and therefore masculine rationality on the one hand and inferior, irrational and therefore feminine sensuality on the other,⁶⁶ it is clear where virtuosity's allegiances lie, for virtuosity is, *qua* performance,

⁶³ Leppert 1992, p. 122.

⁶⁴ Leppert 1993, p. 155.

⁶⁵ Taruskin 2010.

⁶⁶ The impact of this "logic of alterity", as Lawrence Kramer dubs it, on the position of music in Western culture and its wider gender politics has been discussed a number of times within musicology and beyond. For a few rather influential and controversial instances, see McClary 1992, pp. 3–34; Citron 1993, pp. 120–65; and Kramer 1996, pp. 1–32.

irreducibly, radically, and exuberantly sensuous, always grounded in, and emanating from, the virtuoso's body.⁶⁷ "When people hear a musical performance", Leppert reminds us, "they see it as an embodied activity".⁶⁸ Critics like Davison, discussed in Chapter One, essentially blamed virtuosity for foregrounding music as a sensuous, bodily practice and eclipsing the disembodied, autonomous art of music, thus reversing the purportedly "natural" order of things. Essentially, virtuosity's sin was to reveal that music, "despite its phenomenological sonoric ethereality, is an embodied practice, like dance and theatre".⁶⁹ However, as it is suggested by the reviews discussed just below, one way to recuperate virtuosity may have been to posit it as a tool (or perhaps even a weapon) for bringing the sensuous body of music back under (the virtuoso's) masculine control.

We already witnessed above Schumann's impression of Liszt's "seizing" of Weber's *Concertstück*, "with such power and greatness in expression, as if it were a charging platoon on the battlefield", which made Liszt appear "like a general". In violin virtuosity, although Kawabata situates the prevalence of militaristic discourse in its critical reception only in the 1830s and '40s, we find the German-French violinist and composer Ludwig/Louis Spohr (1784–1859) praised in similar terms as early as in an 1818 issue of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, for an excellent performance of his own A-major violin concerto in Amsterdam: "All the difficulties, no fewer in the first and final movements [than in the second], he conquered with an admirable ease".⁷⁰ But it will be more fitting to conclude a section on virtuosic hyper-

⁶⁷ Asserting that the virtuoso was a "feminine artistic type" due to his self-displaying and dependence on the sensuous, Cornelia Bartsch offers a detailed discussion of the devaluation of virtuosity due to its perceived gender positioning; see Bartsch 2004.

⁶⁸ Leppert 1993, p. xxii.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

⁷⁰ [Unsigned], "Nachrichten. Amsterdam.", *AMZ*, 14 January 1818, p. 33: "Alle Schwierigkeiten, deren der erste und letzte Satz nicht wenige enthalten, besiegte er mit einer bewundernswürdigen Leichtigkeit". This was more likely

masculinity by turning to Liszt once more, that is, to an 1841 review of his famous *Grand galop chromatique*, published in the *Revue et Gazette*. Writing under his penname “Paul Smith”, *feuilletoniste* and administrator of various theaters in Paris Édouard Monnais (1798–1868) appropriately prefaces his review with an epigram borrowed from Corneille (*Moi ! Moi, dis-je, et c’est assez !*), to underscore the originality of Liszt’s styles of composition and performance, as well as his idea to give a *recital*, featuring just himself and his instrument, without supporting artists—in 1841 apparently still an unusual practice in Paris—at the *salon Érard*, his piano-manufacturing sponsor’s showroom:

Here is an original concert: one single artist, one single instrument: it is the antipode of the monster-concert! [...] Twenty-five years ago, a similar attempt would have been impossible. Liszt has grown with the piano, which has become, under his hands, the universal interpreter of all kinds of music [*musiques*], orchestras, voices: what we heard the other day leaves no doubt about it.⁷¹

Monnais proceeds to commend the *Galop* (which *The Musical World* had so passionately condemned only a year before—see the opening of Chapter One) as “something of the most ethereal, the most spiritual, the most coquettish: it is the dance of sylphs and sylphides, at the end of a heavenly orgy. Right from the opening bars, one is raised from the ground, taken up into a space unknown”.⁷² A quick glance over Liszt’s galloping score (Example 10),⁷³ with its

Spohr’s Violin Concerto No. 10, Op. 62 (1810) than either one of his two youthful violin concerti in the same key, No. 1, Op. 1 (1802–3), or No. 2 (no opus number, 1803–4). Unfortunately, the review does not specify.

⁷¹ Paul Smith [Édouard Monnais], “Matinée musicale donnée par M. Liszt, dans les salons d’Érard.”, *RGMP*, 18 April 1841, p. 226: “Voici un concert original : un seul artiste, un seul instrument : c’est l’antipode du concert-monstre ! [...] Il y a vingt-cinq ans, pareille tentative eût été impossible. Liszt a grandi avec le piano, qui est devenue sous ses mains le traducteur universel de toutes les musiques, de tous les orchestres, de toutes les voix : ceux qui l’ont entendu l’autre jour ne sauraient en douter”.

⁷² *Ibid.*: “tout ce qu’on peut imaginer de plus aérien, de plus spirituel, de plus coquet : c’est la danse des sylphes et des sylphides, à la fin d’une orgie céleste. Dès les premières mesures, on se sent enlevé de terre, emporté dans des espaces inconnus”.

⁷³ The passage comes from the *Galop*’s original version. Liszt also published an easier version, “simplifié par l’auteur”, to make the *Galop* more accessible to domestic music-making and milk its huge popularity. In an instance such as this one, it is not hard to see how virtuosic music could be seen as incompatible with the conception of music as aesthetically autonomous.

fortissimo dynamics, *presto* tempo, and busy chordal writing might induce one to question Monnais's judgment regarding the *Galop*'s purported ethereality and spirituality (although there is certainly plenty of coquetry in there); on the other hand, the close connections that Liszt cherished with the *Revue et Gazette* and with Monnais personally might serve to explain, if not justify, the latter's exuberance over the piece.

Monnais concludes his review by duly noting Liszt's *triumph* over his own piece: "The trial is decided: the artist has emerged victorious and will not share his victory with anyone".⁷⁴ The music itself, though, amounts to little more than a fairly simple rondo comprising a series of progressively busier rising and descending renditions of the chromatic scale in a variety of keys. In other words, it does seem like a piece the sole purpose of which is to be *vanquished, conquered, defeated*. The *Galop* then, or rather, Liszt's performance ("seizing") of it, offered his audiences again and again—for this was one of the most sought-after pieces in Liszt's concert repertory—the spectacle of the feminine, sounding, sensuous body of music brought under the hyper-masculine virtuoso's control. By thus taming his own virtuosic music, Liszt (or any other virtuoso, for that matter) might be seen as reaffirming the bourgeois ideal of the omnipotent hyper-masculine subjectivity that virtuosity was meant to embody. At any rate, this would very much agree with Dana Gooley's compelling point about virtuosity as essentially being about "shifting borders, [...] the limits of what seems possible"⁷⁵ on the one hand, and on the other, Lawrence Kramer's equally apt summary of the rites of male initiation in Western culture, whereby "a boy always achieves manhood by ordeal, by crossing a boundary".⁷⁶

⁷⁴ "Matinée musicale donnée par M. Liszt.", p. 226: "L'épreuve est décisive : l'artiste en est sorti victorieux, et sa victoire, il ne la partage avec personne".

⁷⁵ Gooley 2004a, p. 1.

⁷⁶ Kramer 1997, p. 224.

Virtuosity, then, may be seen as restaging that spectacle over and over again, in which the male virtuoso reaffirms his masculinity by emerging victorious from the ordeal put before him by the feminine, sonorous body of a virtuosic piece of music. And if all of the existing virtuosic music is not challenging enough, then the virile virtuoso will set himself an appropriate challenge, by composing a virtuosic piece of music for the sole purpose of subduing it. Liszt's *Grand galop chromatique* is such a piece: composed only to showcase Liszt's virtuosity, it offers little in the way of melodic content, interesting formal or tonal structure. But that is beside the point, in a piece that was composed only to be conquered.

In fact, a number of Liszt's reviewers, even those who were, like Monnais, sympathetic to him, noticed as much about his music in general. Thus the critic and dramatist Ernest Legouvé (1807–1903), reviewing Liszt's famous 1837 recital at the Paris Opéra, classifies him as “one of those artists, who [...] take art forward, because they are always in quest; they love difficulties, which they need, which they create where they do not exist”.⁷⁷ Legouvé reaches this conclusion after likening Liszt to the heroes of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*: “As an artist, Liszt has always reminded us of those heroes of *Ariosto*, the wandering knights of the *Round Hall*, who would mount their big warhorses with weapons of all kinds and go forth to conquer or defend a state”.⁷⁸ Writing for the same journal nine years earlier, an unsigned reviewer reached a remarkably similar conclusion:

There are people who create for themselves chimeras in order to have the pleasure of combating them; Mr. Liszt has done like they do, made for himself a thousand

⁷⁷ Ernest Legouvé, “Concert de M. Liszt, à l'Opéra.”, *RGMP*, 26 March 1837, pp. 103–104: “Liszt est un de ces artistes [...] qui font avancer l'art, parce qu'ils cherchent toujours ; qui aiment l'obstacle, qui en ont besoin, qui le créent quand il n'existe pas”.

⁷⁸ “Concert de M. Liszt, à l'Opéra.”: “M. Liszt nous a toujours rappelé, comme artiste, ces héros de l'*Arioste*, les paladins de la *Salle-Ronde* qui montaient armés de toutes pièces sur leur grand cheval de bataille, et s'en allaient seuls à la conquête ou à la défense d'un état”

tremendous difficulties to have the merit and glory to surmount them. The unanimous and prolonged applause was his victory's prize.⁷⁹

The anonymous reviewer's word of choice—chimeras—is pertinent: pieces like the *Grand galop chromatique* were hardly “natural” adversaries, in the way circus animals might be regarded; rather, they seem more akin to monsters featured in freak-shows, begotten only to be subdued. Quite contrary to the ideal of music as a transcendent, autonomous art, the *Grand galop chromatique* appears to exist not for its own sake, but for that of the virtuoso, who, via it, exploits music to showcase his virtuosic skill and, by extension, his ardent virility.

