

# Patterns of Musical Time Experience Before and After Romanticism

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The article pays homage to the leading authority of 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian music aesthetics, József Ujfalussy, by connecting his heritage to more recent research on the problems of musical time and notably to the study pursued by Raymond Monelle. Rather than a perennial invariant, Monelle interpreted musical time as a historically changing phenomenon constituting implicitly the basic levels of musical semantics, as they have developed throughout the Baroque, Classical and Romantic eras. The present study focuses on the last of these paradigms, claiming that the Romantic experience of musical time has dominated both the production and the reception of music culture up to this day. The Romantic musical experience is based on a latent 'framework contract' between composition and audience, which drives the meanings attached to the experience of musical temporality. This latent agreement warrants a need for conventional compositional forms and simultaneously the insufficiency thereof. | Keywords: *Musical Experience, Temporality, Romanticism, Romanticized Hearing, Musical Genre Theory*

## 1. The Problem of Time in Music

The problem of time in music was solved a long time ago, about a century and a half. Few aesthetic clichés are set more firmly in the public consciousness than the words of wisdom repeated to boredom that 'music is the art of time'. But it is precisely the old and generally accepted commonplaces that we sometimes have to examine deeper to discover and resolve their contradictions. (Ujfalussy, 1962, p. 55)

Half a century ago, the notable 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian philosopher of music, József Ujfalussy, thus formulated the task he was trying to accomplish in one of the chapters of his main work, *The Musical Image of Reality [A valóság zenei képe]* (1962, pp. 55-71). Ujfalussy sought to shift the seemingly banal and rather vague view of music as a 'time art' from a deadlock by validating its spatio-temporality, that is, the spatial aspects that covertly accompany the

eminent temporality of musical experience.<sup>1</sup> He articulated his theoretical intention against the view of aesthetic immanence: an idea that originated from and prevailed within German idealism. Ujfalussy placed his studies on musical spatio-temporality into a broad horizon along the question of musical meaning that is socially formed. This approach makes his work comparable not only to Marxist musicology of the Soviet-Russian era but also to the later research of many Western poststructuralists, among others Lawrence Kramer (1990), Susan McClary (2000) and Jacques Attali (1985).<sup>2</sup>

One of these poststructuralist researchers, Raymond Monelle (2000) attributed particular importance to the problem of musical time. In chapter 4 of his seminal book *The Sense of Music*, he examined the historical development of temporalisation in composed music and as one of the first moments of grasping musical semantics, he highlighted the layers of meaning in historically changing forms of temporalities in musical works.<sup>3</sup> The present study, building primarily on Monelle's insights (and also referring back to the task set by Ujfalussy), seeks to characterize the time experience of musical Romanticism that reigns to this day and defines not only the musical experience of many people today but affects the general time experience as well. My intention is to demonstrate that Romantic musical experience is based on a latent 'framework contract' between the piece of music and the audience that directs and coordinates the meanings attached to the experience of musical temporality. This latent agreement warrants the need for conventional compositional forms and simultaneously the insufficiency thereof. In order to make my position more explicit, I should clarify in the first place the preceding historical process from which the Romantic experience of musical time has emerged.<sup>4</sup> Thus, my first step will be to briefly reconstruct the temporal poetics of Baroque and Viennese Classical music; only then shall I return to the original question: the musical expression of the temporal experience in modernity.

## 2. Ambiguity of Musical Time Experience

The starting point can be nothing more than to state that music is temporal in its deepest essence and is even a transfiguration of time itself.<sup>5</sup> In music, time is preserved and denied at the same time; in a dialectical cycle it ceases and gets exalted. As Schelling (1989, 107 ff.) has already put it, although the self-

<sup>1</sup> Ujfalussy's considerations are in agreement with the criticism that was influentially explicated recently by William John Thomas Michell and other interdisciplinary scholars with regard to the modern standpoint of art theory emerged from Lessing's coat, by subordinating the mediums of arts to the separated and opposed dimensions of spatiality and temporality (Mitchell, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> For the broader context of post-World War Soviet-Russian and East European musicology compared to Western European and Anglo-Saxon (post)structuralist musicology, see Márta Grabócz (2009).

<sup>3</sup> Further notable readings in this respect are Jonathan Kramer (1988), Gisèle Brelet (1949), and Jerrold Levinson (1997).