Honorary Masculinity and the Dubious Value of “Feminine Charms”: The Critical Reception of the Virtuose

Given so much testosterone, Katherine Ellis understandably asks: “What place was there for women within such a system?”⁸⁰ As we are about to see, contemporary reviews suggest that there indeed was a place for women within the system of nineteenth-century instrumental virtuosity, but a carefully circumscribed one. It is probably little surprising that in “a period in which our modern oppositions of masculinity and femininity [...] were formed”,⁸¹ the critical reception of virtuose offers a rather different picture from the reception of their male colleagues, even though they often performed the same virtuosic repertory as did the virtuosi, with

⁷⁹ S., “Concert vocal et instrumental, Donné par M. Liszt, le lundi 7 avril, dans la salle de la rue Chanteraine.”, *RM*, April 1828, p. 256 : “Il y a des gens qui se créent des chimères pour avoir le plaisir de les combattre ; M. Liszt a fait comme eux, il s’est proposé mille prodigieuses difficultés pour avoir le mérite et la gloire de les surmonter. Des applaudissemens unanimes et prolongés ont été le prix de sa victoire”.

⁸⁰ Ellis 1997, p. 357.

⁸¹ Kramer 1997, p. 15.

comparable virtuosic prowess. Almost needless to say, there is no mention of gods and heroes and their triumphs, no vanquished pianos, subdued orchestras, and conquered music. Overall, most of the reviews, even when otherwise positive, come from a rather condescending general position on women, their abilities and capacities, in music and beyond.

Thus Alsatian composer and music critic Jean-Georges/Johann Georg Kastner (1810–1867) sums up for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* his impression of one of the recitals that Clara Wieck gave on her 1837 tour of Paris, the first without her father,⁸² in following terms: “We will say it all if we admit that we have never before heard a maiden of such dexterity”.⁸³ The unsigned reviewer of a Marie Moke recital in London, a part of her hugely successful 1846 tour of England, praises her skill (as most of his colleagues did), but takes care to keep her in her designated place, as a *female* musician:

With a force and a certainty which recall the best pianists in their prime, Madame Pleyel has still something of her own sex,—an elegance and fascination which place her apart from all men; and superior, we have no hesitation in asserting, to every other female instrumentalist we have hitherto heard. [...] Her self-control (a very rare gift among women) is perfect.⁸⁴

Incidentally, the issue of self-control never comes up in reviews of male virtuosi, not even of the most animated among them, such as Liszt or Paganini. The main point of the quoted passage, though, is that however superb a virtuosa might be, some borders could not be violated: she could only be assessed by comparison to other virtuose, but not to her male colleagues.⁸⁵ The

⁸² Although only a mixed success, this was arguably Wieck’s most important tour, because it was the first one that she undertook independently, in defiance of her overbearing father, and at that in the cultural capital of nineteenth-century Europe. It was therefore an invaluable experience in Wieck’s maturation as an artist and woman. For more on Clara Schumann’s first independent tour, see Wittkowski 1996 and Reich 2001, pp. 65–71.

⁸³ G. Kastner, “Nachrichten. *Paris.*”, *AMZ*, 21 May 1839, pp. 406–407: “Wir glauben Alles mit dem einen zu sagen, wenn wir bekennen, nie noch ein Frauenzimmer gehört zu haben, die es über diese Fertigkeit gebracht hätte”.

⁸⁴ [Unsigned], “Reception of Madame Pleyel by the English Press”, *MW*, 23 May 1846, pp. 239–41.

⁸⁵ James Parakilas and Katherine Ellis have both shown that the Paris Conservatoire, too, with Leipzig one of Europe’s two main nesting grounds of virtuosity, enforced gender-segregationist policies, reserving Beethoven and most of nineteenth-century piano music, including Liszt and Thalberg, for male students and confining female

unsigned reviewer of a *Revue et Gazette* concert that, among others, also featured Moke, would probably agree, given his description of the pianist as “this woman who has no rival among women and with whom artists of the opposite sex *would be* honored to be compared [emphasis added]”; as the critic’s use of conditional tense implies, comparing Moke to her male rivals would be highly unusual, her great skill and talent notwithstanding.⁸⁶ Similarly, the anonymous contributor to the *Musical World* asserts that Moke is “unrivalled—she is unapproachable”; but: “We shall not speak of the masculine players, such as Liszt, Thalberg, and Mendelssohn, or even Chopin, Döhler, Dreyschock, Emile Prudent, &c. But of the female executants, Madame Pleyel [*née* Moke] is the Liszt. She is the veritable empress of the instrument”.⁸⁷ To put it bluntly, it simply appears that men may be good pianists, whereas women could only be good *female* pianists.

More specifically, women were deemed ill-suited to composition and in that regard even more inferior to their male colleagues than in performance. Family pressures (one only need think of Felix Mendelssohn’s letters to his sister Fanny), the unwillingness of most conservatories to admit female students in their composition classes, the publishers’ reluctance to market women composers’ works, and the gender prejudices of most contemporary critics resulted in all but barring women from composition, the most prestigious musical activity in the nineteenth century (as discussed in Chapters Two and Three), automatically withholding full recognition from women on the virtuoso circuit, dominated by virtuoso-composers such as

students to “early music” (which in Paris comprised that of J. S. Bach, Handel, Scarlatti, Haydn, and Mozart, among others) and only a few nineteenth-century composers, such as Chopin (tellingly) and Hummel. “What really mattered”, Parakilas writes on page 121, “was that there should never be a direct comparison between women and men pianists, because it was too risky to test the belief that women couldn’t play like men”; see Parakilas 2001a, p. 121 and Ellis 1997, pp. 363–64.

⁸⁶ [Unsigned], “Concert donné par La Revue et Gazette musicale.”, *RGMP*, 19 March 1848, p. 85 : “cette femme qui n’a pas de rivale parmi les femmes et à qui tous les artistes de l’autre sexe s’honoreraient d’être comparés”

⁸⁷ “Reception of Madame Pleyel by the English Press”, *MW*, 23 May 1846, pp. 239–41.

Thalberg and Liszt.⁸⁸ Forced, then, to perform the music of others (that is, of men), female pianists “made their reputations as interpreters of—or vessels for—the creative products of men. As such they reinforced a gender stereotype that called for women to renounce an individual authorial voice but allowed them, like St. Cecilia, to transmit the lofty inspirations of others”.⁸⁹ Women pianists thus beat their male rivals to the later nineteenth-century (and modern) idea of the virtuoso as a faithful *interpreter* of canonized musical works, which Wagner first tried to impose, as we saw in Chapter Two. Of course, being recognized as an interpreter of other people’s (other men’s, really) greatness came at the heavy price of having to accept a cultural status inferior to that of the (almost always male) composer.⁹⁰

All of this is, of course, little surprising when one remembers that “until the aesthetic shift occurring at the *fin de siècle*, women in the arts were more closely associated with consumption and performance than production”,⁹¹ chiefly due to the ruling misogynist suspicion that women, hopelessly grounded in their sensuous bodies, “closer to nature”, and thus “less analytical than men”,⁹² may simply be incapable of mental creativity.⁹³ In Marcia Citron’s

⁸⁸ It will be remembered from the preceding chapter that throughout their respective careers Thalberg and especially Liszt fought hard to be recognized as composers and not *merely* performers, no matter how virtuosic, thus reflecting the much higher prestige of composition than that of performance. To achieve full recognition, then, a virtuoso had to be a composer as well. Katherine Ellis then rhetorically asks: “What place was there for women within such a system? At first sight, the answer appears stark: few women were able to conform to the virtuoso-composer paradigm because few composed. Women had limited opportunities to be trained in composition, either in Paris or elsewhere in Europe. The same was true of professional prizes, gateways to a career. The Paris Conservatory barred women from competing in the Prix de Rome until 1903, when government pressure forced the institution to change the rules of eligibility” (Ellis 1997, p. 357). For more on the history of women’s exclusion from composition, see Citron 1993. For the strategies that female pianists in Paris and London employed to circumvent their predicament, see, respectively, Ellis 1999 and Ellsworth 2003. For more on various critics’ prejudiced responses to Clara Schumann’s work in composition, see Macdonald 1993.

⁸⁹ Ellis 1997, p. 358.

⁹⁰ In this context, Ellis also notes that because they had to make their reputation by performing other composer’s works, women pianists played a crucial role in early canon-formation, especially that of “early” (that is, pre-Beethoven) music. See Ellis 1997, p. 359.

⁹¹ McNeely 2009.

⁹² Jordanova 1989, p. 21: “The notion that women are closer to nature than men contained numerous elements, including the claims that women are more emotional, credulous, superstitious and less analytical than men”. Cf.

summary: “Patriarchal society has captured the concept of creativity and deployed it as a powerful means of silencing women”.⁹⁴ Writing for *La France musicale* in 1845, ballet composer Adolphe Adam thus lauds Marie Moke for having “the good sense to not compose” but notes that “it is a disadvantage for the performer to draw her inspiration from the work of another”.⁹⁵ “D. G. W.”, *The Musical World*’s reviewer of a Moke recital in Dublin, casually remarks that in her “we behold a rare combination of the graces of womanhood and the wonders of genius”.⁹⁶ Apparently, “D. G. W.” shared in the nineteenth-century consensus, discussed above, about the gendering of genius. Writing for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, “A. K.”, the reviewer of Wieck’s G-minor, Op. 17 piano trio, “probably her greatest achievement”,⁹⁷ prefaces his review of the piece with the following general assessment of women’s creative capacities in music:

Whereas German literature features such a great number of female authors, especially female poets, the field of musical composition is much less accessible to the feminine sex. Vocal or instrumental virtuosic performances and small musical sketches, songs, and the like—that would be the women’s lot in the musical occupation.⁹⁸

Citron 1993, pp. 48–50: “Culture is privileged and associated with men, while nature is inferior and linked with women. [...] the culture-nature hierarchy has functioned as a rhetorical means of excluding women from the creation of art. The relegation of women to the lower natural sphere reserves the higher level of culture for men”.

⁹³ Ellis 1997, p. 358: “The question of whether women were capable of mental creativity was crucial in their reception as composers and performers; indeed, it was an issue that affected women artists in all fields”.

⁹⁴ Citron 1993, p. 46.

⁹⁵ Ad. Adam, “Concert de Mme Pleyel.”, *FM*, 13 April 1845, p. 114: “Mme Pleyel a l’esprit de ne pas composer ; c’est un avantage pour le public, puisqu’elle fait entendre la musique des grands maîtres à laquelle les autres pianistes préfèrent leurs propres compositions ; c’est un goût qu’il est permis de ne pas toujours partager. Mais aussi c’est un désavantage pour l’exécutant de puiser ses inspirations dans l’œuvre d’un autre”.

⁹⁶ D. G. W., “Music in Dublin”, *MW*, 16 May 1846, p. 225.

⁹⁷ Reich 2001.

⁹⁸ A. K., “Recensionen. Clara Schumann, geb. Wieck, Trio für Pianoforte, Violine und Vcelle.”, *AMZ*, 5 April 1848, p. 232: “Während die deutsche Literatur eine so grosse Anzahl von Schriftstellerinnen, insbesondere Dichterinnen aufweist, ist das Feld musikalischer Komposition dem weiblichen Geschlechte weit weniger zugänglich gewesen. Virtuose Leistungen auf einem Instrument oder im Gesange, und kleine musikalische Skizzen, Lieder u. dgl.—hiermit wäre der weibliche Antheil an der musikalischen Thätigkeit bezeichnet”. This and other gender-biased reviews of Clara Schumann’s G-minor Trio are further discussed in Klassen 2004. Katherine Ellis notes that those women composers who did stick to small forms, as “A. K.” demands, did receive much critical acclaim—but only at the price of confining themselves to an “inferior” genre of music: “Women who wrote salon pieces and romances faced weaker institutional opposition and often pursued highly successful careers as composers specializing in

Of course, the feminization—and resulting denigration—of the small genres in nineteenth-century music criticism was observed some time ago, perhaps most notably by Jeffrey Kallberg.⁹⁹ Wieck’s German reviewer proceeds to tell us why women should stick to “their own” genres: “only seldom do women arise to more mature composition, because it presumes, in terms of the steadiness of what the inner ear hears, a power of abstraction that is mostly given to men”.¹⁰⁰ Of course, this takes us away from music as a feminine cultural practice and back to music *qua Tonkunst*, the abstract, intellectual, rational, creative autonomous art emblematic of free subjectivity, itself by default gendered male, and therefore reserved for men.¹⁰¹ The reviewer does concede that Wieck is something of an anomaly, that she “fortunately belongs to the few [women] who have indeed taken possession of this power”, but only—he makes sure to emphasize—because “as *Schumann*’s spouse she did not lack his full support, whereby her outstanding artistic talent developed to maturity”.¹⁰²

Even when confronted with such obvious proofs of “more mature composition” and the “power of abstraction” in pieces composed by women, such as Wieck’s three preludes and

“lesser” forms. [...] The composition of virtuoso operatic fantasies or concertos was, however, a different matter” (Ellis 1997, p. 358).

⁹⁹ See his Kallberg 1992; Kallberg there notes “the persistent alignment of the idea of detail with the feminine”, p. 106; “to be associated with the feminine was also often to be devalored” and “affiliation with women usually led to a lesser ranking in the aesthetic hierarchy”, p. 110; “throughout the nineteenth century, and in many different spheres of creative work, genres that were primarily the purview of men (as producers and/or consumers) were privileged. Genres cultivated by women, on the other hand, were relegated to the margins of the aesthetic horizon”, p. 112.

¹⁰⁰ “Recensionen. *Clara Schumann*, geb. *Wieck*, Trio für Pianoforte, Violine und Vcelle.”: “Bis zur reiferen Komposition erheben sich die Damen deswegen nur selten, weil sie zur Festhaltung dessen, was das innere Ohr hört, eine Kraft der Abstraktion voraussetzt, die überwiegen den Männern gegeben ist”.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Citron 1993, p. 52: “Reason has often served to express and privilege maleness”.

¹⁰² “Recensionen. *Clara Schumann*, geb. *Wieck*, Trio für Pianoforte, Violine und Vcelle.”, p. 232: “Zu den wenigen aber, die sich dieser Kraft wirklich bemächtigt haben, gehört vorzugsweise *Clara Wieck*, die als Kind schon überall bewundert, als Gattin *Schumann*’s jener Stütze nicht entbehrt hat, woran ihr bedeutendes Kunsttalent sich zur Reife entwickelte”. In fact, opinions vary as to how helpful or detrimental Robert Schumann was to Wieck’s work in composition; for instance, Jeffrey Kallberg writes that Wieck, in response to Schumann’s criticisms of her works, deprecated herself in terms drawn directly from the prevailing male ideology of the day” (Kallberg 1992, p. 117). For a different opinion, see Reich 1996.

fugues, Op. 16, reviewers would typically stick to their guns, accepting such works only as an exception to the rule—the rule of women-composers’ inferiority to men. Thus the unsigned reviewer of Wieck’s Op. 16 notes that “however, to encounter Clara Schumann [*née* Wieck] in this area may surprise, and is all the more welcome, since the feminine spirit gladly yields only lyrical expression, and such seriousness offers the surest proof of the advance of her important talent”,¹⁰³ in consistence with the dominant view of women as “frivolous and emotional” as opposed to the “serious and thoughtful” men.¹⁰⁴ As usual when it comes to expression, things get frustratingly vague. Nonetheless, we are probably safe to assume that this is not the arcane notion of expression that was so prominent in the criticism of virtuosic music (by men) discussed in Chapter Three, but rather a special, feminine, and, it would seem from the reviewer’s thinly veiled denigration of it, inferior, “only lyrical” type of expression. As David Gramit notes, “the expectation that serious music—like civil society—was preeminently a male domain was never far beneath the surface”.¹⁰⁵ The reviewer then offers a general description of the opus, noting correctly that the fugues are preceded by pieces that somewhat depart from the customary prelude style, being mild in character, but at any rate forming a worthy preparation for the ensuing fugue.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Wieck’s preludes are closer in character to some of Chopin’s 24 than to any of Bach’s 48, which in 1845 was only to be expected. But the reviewer apparently attached

¹⁰³ [Unsigned], “Recensionen. *Clara Schumann*, geb. *Wieck*: Drei Präludien und Fugen für das Pianoforte. Op. 16.”, *AMZ*, 4 February 1846, p. 73: “Clara Schumann auf diesem Gebiete anzutreffen, kann aber überraschen, und um so freudiger, als der weibliche Geist sich gern dem lyrischen Ausdrucke allein überlässt und ein solcher Ernst die sicherste Bürgschaft für die Fortbildung ihres bedeutenden Talenten enthält”.

¹⁰⁴ Jordanova 1989, p. 38: “Stereotypically, men were portrayed as serious and thoughtful, women as frivolous and emotional”.

¹⁰⁵ Gramit 2004, p. 93.

¹⁰⁶ “Recensionen. *Clara Schumann*, geb. *Wieck*: Drei Präludien und Fugen.”: “Die drei hier gegebenen Fugen sind jede von einem einleitenden Musikstücke begleitet, welche von dem herkömmlichen Präludienstücke etwas abweichen. Es sind Sätze von milden Character im gebundenen Style; jene vortrefflichen zweistimmigen Passagen, oft durch allen Reiz des doppelten Contrapunctes gehoben, die Bach seinen Fugen vorausschickt, bilden jedenfalls eine nachahmenswerthe Vorbereitung auf die Fuge selbst”.

much more importance to the fugue as a genre than to the prelude, which might remind us of that “classicizing” strain of nineteenth-century criticism discussed in the previous chapter, the bias in favor of well-established, historical, non-virtuosic genres as carriers of aesthetically autonomous music; “Yet, Clara Schumann understands the main thing”, he tells us, imputing the same preference to the composer, “that the prelude is seldom complete in itself, but must anticipate what follows, which it serves only as support”.¹⁰⁷

The reviewer then proceeds into a rather cursory description of each pairing, missing some of the most interesting structural features of each fugue. Thus the G-minor fugue is “rather pianistic and grateful”, but there is no mention of its deliberately arcane construction, complete with multiple statements of the subject in inversion (see Example 11 below), which certainly makes it tempting to interpret the fugue (if not the entire opus) as a purposeful attempt on the composer’s part to showcase her mastery of an esoteric, learned, and distinctly masculine historical genre.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, Wieck’s Opus 16 came as a result of her study of counterpoint with her husband at this time, preceded by the lessons in counterpoint she had taken from a number of teachers in Leipzig, Dresden, and Berlin.¹⁰⁹ The three fugues may be seen as the virtuosa’s deliberate (and successful) claim of proficiency in composition as the most prestigious musical activity and at that, in the most learned of genres, comparable to Liszt and Thalberg’s efforts in the sonata.¹¹⁰ The B-flat-major fugue is hardly any simpler in construction: scarcely a note is free, that is, not part of a statement of the fugue’s stately subject or one of its counter-subjects

¹⁰⁷ “Recensionen. *Clara Schumann, geb. Wieck: Drei Präludien und Fugen.*”, p. 73: “Doch hat Clara Schumann die Hauptsache, dass das Präludium weniger in sich selbst abgeschlossen sein, als das Folgende ahnen lassen müsse, dem es nur zur Stütze dient, wohl erwogen”.

¹⁰⁸ For more on the cultural significance of the fugue in German nineteenth-century music criticism, see Chapin 2002.

¹⁰⁹ Reich 2001, p. 85.

¹¹⁰ Wieck’s determination at this point in her career to legitimate herself as a composer (in addition to being a virtuosa) may be linked to her ambivalent, according to a number of scholars, stance on virtuosity, which likely improved her reception as well; see App 1999, Blanck 1983, Klassen 1999, Prince 2009, and Rossner 1994.

(see Example 12 below). However, the reviewer merely states “we would prefer to hear the ensuing strict four-part fugue played by a string quartet”, we can only speculate as to why;¹¹¹ perhaps because Wieck’s beautifully crafted melodic lines might come across more distinctly in a string-quartet texture; furthermore, fugal writing, even though “outdated”, had been not uncommon in string quartets, especially in the final movements, ever since Haydn’s Opus 20 (1772).¹¹² The third fugue in the opus, in D minor, is treated similarly: the author notes that “the prelude, as well as the fugue, is organ-like in character”,¹¹³ without noticing that they are both constructed on essentially the same organ-like subject (see Examples 13 and 14 below). Therefore, given that the reviewer apparently missed the most interesting structural features of each fugue, it is not easy to see what it was about them that caused him to produce such a positive review, if not the mere fact that they are fugues—which could, of course, be interpreted as another instance of that “classicizing” streak discussed in Chapter Three. The critic’s obliviousness to the intricacies of the three fugues is doubly regrettable, though, because it is they that demonstrate that a woman can indeed compose well in a “serious” genre, not the mere fact that she happened to compose a fugue.