<sup>4</sup> In the following, the terms 'modern' and 'romantic', which Hegel already used in a related sense, are treated as quasi-identical concepts. For an updated explanation of the concept of 'romantic,' see Maarten Doorman (2004).

<sup>5</sup> For highly elaborate formulations of this commonplace, see Vladimir Jankélévitch (1961).

absorbed listening surrenders itself into a moving flux of sound while perceiving the musical process, the latter reaches a resting point in the final chords, which exerts a retroactive effect on the listening experience. The piece of music, both as an ongoing occurrence and as a completed deed, especially in the eyes of the early Romanticists, is honored as the prime path of ascension for the human spirit. They consider it to be reminiscent of philosophical contemplation because of its form, without complicating the spirit with overweight conceptuality (cf. Bowie, 2001, p. 42). The result of the above-mentioned retroactive listening experience is that a work of music becomes what it precisely is in the very moment it has been completed in its performance. It is born just when it passes away and becomes the content of memory and retrospection, as if it has always belonged to the past tense, not to the present.

In the memory, the temporality of the musical process transfigures into something spatial, the imaginary spatialization of its building blocks. "Time in succession becomes a spatial juxtaposition through memory," Ujfalussy (1962, p. 61) writes, referencing the forefather of Western music philosophy, Aristoxenus.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the work of music follows contradictory drives: in its progression, it meets the expectation of the listener for formal fulfillment and completion that leads into mental spatialization; but at the same time, it procrastinates the achieving of its objective identity. This tension characterizes the piece of music not only in terms of the spatiality that emerges from temporality, but also in its materiality which is acoustically perceivable, and transfigures into an intellectual content within the musical process. This musical content can only come into existence in our imagination. Thus, although music works with the utmost real in our existence: our time, it still casts doubt on the pressing of ever-flowing time, when it establishes itself in the realm of memory and imagination.

Music also interrupts our everyday time experience in multiple ways, because in music, not only natural and cultural time, but also syntactic and semantic time separate from each other. The evolving of the musical process, that is the well-constructed sequence of musical signs, is tied to a certain *chronological* order of the piece in contrast with its retroactive meaning, which has a *kairological* character (cf. Monelle, 2000, pp. 81-114).<sup>7</sup> The time of signification is thus something quite different from the temporality of the signified. On the one hand, there is a measurable continuum, on the other hand, an undivided whole that Henri Bergson (1912) called 'durée,' i.e. duration.

To sum up, while a work of music constitutes its own time in imagination and memory, at the same time it suspends the 'actual' time, that is the external

<sup>6</sup> For the original reference see Aristoxenus (1902, sect. 38-39, pp. 193-194).

<sup>7</sup> Contrary to the quantitative concept of *chronos*, understood as a continuity and progress and as a linkage of successive events, ancient Greek thinking already formulated the qualitative concept of *kairos*, another kind of time that is indeterminate, directionless, unpredictable, decision provoking (or provoked by decision), and which get conceptualized in Aristotelian rhetorics as the 'right moment,' in Christian theology as a 'moment of grace' or 'divine order'. (Cf. McNeill, 1999, p. 44; Sipiora and Baumlin, 2002)

continuity of the *durée* of remembrance and imagination. In other words, it suspends the 'real' present time, and gives place to the piece to flourish, whose final chords have resounded just now. But this summary would be hasty, and it was exactly from this haste that a misunderstanding of the constitutive historicity of Western music came out. The historical aspects of our music culture have not been grasped yet by acknowledging the fact that music possesses a specific kind of time of its own, and its own *durée* is characterized by the spatial qualities of memory and imagination. The historicity typical of Western culture can be grasped where the relationship between musical time, as structured in the compositional form, and the subjective experience of time goes through changes. From this perspective, we can find very similar fault lines in the modern history of European music as recognized by Foucault (1972) in the epistemology of the modern age.<sup>8</sup>

Monelle carried out a thorough historical study on the forms of musical time, i.e. musical temporalization in the above sense, drawing on the philosophical theories of Henri Bergson and the literary scholar George Poulet (1956). His insights offer analytical perspectives that have remained largely untapped so far and can contribute to provide renewed intellectual adventure for our present by the highly respected concert repertoire. "In music we have been so preoccupied with formal categories that we have found no name for the genre of nineteenth-century instrumental music, the musical novel indeed." In a self-evident and yet provocative way, Monelle (2000, p. 119) summarizes a conclusion that he draws from the comparative analysis of musical temporalizations in Baroque, Classical, and Romantic repertoires. In general, these three repertoires of musical works, the most prominent ones in Western music history, are considered from the perspective of musicology – that is based on *Formenlehre* – to be three variations of a single paradigm, the European major-minor tonality. However, they form three dramatically distinct modes of musical time.