¹¹¹ “Recensionen. *Clara Schumann*, geb. *Wieck*: Drei Präludien und Fugen”, p. 73: “die folgende strenge vierstimmige Fuge möchten wir lieber vom Streichquartett hören”.

¹¹² For more on Haydn’s use of fugal writing in these six and other quartets, see Choa 1998 and Grier 2010.

¹¹³ “Recensionen. *Clara Schumann*, geb. *Wieck*: Drei Präludien und Fugen”: “Nr. 3, Präludium sowohl als Fuge, hat orgelmässigen Character”.

[Allegro vivace]

The image displays a musical score for Clara Schumann's Fugue in G minor, Op. 16, measures 19 through 32. The score is written for piano in 3/4 time, with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The tempo is marked as [Allegro vivace]. The score is organized into five systems, each with a measure number (22, 25, 28, 31) at the beginning of the first staff. The notation includes treble and bass staves for each system, with various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. A forte (f) dynamic marking is present in the third system. The score shows a complex rhythmic and melodic structure characteristic of a fugue.

Example 11: Clara Schumann, Fugue in G minor, Op. 16, mm. 19–32.

Andante.

The image displays a musical score for Clara Schumann's Fugue in B-flat major, Op. 16, measures 1 through 26. The score is written for piano in 3/4 time, with a key signature of two flats (B-flat major). The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The score is divided into five systems, each with a measure number (7, 12, 17, 22) at the beginning of the first staff. The first system includes the instruction 'sempre legato' and a dynamic marking of 'mf'. The notation features a complex interplay of voices, with frequent sixteenth and thirty-second note patterns, and various rests and ties. The bass line often provides a steady accompaniment, while the treble line carries the more intricate melodic lines.

Example 12: Clara Schumann, Fugue in B-flat major, Op. 16, mm. 1–26.



Example 13: Clara Schumann, Prelude in D minor, Op. 16, mm. 1–6.

Andante con moto.

Example 14: Clara Schumann, Fugue in D minor, Op. 16, mm. 1–6.

Reviews of Wieck’s music, then, actually tell us less about her music than we might have expected; turning to those of her performances, we find a similar state of affairs. Unlike reviews of Liszt and other virtuosi’s triumphs over their instruments, orchestras, audiences, and pieces of music, reviews of Wieck and Moke’s performances are almost silent about the details of their virtuosity. Instead, their authors almost invariably chose to focus on their physical appearance.

Thus, for instance, the following rhapsody on Moke from Henri Blanchard:

Her eye is as inspired as it inspires; her talent is suave and sweet and at the same time energetic. As she piles up, with her beautiful hands, the storms that explode on the keyboard with tumultuous effects, her look is calm and serene, because it dominates the tempests of difficulties, which are always followed by a stream of melodic pearls that scintillate and blend with flows of a clear harmony and seduce and bedazzle even the most versed musical minds.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Henri Blanchard, “Théâtre-Italien. Mme Pleyel et M. Thalberg.”, *RGMP*, 6 April 1845, p. 105: “Son œil est inspire comme il est inspirateur ; son talent est suave et doux en même temps qu’énèrgique. Quand, de ses belles mains, elle amoncelle les orages qui éclatent en tumultueux retentissements sur le clavier, son regard est calme et

Now compare that to Blanchard's impression of Thalberg's performance during the same evening, transmitted in the same article:

Thalberg is the king of pianists [...] To make the piano sing is a problem that he has resolved. One of his best qualities is the way he commands attention, how he makes himself be heard. In his works, which do not feign to rival Beethoven or Weber and their great instrumental machines, he is clear and coherent [...]¹¹⁵

No mention of Thalberg's aristocratic appearance at the piano, his famous poise whilst performing the most virtuosic feats; instead, Blanchard duly describes some specific qualities of the pianist's virtuosity. Not so in his treatment of Wieck or Moke; here we find him again in rhapsodic mode, this time with a distinctly erotic note, as if speaking to and courting the pianist directly:

[...] what I admire in you above all is the noble sentiment, the living understanding of the art; it is this intimate and boundless poetry that shows in the fire of your look, in the expression of your face, in the deep, pleasant sonorities that flow from your fingers, in your entire person, in the movement of your lips, in the graceful swaying of your head [...]¹¹⁶

Whilst perhaps shocking by our standards of journalist criticism, in Blanchard's day it was not uncommon for a critic to address the target of his criticism directly: one need only think of Fétis "fatherly" criticism of Liszt and the resulting polemic that developed on the pages of the *Revue et Gazette* during Liszt's acrimony (mostly of his own making) with Thalberg of 1837. But even

serein, parce qu'il domine ces tempêtes de difficultés auxquelles succède toujours une pluie de perles mélodiques qui scintillent, se mêlent aux flots d'une harmonie limpide, et séduisent, éblouissent les intelligences musicales les plus exercées".

¹¹⁵ "Théâtre-Italien. Mme Pleyel et M. Thalberg", p. 105: "Thalberg est le roi des pianistes exécutants [...] Faire chanter le piano est un problème qu'il a résolu. Une de ses plus belles qualités, c'est de commander l'attention, de se faire écouter. Dans ses œuvres, qui n'affectent pas de rivaliser Beethoven ou Weber et leurs grandes machines instrumentales, il est clair, lucide [...]"

¹¹⁶ Henri Blanchard, "Concerts.", *RGMP*, 13 April 1851, p. 113: "[...] ce que j'admire surtout en vous, c'est le sentiment élevé, la vive compréhension de l'art ; c'est cette poésie intime et débordante qui se traduit dans le feu de vos regards, dans l'expression de votre physionomie, dans la sonorité profondément sympathique des notes qui jaillissent sous vos doigts, dans toutes votre personne, dans le mouvement de vos lèvres, dans les gracieuses ondulations de votre tête [...]"

though one could also find eroticized critical responses to male virtuosi, such as Heinrich Heine's descriptions of Liszt, they hardly go quite as far as Blanchard's thinly veiled love letter to Moke. Moreover, even when reviewers do indulge in describing the physical appearance of male virtuosi, they typically focus on the virtuoso's sheer power as a source of his virtuosity, which is then duly accounted for in some detail at least, as Blanchard does with Thalberg in the review quoted above.¹¹⁷ By contrast, when virtuose such as Wieck and Moke were concerned, as Blanchard again shows, the visual spectacle of a woman exhibiting herself onstage typically eclipsed the very purpose of the spectacle—her virtuosity.

But one must not forget, virtuosity was very much a spectacle itself, an audio-visual spectacle; Richard Leppert's assertion that “[f]or much of Western history, at the most fundamental level of human perception, the sound *is* the sight, and the sight *is* the sound” applies to nineteenth-century virtuosity as much as it does to, say, nineteenth-century opera, or any other type of musical practice. As we already saw above, virtuosity's affiliation with visual display led a number of contemporary critics, as well as modern scholars, to associate it with the feminine.¹¹⁸ And “to be associated with the feminine” in Clara Wieck and Marie Moke's day, “was also often to be devalorized”.¹¹⁹ As was already hinted in the preceding paragraph, in reviewing women's virtuosity, critics focused not on virtuosity itself, as they did with men, but on the female body producing that virtuosity, the body as a sight, “in essence a sight of

¹¹⁷ Regarding the contemporary criticism of women pianists, Katherine Ellis similarly notes “an attention to the physicality of women's playing that is almost entirely absent in reviews of male performers, except for comments related to power”; see Ellis 1997, p. 367.

¹¹⁸ See Bartsch 2004 and Borchard 2004.

¹¹⁹ Kallberg 1992, p. 110.

sights”;¹²⁰ it was “a disquieted male gaze that beheld women’s public display of that most appropriate female accomplishment: playing the piano”.¹²¹

As Katherine Ellis has already noted, the prime target of this “roving eye” class of criticism was Marie Moke, not least due to her beauty—little surprising, in an age “transfixed by feminine beauty”¹²²—as well as owing to a somewhat flirtatious manner on- and offstage;¹²³ “Critics commented almost without exception on Moke’s beauty, both as a woman and as a silhouette curved over her piano”.¹²⁴ The already cited review written by Adolphe Adam and published in an 1845 issue of *La France musicale* is a case in point:

How beautiful Mrs. Pleyel is when she at the piano! It is not enough to hear her, one must also see her. One sees that this music she conveys to you on the piano finds its source in her soul and that her fingers are but interpreters: her countenance shines forth and bares all of her sensations. [...] God is there and the priestess shows you all of Him.¹²⁵

In addition to Adam’s focus on Moke’s appearance, note also the prominent presence of the virtuoso *qua* faithful interpreter trope, which we examined in Chapter Two. But this fascination with Moke’s looks reached its apex on the pages of *The Musical World*, during her enormously successful tour of Britain and Ireland in 1846. Thus we read that

The aspect of the muse inspired, when she makes the soul of the instrument vent itself in passionate song—when she makes its innermost fibres vibrate under her magnetic fingers—communicates to her hearers a sentiment more intelligent and profound of the

¹²⁰ Leppert 1993, p. xix.

¹²¹ Ellis 1997, p. 355

¹²² Pearsall 1969, p. 102.

¹²³ Ellis 1997, p. 375: “There is no doubt that Pleyel went out of her way to court such reviews”.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Ad. Adam., “Concert de Mme Pleyel.”, pp. 114–15: “que Mme Pleyel est belle quand elle est au piano ! il ne suffit pas de l’entendre, il faut la voir jouer. On comprend que cette musique qu’elle vous traduit sur le clavier prend sa source dans son âme, et que ses doigts ne sont que des interprètes : sa figure rayonne et trahit toutes ses sensations. N’allez pas croire, vous qui ne l’avez pas vue, qu’elle grimace et que son corps se contorsionne ; c’est un ignoble défaut qui dépare de fort beaux talents. On voit au contraire les efforts de l’artiste pour comprimer l’exubérance des sensations qui l’animent ; pas un muscle ne bouge, mais un feu divin anime son regard ; le génie illumine son front ; on sent qu’elle pense tout ce qu’elle joue ; le Dieu est là et la prêtresse vous le révèle tout entier”.

perfections of her playing. The execution of a musical composition by a model thus accomplished, administers more than a mere lively sensation of pleasure [...]¹²⁶

Another reviewer for the *Musical World*, signed “D. G. W.,” went even farther, happily neglecting to write a word about Moke’s performance:

I had never seen Madame Pleyel before this moment, and her appearance at once satisfied all my expectations. Nothing can be more prepossessing, nothing more picturesque. Madame Pleyel is considerably above the middle height; her figure is slight, but beautifully proportioned; her hair dark, and arranged *en bandeaux*, with two simple flowers for ornament; her forehead compact and intellectual; her eyes a deep blue, instinct with a kind of mysterious light, and full of meaning; her mouth defies description, from its ever-changing expression; and the whole *contour* of her face rivals the most wonderful of those perfect fancies with which the canvases of Raphael and Guido teem. Such a face indicates the great artist at a glance. Madame Pleyel was dressed in a *robe noir*, distinguishable alike for simplicity and taste. But you will ask me what has Madame Pleyel the woman to do with Madame Pleyel the pianist—to which I can only reply, you must see her, and judge for yourself.¹²⁷

And another contributor to the *Musical World* preferred to focus on a specific part of Moke’s physique:

Her foot—what has her foot to do with the matter?—never mind, the word has escaped us, and we snatch at the opportunity of speaking enthusiastically of *le pied le plus mignon, le plus joli, de l’univers*—her foot, then, which [...] peeps in and out from under her robe, like a little mouse from its hole, is excellently fitted to use the pedal at discretion; and we need not tell the pianist-reader, that the pedal well employed is a powerful auxiliary of expression; therefore, let no one blame us for speaking of the foot—that is of the right foot—for as Madame Pleyel hardly ever makes use of the soft pedal, the left foot remains invisible, wrapped in its silken heaven.¹²⁸

The unsigned reviewer’s feeble justification (“the pedal well employed is a powerful auxiliary of expression; therefore, let no one blame us for speaking of the foot”) of his almost fetishistically

¹²⁶ [Unsigned], “MADAME PLEYEL.”, *MW*, 14 March 1846, p. 124.

¹²⁷ D. G. W., “Music in Dublin.”, *MW*, p. 225.

¹²⁸ [Unsigned], “Madame Pleyel”, *MW*, 23 May 1846, pp. 237–38.

detailed focus on Moke's foot notwithstanding, it is important to note here that such outbursts will hardly be found in the contemporary criticism of male virtuosi.¹²⁹

Even when approaching the ridiculous, as it does here, this focus on the virtuose's "feminine charms" and not on their prowess in performance and composition is consistent with the contemporary gendering of subjectivity: the subject is by default male, therefore only men may be autonomous and unmoored in their bodies, that is, have a higher metaphysical significance than their mere bodily existence; by contrast, women are just women, not subjects—they are irreducibly sensuous and bodily creatures (thus also inferior to the more rational men), as this and so many other reviews keep affirming over and over again, even when enthralled with a particular woman and her qualities, as in the case of Moke's infatuated reviewers. Furthermore, this line of criticism, akin to Richard Leppert's diagnosis of a "scopophilic fascination with women's bodies in art",¹³⁰ helped maintain the gender boundaries of nineteenth-century European respectability: for, even though some remarkable women such as Wieck and Moke were allowed to display their excellence and have independent careers in a limited number of professions (including musical performance), they were demonstrably not treated as their male colleagues' equals, let alone allowed to compete with them, while their accomplishments were enjoyed more as pleasant accoutrements of bourgeois culture, rather than intellectually appreciated or criticized. That is also why their critics seemingly treated them with so much more benevolence (albeit of a condescending kind) than their male colleagues, such as Liszt,

¹²⁹ That said, Liszt's famously flowing, golden hair did attract some comment (though nothing on this scale—at least not in print) and there was quite a bit of quasi-scientific and artistic interest in the anatomy and appearance of his hands (complete with plaster casts and a wealth of pictorial representations; for more on this particular segment of Liszt reception, see Pocknell 2003), though a keen interest in a virtuoso pianist's hands seems to me easier to justify than the above-quoted effusion on Pleyel's foot.

¹³⁰ Leppert 1993, p. 155: "the visual fascination with the piano connects to the scopophilic fascination with women's bodies in art. The compulsion to sort out and stabilize the sign 'woman', an obsession with Victorian men, is tied not only to the demands of identity, sexual difference, and power but also to the equally troublesome categories of 'desire' and 'pleasure'".

Paganini, Sivori, or Herz; the virtuose and their “feminine” virtuosity were simply not perceived as a threat to the aesthetic-philosophic ideal of the (masculine) art of music.

But according to Foucault, the nineteenth-century “‘bourgeois’ society [...] was a society of blatant and fragmented perversions”;¹³¹ its normative gender boundaries were much more porous than the criticism of virtuosity discussed so far might have us believe: the examples of such women as George Sand (and, as I am about to argue, her contemporaries Wieck and Moke), as well as a variety of theoretical responses to homosexuality that were predicated on the notion of gender “inversion”—the idea that anatomical women who desire other women are “really” men, and vice versa—suggest otherwise. In Ronald Pearsall’s summary, the nineteenth century “was not only an age of optimism, and an age of transition, but an age of anxiety. [...] By striving too hard for an almost unattainable level of sexual respectability, by refusing to admit that they were constantly falling down on this target, the middle-class Victorians found that the whole subject of sex became forbidden, confused, and diffused into the most unlikely areas”.¹³² But that certainly does not mean that sex was not talked about. After all, the nineteenth century, as Foucault showed, saw an unprecedented proliferation of a wide variety of discourses on sex and sexuality, including Catholic and Protestant Christianity, bourgeois and working-class moralism, fine literature and the arts, medicine (including psychiatry and the emerging science of sexology) and the natural sciences, erotica and pornography, etc. Far from seeking to repress a purportedly immediate, natural core of sexuality (the feasibility of which Foucault, as is well known, emphatically rejected), the nineteenth-century proliferation of discourses around sexuality was meant to bring it into being, to construct it, so as to regulate it, control it,

¹³¹ Foucault 1990, p. 47. Foucault also adds that the nineteenth-century “bourgeois” society of “blatant and fragmented perversion” is “doubtless still with us”.

¹³² Pearsall 1969, p. xi.

commodify it.¹³³ The fact that the proliferation continues two hundred years on suggests how fluid and slippery the categories, boundaries, and normative identities of gender and sexuality were in the nineteenth century and have continued to be.

One index of the fluidity of nineteenth-century gender boundaries and identities is the readiness with which supposedly masculine traits were attributed to women and vice versa.

Christopher Parker thus asserts:

There is no doubt that Victorians had a clear idea of what constituted appropriate qualities of femininity and masculinity, but they were quite willing to ascribe “feminine” characteristics to men and “masculine” characteristics to women, suggesting a fair amount of unease about gender roles once the issue had been opened.¹³⁴

In other words, the Victorians, as Parker dubs them, were ready to label “masculine” any woman’s characteristics that did not conform to normative femininity; for instance, in the case of George Sand, not only her penchant for wearing men’s clothes, but also her intellect, education, interest in politics, literature, the arts, etc. In Thais Morgan’s summary: “The pressure exerted by the rise of the cultural authority of women since the 1840s”—women such as Sand, Wieck, and Moke—“made differentiation among the manly, the feminine, and the effeminate both increasingly necessary and increasingly difficult. The ideological work required to police the ever-wavering boundaries of gender was a task shared by men and women alike”.¹³⁵ However, such transgressions of gender norms were far from welcome: “in general femininity and masculinity in the wrong sex were regarded as a misfortune, undermining the integrity of the

¹³³ Pearsall 1969, p. 69: “The society that emerged in the nineteenth century [...] did not confront sex with a fundamental refusal of recognition. On the contrary, it put into operation an entire machinery for producing true discourses concerning it. Not only did it speak of sex and compel everyone to do so; it also set out to formulate the uniform truth of sex”.

¹³⁴ Parker 1995, p. 11.

¹³⁵ Morgan 1999, p. 113.

character”.¹³⁶ And yet, the critical reception of Clara Wieck and Marie Moke appears to suggest otherwise, for “honorary masculinity” was about the greatest compliment a female pianist could receive from her male critics.¹³⁷ In her excellent study of the contemporary reception of piano *virtuose* in nineteenth-century Paris, Katherine Ellis notes that for “critics who tried to raise the profile of particular women pianists, a common tactic was to minimize the impact of their femaleness or, indeed, to elevate them to the status of honorary men as a mark of professional respect”.¹³⁸ Thus we find, for instance, a critic writing for *The Musical World*, signed only as “R.”, assert that Moke “is certainly a great, a wonderful artist. Never for one instant does she allow you to think that a female, and not a male pianist is at work”.¹³⁹ Similarly, an unsigned reviewer in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* dubs Moke the “female Liszt”.¹⁴⁰

It is clear, then, that in this instance of “honorary masculinization”, masculinity was used to confer value on a feminine artist, at the expense of an implicitly (and often explicitly) devalued femininity. Moke is a “female Liszt”, simply too good for a woman and therefore closer to a man, her feminine charms notwithstanding; “Never for one instant does she allow you to think that a female, and not a male pianist is at work”. What seems less clear is Ellis’s reading

¹³⁶ Morgan 1999, p. 113.

¹³⁷ According to Ludmilla Jordanova, the perceived masculinization of women “was believed to result from excessive physical and mental work”, both of which were obviously requisite to the level of virtuosity attained by Moke and Wieck; see Jordanova 1989, p. 22. Maiko Kawabata notes a similar trait in the criticism of the few violin virtuose who performed in Germany, though her conclusion may not necessarily hold for the criticism of piano virtuose as well: “the use of ‘manly’ or ‘masculine’ as terms of praise sought to preserve the heterosexuality of performance: if the violin was feminine in form, then its player needed to be performatively ‘masculine’—whatever the biological gender”; see Kawabata 2004, p. 106.

¹³⁸ Ellis 1997, pp. 371–72.

¹³⁹ R., “Madame Pleyel at Manchester”, *MW*, 13 June 1846, p. 273.