### 3. Temporalities in Baroque and Classical Music

Linking Monelle's considerations to the insights put forward by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1986, pp. 3-53), we can state that Baroque music has a kind of festive character in a temporal sense. Now, the time of the feast, in contrast to its today misinterpretation, in its original sense would not remove us from our normal selves, nor would it put 'real' time in parentheses. On the contrary, feast makes the sempiternity of time and the temporality of human life emphatic. *Sempiternitas* is what Augustine in his *Confessiones* (XI, 14) referred to when he characterized time as something that one experiences as understandable only when one doesn't think about it, but lives with and in it,

<sup>8</sup> As Clifford Geertz (1978) writes in his elegant review on Discipline and Punishment, according to Foucault "history is not a continuity, one thing growing organically out of the last and into the next, like the chapters in some nineteenth-century romance. It is a series of radical discontinuities, ruptures, breaks, each of which involves a wholly novel mutation in the possibilities for human observation, thought, and action." These mutations or 'epistemological fields' are the ones that research must first and foremost describe "according to the rules determining what kinds of perception and experience can exist within their limits, what can be seen, said, performed, and thought in the conceptual domain they define." Finally, it must be described "how one [of the *épistémès*] has formed itself in the space left vacant by another, ultimately covering it over with new realities."

while if one makes it the subject of thought, it had already slipped out of their hands.<sup>9</sup> Gadamer emphasizes that we are to adjust ourselves to the feast that discloses the mystery hidden in the sempiternity of time as a dictation. Therefore, instead of supposing that time is at our disposal we subordinate ourselves to it. This is expressed by the saying that we can ‘enact a celebration’, or ruin it with our ignorance. The festival designates its duration: there is an interval between its coming and passing. This festive time, however, does not disconnect itself from the ordinary, but confirms it by a double temporality. Accordingly, this does not mean at all that celebration would be detached from reality or would be imaginary; for without the experience of the feast the daily reality of time would not be accessible otherwise. The feast confronts us with our temporality and teaches us how time ‘is’.

If the temporality of Baroque music is rightly called ecstatic, ecstasy here can only mean that this music connects us with our *ek-static*, that is, unstable and eternally dynamic fundament of existence. The temporal dynamics of Baroque music does not know the difference between pathos and progression: for in this music the pathos always progresses by itself, and at the same time allows itself to be confined within the limits set by ethos. The temporal unity of pathos and ethos forms a typifiable pattern and does not separate into two, distinct moments of pathos and ethos. Baroque music always employs a single temporality, but that temporality – and this is where the typology comes into play – is different in every piece and every movement.

In contrast to a Baroque piece of music conceived in the unity of pathos and ethos, in the internal articulation of which we always find contrastingly separated units that do not form a developing semantic field, the Classical symphony has an argumentative structure (Monelle, 2000, p. 111 ff.). Compared to the festive time of the former, a dramatic-discursive temporality appears here, one in which each moment refers to another moment that can be contrasted with. In Baroque music, time is not yet a constitutive ingredient of form in the strict sense. In turn, the Classical piece of music is first and foremost a temporal form, and in fact, a *dramatic* form of time. The sense of wholeness that arises at the end of the symphony (and at the end of each formal unit) comes from the balance of the interplay of opposing moments. This equilibrium, however, is not fixed, rather, it is a continuous dynamism while giving birth to ever new aspects and relations. Throughout the piece, the symphony is on its way to its own fullness and unceasingly promises the experience of ‘ful-filled time’. (Gadamer, 1970, pp. 341-353) However, the distinction that works between its progression and its completion is mirrored in a duality of its temporal experience. Everything that happens in it to counterbalance opposing moments and to generate its semantic dynamics gets relativized through the contrast between the sheer temporality of progression and the ful-filled time of completion.