¹⁴⁰ [Unsigned], “Wien. *Musikalische Chronik des virten Vierteljahres* 1839.”, *AMZ*, 29 January 1840, p. 91: “Mad. Camilla Pleyel als dessen würdiges Seitenstück, ihrem durchgebildeten Mechanismus nach gewissermaassen ein weiblicher Liszt, der ihr zudem seine kollegialische Anerkennung dadurch bezeugte, dass er selbst die ebenbürtige Genossin dem Auditorium introduzirte und eine vierhändige Fantasie von Herz mit ihr vortrug”.

of the gender politics in Moke's personae on- and offstage, as well as her contemporary reception. Ellis writes that

the most astonishing aspect of Pleyel's career was her ability to overlay the masculine on the feminine, and to attract male-gendered critiques that were entirely laudatory. That Pleyel was portrayed in the press as matchlessly combining masculine authority and feminine grace was partly the result of her decision to shock critics into treating her as an artist and not as a mere woman.¹⁴¹

In other words, Moke stayed within the bounds of normative femininity in all but her virtuosity: in her visual persona she fully embraced her womanhood, but in her performances she demonstrated a degree of power more readily expected of men. In effect, it was a masculine-sounding virtuosity coming from an unambiguously female body. Ellis continues:

Among women pianists, she was exceptional in that she turned *herself* into an honorary man, rather than waiting for her critics to decide that such elevated status was appropriate. [...] Critical response reveals that Pleyel achieved the seemingly impossible, donning masculine identity, claiming that gender was irrelevant to art, and using the sexuality of her stage presence to break down male resistance. [...] It is therefore not so much that Pleyel "has no gender", as that she embodies maleness and femaleness together.¹⁴²

But compare that to Henri Blanchard's outburst that Marie Moke "is more than a man, more than a great artist, this is more than a pretty woman; *she has no sex when she is at the piano*" [emphasis added].¹⁴³ One could hardly find a more explicit instance of an honorary defeminization, as it were. Blanchard is clear: when Moke is at the piano, "she has no sex". Finally, Ellis concludes that Moke "did not, by taking on male characteristics, cease to be a true woman".¹⁴⁴ That may be so: unlike George Sand, she certainly refrained from smoking cigars, talking politics, and wearing trousers; but still, *pace* Ellis, Blanchard's and other reviews

¹⁴¹ Ellis 1997, p. 376.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 376–77.

¹⁴³ Henri Blanchard, "Coup d'œil musical sur les Concerts de la semaine et de la saison.", *RGMP*, 2 February 1845, p. 38: "c'est plus qu'un homme, qu'un grand artiste, c'est plus qu'une jolie femme ; elle n'a pas de sexe quand elle est au piano".

¹⁴⁴ Ellis 1997, p. 377.

discussed above show that her critics simply could not bring themselves to accept such a powerful pianist as a “mere” woman, despite all of her feminine charms, purported coquetry, and undeniable beauty. A virtuosity of such masculine power and, more generally, such a degree of artistic excellence, were simply not compatible with a female body: therefore Moke had to be masculinized or at least desexed, if only onstage. The binary relationship between masculinity as value and femininity as inferiority had to be preserved at all costs. The virtuoso did embody radical individuality, the bourgeois ideal of a free, omnipotent subjectivity; but in the nineteenth century, that subjectivity and by extension the virtuoso embodying it could only be male or at least be seen as male, even when she happened to be a woman.

*Dubious Masculinity and Dishonorable Feminization: The Misogynist Overtones in the
Critical Reception of Chopin*

When a male pianist was perceived to play like a woman, however, that was a different matter. Observed in a female artist, the feminine could still be a desirable trait: for instance, despite Moke’s “bold and hazardous daring”, her “touch is still deliciously feminine”.¹⁴⁵ Not so if found in a male artist, or, as Christopher Parker put it, “in the wrong sex”, even though, as we just saw, masculinity perceived in the “wrong sex” was invariably read as the source of a woman’s excellence in art. There is probably no better evidence of this asymmetry than the contemporary reception of Chopin. The feminization of the composer by means of using otherworldly metaphors to describe his playing, music, and himself was already mentioned in Chapter Three;

¹⁴⁵ [Unsigned], “Reception of Madame Pleyel by the London Press”, *MW*, 27 June 1846, pp. 299–301.

it was first superbly discussed by Jeffrey Kallberg in his *Chopin at the Boundaries*. Likening Chopin and his music to gender-ambiguous creatures such as angels, elves, and sylphs, already in his lifetime and throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century “helped forge a changing image of Chopin as an androgynous, hermaphroditic, effeminate, and/or pathological being”.¹⁴⁶ But in their hard work to tie Chopin with the feminine, his reviewers often became explicit. For instance, writing for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, the anonymous reviewer of several of his pieces including the E-minor Piano Concerto Op. 11 thus opines that “Chopin has almost all the able pianists of the new school on his side, and peculiarly—or, in fact, not so peculiarly—the female ones, whether by sex or by attitude. He charms them for the most part, he even promotes them in a way”.¹⁴⁷ Apparently, an anatomical man could still be “really” female, if only “by attitude”. And Chopin’s unsigned reviewer appears to ascribe this femininity “by attitude” not only to Chopin’s admirers, but also to the composer himself, on account of his feminine (effeminate?) music: “The Nocturnes are truly the musings of a soul, swaying in the still of the night from one feeling to the next, which we would set to nothing but the outburst of a female heart, after a profound performance: ‘My whole life is in these Nocturnes!’”.¹⁴⁸ At stake were the three nocturnes from Chopin’s Opus 15, in F major, F-sharp major, and G minor. The firm association of the nocturne with the feminine throughout the nineteenth century was, again, cogently demonstrated by Jeffrey Kallberg, in “The Harmony of the Tea Table”.¹⁴⁹ Such

¹⁴⁶ Kallberg 1996, p.70.

¹⁴⁷ [Unsigned], “Recension.”, *AMZ*, 13 August 1834, p. 541: “Chopin hat fast alle tüchtige Klavierspieler der neuen Schule für sich, und sonderbar—oder im Grunde nicht sonderbar—am allermeisten die weiblichen, dem Geschlecht und der Gesinnung nach. Er entzückt sie grösstentheils, ja er fördert sie von einer Seite her”. I am grateful to Martin Küster for helping me with this particular translation.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: “Die Nocturnen sind wirkliche Träumereyen einer in der Stille der Nacht, von Gefühl zu Gefühl schwankenden Seele, über welche wir nichts als den Ausbruch eines weiblichen Herzens nach empfundenem Vortrage derselben hersetzen wollen: ‚Diese Nocturnen sind doch ganz mein Leben!‘”.

¹⁴⁹ Kallberg 1992. For another take on the same subject, see Jager 2004.

feminine music, as far as Chopin's anonymous reviewer was concerned, could only stem from a likewise feminine—that is, Chopin's—soul.

Unfortunately, “affiliation with women usually led to a lesser ranking in the aesthetic hierarchy”¹⁵⁰—and Chopin was no exception. The critical perception of Chopin as effeminate always was—and for a long time remained—a major source in the denigration of the composer in favor of his supposedly more manly predecessors and contemporaries, chiefly Beethoven and Liszt. Chopin is thus merely a “minor composer”, a *Kleinmeister*, capable of producing compelling music only in the “minor”, “feminine” genres of “salon music” (nocturnes and the like).¹⁵¹ We already know from Andreas Ballstaedt about the detrimental effects of Chopin's association with Parisian salon culture on his reception in Germany and Austria, due to the chauvinist and misogynist contemporary perceptions of the salon in those countries prevailing in Chopin's lifetime and later.¹⁵² Crucially, the salon was denigrated as a place of retreat from public life: it was therefore viewed as an essentially feminine space, a locus of privacy and domesticity, in contrast to the masculine-gendered public sphere; remember Hegel's assertions, quoted above, that full subjectivity must be reserved for men, since only men get to engage with society (with the social other), whereas women, confined to domesticity, stay stuck in on pre-subjective level.

Due to his famous reticence—Chopin rarely performed in public, about twenty times in his whole career¹⁵³—he, too, was perceived as weary of the public and thus “deficient” in

¹⁵⁰ Kallberg 1992, p. 110.

¹⁵¹ Ballstaedt 1994, p. 28: “Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, certain works and genres are again and again linked directly to the salon, above all the waltzes and nocturnes”.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 34: “the widespread antipathy and hostility to the salon expressed in the literature inevitably strike a hammer blow at Chopin's music”.

¹⁵³ Rink 1997, p. 14: “Chopin's legendary reputation as a pianist arose from fewer than two dozen public performances throughout his career”.

virility. Ballstaedt notes that “Chopin’s closeness to the female sex [...] led in the eyes of some contemporaries to a sort of gender reversal. From this virtual transformation of Chopin into a woman [...] it requires only a short step to look at his works as a forthright expression of the feminine character”.¹⁵⁴ Such a “feminine character” could only produce likewise feminine music in small, feminine genres, consistent with the nineteenth century’s “persistent alignment of the idea of detail with the feminine”,¹⁵⁵ but not, due to his “deficient” masculinity, properly “manly” music in the larger, more prestigious genres of the sonata, the concerto, and the symphony. As is well known, Chopin did stay away from the latter genre; as for the sonata, despite some good reviews noted in the previous chapter, his essays in that genre were by and large not favorably received, even in his native Poland.¹⁵⁶ Ditto Chopin’s two piano concerti, Opus 11 in E minor and Opus 21 in F-sharp minor. John Rink notes the “three recurrent, almost inevitable criticisms [...]: Chopin’s *poor control of form and tonal structure*; the music’s *lack of development and organic unity*; and the *inept orchestration* [emphasis original]”.¹⁵⁷

We find them all in the following passage, taken from an 1843 *Musical World* review, complete with a diagnosis, of sorts:

[Chopin] cannot be a thoroughly great composer, because he lacks the first requisite of greatness—viz., the *power of continuity*. [...] Chopin is incapable of producing a symphony or overture—that is to say, a good symphony or overture—because, though he has fancy enough to supply admirable materials, he has not a sufficient development of the organ of consistency—the bump of epicism, it may be called—to enable him to demonstrate, carry out, amplify, and complete, his original notions. His concertos, *par exemple*, his longest published works, are remarkable for this deficiency. Brilliant and effective as they are, they stop short of greatness in their lack of continuous feeling. The subjects are all excellent, but they fail to give a colouring to the whole. The entire work is not a consequence of the first idea, as in the concertos of Beethoven or Mendelssohn, but wholly independent of it [...] Therefore is Chopin incapable of a large and profound

¹⁵⁴ Ballstaedt 1994, p. 27.

¹⁵⁵ Kallberg 1992, p. 106.

¹⁵⁶ See Carew 1992, pp. 228–29 and Chechlińska 1992, pp. 213–15.

¹⁵⁷ Rink 1997, p. 30.

work of art. But on the other hand, in compositions of less important aim—in fantasias of all kinds, where the fancy may sport, unrestrained by the shackles of form—in short movements, *pot pourris*, and *capriccios*, Chopin’s rich fund of ideas, his pleasant fancy, his melancholy humour, his fresh and fluent melody, his elegant graces, his piquant remplissage, his poetical and passionate colouring, are displayed to consummate advantage [...] Let this, then be borne in mind—Chopin cannot produce a lengthened work [...]¹⁵⁸

In a mere 250 words, this dense passage sums up Chopin’s reception in Britain (and not only in Britain) throughout the nineteenth and much of twentieth century. Chopin is not a “great composer” because he lacks “the *power of continuity*”; he lacks that power because “he has not a sufficient development of the organ of consistency—the bump of epicisim”. At this point, we might be reminded of another critic’s observation, quoted above, that “the feminine spirit gladly yields only lyrical expression”. And although the *Musical World* reviewer does not tell us that himself, we are safe to assume that this curious “organ of consistency”, “bump of epicisim”, may be found (if anywhere) in male anatomy only, that is, in a man who is, unlike Chopin, not “deficient in masculinity”. The “bump of epicisim”, in contrast to “lyrical expression”, probably refers to the defining qualities of conventional epic narratives: large size, organic, teleological continuity, and, of course, “masculine” topics of struggle and chivalry, as opposed to the “feminine” subjects of love and sensuality more typical of lyrical poetry.

Of course, all of this brings us back to the then-ruling prejudice that women are incapable of artistic creativity, discussed above, which served to bar them from composition and other creative arts and, more generally, to the entrenched binaries of superior masculine rationality and inferior feminine sensuality. Chopin’s concerti are “brilliant” and “effective”, but “stop short of greatness in their lack of continuous feeling”. Then there is the always damning comparison to more “manly” composers, Beethoven (as usual) and Mendelssohn (due to his high esteem in

¹⁵⁸ [Unsigned], “Chopin”, *MW*, 17 August 1843, pp. 275–76.

England, shared by *The Musical World*'s chief editor Davison, who probably wrote that Chopin review). Sexually and ethnically other, Chopin is denigrated so that the self, represented here by Beethoven and Mendelssohn, may be upheld as normative and superior. Finally, we are told what Chopin's strengths are: "compositions of less important aim", "where the fancy may sport, unrestrained by the shackles of form", "his pleasant fancy, his melancholy humour, his fresh and fluent melody, his elegant graces, his piquant remplissage, his poetical and passionate colouring"—all "feminine" features, in contrast to the supposedly masculine qualities of heroic struggle and large-scale formal and tonal structures characteristic of Beethoven's properly "manly" and thus "great" music.¹⁵⁹ The crucial point here is that abstract, autonomous (we might somewhat anachronistically say "absolute") music may issue only from a properly male subject, for two main reasons: 1) because, as we saw in Chapter One, autonomous music (and all art) was seen as a reflection of the subject's own autonomy, whether transcendental (as in Kant), primordial (as in Schelling), social (as in Hegel), or escapist (as in Schopenhauer) and 2) because that subjectivity, which autonomous music was meant to represent or symbolize, was gendered male. Chopin's damning flaw was that the image he projected, unlike Liszt's, was simply not manly enough for his nineteenth-century critics. That is why they considered him unable to produce properly masculine, autonomous music, but only music in small, "feminine", quasi-programmatic genres.

One additional point needs to be made. As we saw above, the quoted passage stops short of explicitly blaming Chopin's alleged effeminacy for the perceived deficiencies of his music.

But later British critics went all the way. Thus J. Cuthbert Hadden in 1903 asserted that

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Derek Carew's summary of this streak in Chopin reception: "Chopin is simply a miniaturist. In cleaving to one instrument he shows artistic timidity and an inability to handle the larger instrumental forms. In so narrowing his scope, he eschews universality and forfeits the right to be considered with the 'Greats'"; Carew 1992, pp. 228–29.

as a composer of opera Chopin would have been a total failure; it is entirely certain that had he attempted the symphony he would have altogether overstepped the bounds of his genius. [...] As his character was deficient in virility, so his muse must have broken down under such a big undertaking.¹⁶⁰

The fact that Hadden was writing over fifty years after his anonymous *Musical World* colleague only suggests how persistent the trope of Chopin as an effeminate and therefore inferior composer was in his British reception. So damaging was the feminization of Chopin to his reception, along with the always suspect status of a pianist- or virtuoso-composer, that it took over a hundred years to recover—not until the 1960s was Chopin rehabilitated as a major European composer. And it is symptomatic of how persistent such tropes are, even when we are trying to disavow them, that the pioneering steps in the postwar rehabilitation of Chopin were made precisely by reaffirming his masculinity and negating his alleged effeminacy. Thus writing in 1966, Arthur Hedley called for a reappraisal of Chopin the man for the sake of an improved appreciation of his music. He then proceeded to paint a portrait of Chopin as a “natural” man, *despite* his slight physique and frail health, which of course soon grew into a reassessment of his music:

[H]is music, which contains alongside with softness and charm so much of passion and indeed ferocity, was not the product of the gentle inoffensive creature with whom legend has made the world familiar. [...] it is easy to be misled into imagining that there was something of effeminate and fragile in his nature.¹⁶¹

Instead of addressing it in this nervous, revisionist way, Hedley would have done much better, had he simply thrown the whole “issue” of Chopin’s “femininity” straight out of the window. Of course, this is certainly not to suggest that gender issues should be thrown out of musicology. Rather, the point is that attempting to rehabilitate Chopin *by denying* that he was effeminate only

¹⁶⁰ Hadden 1977 (first ed. 1903), p. 181.

¹⁶¹ Quoted from Walker 1966, pp. 1–2.

ends up buying into the same misogynist prejudice that produced the need to rehabilitate Chopin in the first place.¹⁶²

In order to tie up the different threads spun in this chapter, it might be worthwhile to conclude by way of summary: both the virtuoso and the conception of music (i.e., *Tonkunst*) as abstract and autonomous stood in their different ways for the ideal of free subjectivity; that subjectivity, whether utopian or not, was implicitly always and sometimes also explicitly gendered male. Those two positions generated, on the one hand, hyper-masculine critical responses to the more typical male virtuosos (Liszt, Thalberg, Paganini, etc.) and on the other, the extremely complicated receptions of Chopin and the virtuose. Put simply, Chopin did not qualify as a properly male subject or virtuoso; as for Clara Wieck and Marie Moke, as women, they obviously could not qualify either, but they nonetheless did qualify on a less immediate level, as “honorary men”, owing to Wieck’s mastery of such “masculine” genres as the fugue¹⁶³ and Moke’s powerful virtuosity. Though seemingly disparate, perhaps, the three strands of criticism discussed in this chapter—the hyper-masculine reception of male virtuosity, the reception of the virtuose, and that of Chopin—all point to one conclusion: that as far as nineteenth-century critics were concerned, artistic excellence, whether in composition or performance, had to be gendered male and inferiority female, whether they occurred in (anatomical) men or women. The reason for that is the male gendering, whether explicit or implicit, of free subjectivity, represented by virile virtuosos (and “honorary men” like Moke) and the rational, disembodied, autonomous, “masculine” art of music, even when created by women, such as Clara Wieck.

¹⁶² For more detail on this topic, see Cvejić 2008.

¹⁶³ For Wieck’s “honorary masculinization” in her post-1850 reception, see Caines 2002.

This dissertation's main claim has been that nineteenth-century music criticism opposed virtuosity mostly because of its perceived incompatibility with the dominant conception of music as *Tonkunst*—abstract and autonomous—and the (utopian) notion of free subjectivity symbolized by *Tonkunst*, even if virtuosi very much epitomized that subjectivity themselves. By contrast, their female rivals, as women, could neither be seen to embody free subjectivity (by default male), nor were they allowed to practice the kind of virtuosity practiced by Liszt or Paganini and considered incompatible with *Tonkunst*. For those two reasons, virtuose could neither embody nor challenge *Tonkunst* or the notion of free subjectivity symbolized by it; but they could—and did—promote it, by subjecting their own artistic selves to the ideal of faithfully *interpreting* the works of canonized male masters, just as Wagner prescribed. Therefore, it was virtuose who, for better or worse, helped effect the switch from Lisztian virtuosity, largely going defunct by 1850, to our modern notion of virtuosity *qua* faithful yet original interpretation of music, not their more celebrated male rivals, most of whom were by that time either retired or dead. Unlike them, the modern figure of the virtuoso-interpreter, epitomized in the nineteenth century by the likes of Clara Wieck and Marie Moke, is of course still with us.

CONCLUSION

In order to begin wrapping up the argument made in this dissertation, we must briefly return to its beginning. As we gleaned from the lexica and encyclopedias discussed there, back in the early eighteenth century, the time of its earliest usage, “virtuosity” meant nothing more specific than excellence, proficiency in any given field, theoretic or practical. As the century progressed, “virtuosity” received its modern association with music, more precisely, with the performance of music, denoting, that is, one’s superb skill in it; for instance, that of C. P. E. Bach in keyboard improvising. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the meaning of the term was further refined, arriving at the pejorative connotation of “virtuosity” as one’s *merely technical* skill in musical performance, with detrimental consequences for the music performed. The rest is, as they say, history: “the most intense period of anti-virtuosity backlash in the history of instrumental music” and “the war on virtuosity”, in Dana Gooley’s summary of the journalistic criticism of virtuosity during the 1830s and ’40s.

At about the same time, in the years around 1800, another two important developments were simultaneously underway: in Robert Pippin’s wording, the “profound suspicion”, amid post-Napoleonic political and early-capitalist economic repression, “about the basic philosophical claim of ‘bourgeois’ philosophy [...], the notion central to the self-understanding and legitimation of the bourgeois form of life: the free, rational, independent, reflective, self-determining subject”¹ on the one hand and on the other, the promotion of music, and especially of instrumental music, from Sulzer’s merely “pleasant nonsense” to a “philosopher’s art”²—

¹ Pippin 2005, p. 5.

² Bujić 1998, p. 3.

Tonkunst, the disembodied, abstract, intellectual, aesthetically autonomous art of music, unique in its ability to express what otherwise could not be expressed. As Andrew Bowie has shown, these two developments did not merely coincide: rather, music was reconceived as aesthetically autonomous and transcendent precisely in order to symbolize the free subject that seemed increasingly untenable in the empirical, political and economic, reality of nineteenth-century Europe. Hence the outsized significance attached to music by those thinkers who strayed the farthest from the free and self-identical subject of the Enlightenment, in Bowie's reading, most notably the early German Romantics, Schelling, and Schopenhauer; but also, as discussed in Chapter One, the comparatively lower positioning of music in the thinking of those philosophers who still accepted the possibility of subjective freedom, whether transcendental, as in Kant, or teleological and socially mediated, as in Hegel.

The main claim of this dissertation has been that those two simultaneous developments—the rising suspicion about the possibility of subjective freedom and the ascendancy of music in the aesthetic hierarchy of the arts—did not merely coincide with the deteriorating fortunes of instrumental virtuosity in reception, either. Rather, the present dissertation has sought to demonstrate that the music-critical community's "war on virtuosity", in Gooley's wording, was driven by virtuosity's perceived incompatibility with the idea of music as an abstract, intellectual, disembodied, and aesthetically autonomous art and via it, with the notion of free subjectivity that that philosophic idea of music was meant to symbolize. How else to explain the overall negative critical reception of virtuosity, given that virtuosos did quite compellingly embody free and enterprising bourgeois subjectivity themselves and were idolized for it, except when, as shown in Chapters Two and Three, their individuality and originality seemingly morphed into bizarre, pathologized idiosyncrasy? What ultimately mattered was that virtuosos,

even though embodying free subjectivity themselves, came to be seen as a threat to the aesthetic autonomy of music and by extension to the notion of free subjectivity that aesthetically autonomous music symbolized. Hence such nervous (not to say neurotic) and seemingly exaggerated reactions to virtuosity as that of James William Davison, the chief editor of *The Musical World*, discussed at the beginning of Chapter One.

There are several specific points of this perceived incompatibility between virtuosity and *Tonkunst* that were discussed throughout this dissertation and need to be summarized here. First, as a class of performance, virtuosity was by default suspect, on account of its grounding in the virtuoso's body and sensuous effect on the bodies of its listeners. In the new philosophic conception of music as a radically disembodied art, there was no room for performance; at best, it was to be tolerated as a necessary evil, to make music manifest for those who could not hear it with their inner, mental ear, as Davison put it in *The Musical World*. That disembodied conception of music was meant to symbolize the subject's freedom from its ephemeral bodily existence. The trouble with virtuosity was not merely that it was (obviously) a class of performance, but that virtuosity was performance *par excellence*, performance so amazingly superb that it threatened to divert the listener's attention away from the music and onto itself, in other words, away from the aesthetically autonomous product of rational mental activity and onto a sheer bodily act.

Another important point of (perceived) friction between virtuosity and *Tonkunst* was the notion of expressivity in music, in composition and performance alike. As we saw in Chapters Two and Three, the concept of musical expressivity was deliberately kept elusive, so as to preserve an ineffable (but not musically inexpressible) core in music, irreducible to a score, or to a configuration of sonorities in harmony and time, or to a merely correct pressing and depressing

of keys, bowing, and stopping and unstopping of strings at all the appropriate places and times. The critics' silence on what exactly constituted expression in music also agreed with the philosophic conceptions of music's unique ability to express what otherwise could not be expressed. The trouble for virtuosity was that it was deemed inimical to musical expressivity, on account of its allegedly excessive focus on (virtuosic) technique, which to some appeared to reduce performance down to mechanical "finger skill" and "manual dexterity", composition to "empty virtuosic display", and performers to lifeless automata. Only "expressive" music could be said to be truly "human" and ineffably so, just as it seemed impossible to put in words what exactly makes a human subject human and unique. By contrast, "merely" virtuosic music, as Louis Spohr warned, produced "nothing better than musical automata".

Expressivity thus guarded music's ineffably human character; it had an important ally in rational formal construction, which guarded music's aesthetic autonomy. If music was to symbolize subjective freedom, then it had to be autonomous, that is, literally, "self-ruled"; if it was to be autonomous, then it had to be constructed according to its own, strictly musical rules, without the assistance of words, a program, or any other such extra-musical aids. Virtuosity found itself on the wrong side of this debate, too, inasmuch as it was perceived as detrimental to "sound" formal construction in music: virtuosic music was seen as less than autonomous, existing not simply for its own sake and following its own rules but for the sake of showcasing its composer's virtuosity, its real *raison d'être*. The critics' focus on formal construction also conditioned their valorization of the sonata and chamber music, by definition anti-virtuosic, which came hand in hand with a persistent devaluation of all the major genres of virtuosic music. Moreover, the focus on formal construction and, more generally, the imperative of aesthetic

autonomy conditioned the devaluation of program music, with which virtuosity was intimately linked.

Finally, the growing critical force of the canon, the repertory of supposedly timeless musical works symbolic of the free subject's ability to transcend its fleeting bodily existence, coupled with the imposition of interpretation/*Werktreue* as the ideal of musical performance, sounded the death knell of virtuosity as Liszt knew it, in performance and composition alike. That Liszt withdrew from the virtuoso circuit and reinvented himself as a composer precisely at this time is thus little surprising and probably was not a coincidence either. In a hypothetical sequel to this dissertation it might be interesting to see how much Liszt's modern scholarly reception, as well as that of other virtuosos (Paganini first comes to mind), has been affected by his double status as a composer-virtuoso. In this regard, one of our foremost Liszt scholars, James Deaville has written:

[D]espite the research of such individuals as Peter Raabe and Alan Walker (among many others) into the activity and creations of Liszt's post-virtuoso years, we are still advancing the myth of Liszt as the transcendental virtuoso. [...] This pedagogical canon has unwittingly helped to perpetuate the imbalanced perception of Liszt as a virtuoso, and thus potentially contributed to a general assessment of his creative artistry as shallow and transitory, despite the many non-virtuosic keyboard works and all of his compositions in other media. [...] The myth [of Liszt as a transcendental virtuoso] prohibits Liszt from effectiveness in any area other than pianistic virtuosity, which of course would ultimately trivialize his contribution to music. [...] the seemingly persistent desire to focus on Liszt's transcendental virtuosity still infects the artists and scholars among us.³

Deaville's choice of words is symptomatic of our continuously ambivalent relationship with virtuosity: why should one's desire to focus on Liszt's transcendental virtuosity be described as an infection? After all, the man was probably the best piano virtuoso that ever lived. And why fear that Liszt's association with pianistic virtuosity will "*of course*" "ultimately trivialize his

³ Deaville 1997, pp. 184–85, 191, and 195.

contribution to music”? Why would the perception of Liszt as a virtuoso be seen as contributing to “a general assessment of his creative artistry as *shallow and transitory*” (emphasis added)? Answering those and similar questions might help us determine how much (if at all) our own positions on instrumental virtuosity have changed since the 1830s. Also, and perhaps more importantly, it might help us assess our stances on the notions of free subjectivity and the aesthetic autonomy of music.

APPENDIX I: A LIST OF MAJOR VIOLIN AND PIANO VIRTUOSI, C. 1815–C. 1850

Name	Born	Died	Instrument	Provenance
Alard, Delphin	1815	1888	Violin	French
Alkan, Valentin	1813	1888	Piano	French
Artôt, Alexandre	1815	1845	Violin	Belgian
Baillot, Pierre	1771	1842	Violin	French
Bériot, Charles-August de	1802	1870	Violin	Belgian
Bull, Ole	1810	1890	Violin	Norwegian
Chopin, Frédéric	1810	1849	Piano	Polish / French
Clementi, Muzio	1752	1832	Piano	Italian / English
Cramer, John Baptist	1771	1858	Piano	German / English
Czerny, Carl	1791	1857	Piano	Austrian
Dreyschock, Alexander	1818	1869	Piano	Czech
Ernst, Heinrich Wilhelm	1814	1865	Violin	Czech
Field, John	1782	1837	Piano	Irish
Hallé, Sir Charles	1819	1895	Piano	German / English
Heller, István / Stephen	1813	1888	Piano	Hungarian / French
Henselt, Adolf	1814	1889	Piano	German
Herz, Henri	1803	1888	Piano	Austrian / French
Hiller, Ferdinand	1811	1885	Piano	German
Hummel, Johann Nepomuk	1778	1837	Piano	Austrian
Kalkbrenner, Frédéric	1785	1849	Piano	French
Kreutzer, Rodolphe	1766	1831	Violin	French
Lafont, Charles-Philippe	1781	1839	Violin	French
Liszt, Franz	1811	1886	Piano	Hungarian
Moscheles, Ignaz	1794	1870	Piano	Bohemian
Paganini, Nicolò	1782	1840	Violin	Italian
Pixis, Friedrich Wilhelm	1785	1842	Violin	German
Pleyel, Camille	1782	1855	Piano	French

Pleyel, Marie (Moke)	1811	1875	Piano	French
Prudent, Emile	1817	1863	Piano	French
Ries, Ferdinand	1784	1838	Piano	German
Rode, Pierre	1774	1830	Violin	French
Schumann, Clara (Wieck)	1819	1896	Piano	German
Sivori, Camillo	1815	1894	Violin	Italian
Spagnoletti, Paolo	1773	1834	Violin	Italian / English
Spohr, Louis	1784	1859	Violin	German
Steibelt, Daniel	1765	1822	Piano	German / French
Thalberg, Sigismond	1812	1871	Piano	German / Austrian
Vieuxtemps, Henry	1820	1881	Violin	Belgian
Viotti, Giovanni Battista	1755	1824	Violin	Italian

APPENDIX II: LIST OF LEXICA AND ENCYCLOPEDIAE CITED IN THE
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- C. [Carl Montag], “Aus Wien. (Schluß.)”, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Vol. XIII, No. 47 (December 9th, 1840), pp. 186–87
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Bériot

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Bull

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Chopin

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