The Classical symphony, on the level of its tiniest details, is something

<sup>9</sup> “Quid est ergo tempus? si nemo ex me quaerat, scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio.” (‘What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks me, I do not know.’) (Augustine, 2006, p. 254)

incredibly eloquent, getting the listener into its own musical discourse like a vortex. However, if we perceive it as a whole, it is a motionless greatness: silent and inaccessible. The philosophical commentaries that develop around symphonies go into raptures over a “supernatural”, “mystic”, “holy”, “divine”, “heavenly”, and “magic world” (E. T. A. Hoffmann, 1917, pp. 123-133), while they speak of it as a language beyond language, and as the manifestation of the ineffable. (cf. Bonds, 2006) The musical commentator, who expects the failure of verbal communicability regarding the musical experience well ahead, often uses an undisguised religious voice to describe the symphony, while reporting on a state of exaltation, which embraces the physical and the mental wholeness of the human being, and can be communicated only in fragments and in retrospect. (cf. Dahlhaus, 1989) However, this devoted discourse does not create an actual religious cult around the ‘absolute’ music because it is incapable of addressing the composition itself and conveying its superhuman *logos* with a binding force.<sup>10</sup>

In the Classical symphony, the relationship between the part and the whole is even: conflict, complication and resolution are balanced. If we have called its temporal nature dramatic because of its dual character, let us now add for the sake of precision that its dramatic time dynamics is more similar to comedy than to tragedy. The conflicts and confrontations that arise play a role primarily in postponing a resolution, although the latter always takes place sooner or later. The aspects of development and resolution, that is, the time of realization and the timelessness of completeness, relativize each other, and thus a symphony can be conceived with the same right as something in which everything happens for development, and in which everything exists for the sake of the resolution. The argumentative system of expositions, contrasts, conclusions, and derivations, which make up the fabric of progression in a piece of music, as well as the resolution in which the piece becomes complete, are sources of pleasure for the creator and audience alike, although not the identical kind of pleasure. The euphoria of the finale is prefigured by several points in the musical composition, whose completion provides a timeless synthesis of the entire semiotic structure of the piece.

#### 4. Time Experience in Romantic Music

In Romantic music, this temporal duality sharpens into a dramatic conflict and brings the time dynamics of the piece of music closer to tragedy. (Monelle, 2000, pp. 115-121)<sup>11</sup> For the Romantic composer, the progressive and synthetic

<sup>10</sup> From the perspective of the history of mentalities, the captivating aesthetic experience attributed to purely instrumental music can be associated to the decontextualizing character of Winckelmann’s aesthetic sensibility on ancient Greek sculpture, which - decades ahead of the time of the devoutness of the musical experience of symphonies - provides a perfect structural parallel. It is worth noting that oblivion is the key through which both Winckelmann and an early mouthpiece of the idea of absolute music, Wilhelm Wackenroder, are trying to articulate the ecstatic experience they lived through and witnessed; Winckelmann in relation to a Greek (or believed to be Greek) sculpture, Wackenroder in relation to a classical symphony. “In the presence of this miracle of art I forget all else, and I myself take a lofty position for the purpose of looking upon it in a worthy manner.” – Winckelmann writes in his ‘Description of the Apollo Belvedere’. (1872, p. 313) Wackenroder makes a similar statement about the symphony: “I have always experienced that whatever music I am hearing seems to be the best and most exquisite, and makes me forget all other kinds.” (cited in Dahlhaus, 1989, p. 82)

<sup>11</sup> However, Monelle does not discuss tragedy but ‘novelness’, that is ‘the musical novel’.



times of music have opposite values: the former connects to the worthless present while the latter is linked to the precious past (or the mysterious future). The two temporal dimensions can no longer translate into each other. Individual moments cannot unite, and the experience of wholeness is not available even where things fit each other in their totality, but only where something remains fragmentary and triggers the feeling of the “infinite”.<sup>12</sup> Monelle (2000, pp. 121-122) rightly points out that while in the Classical symphony every phase can be integrated into each other, in Romantic music, a “textual schizophrenia” prevails. In the experience of Classical symphony, present time and past tense becomes indistinguishable through the dual work of remembrance and expectant imagination. In Romantic art, however, this harmonious consonance of temporalities proves impossible: “remembering is now no longer *uniting* present with past” (Monelle 2000, p. 115), but executes a leap that leads to the past time, which is not linked organically in any way to the present. Thus, it explicitly [highlights] “all the distance that has to be crossed in order to discern ‘in the desolate depths of the gulf within’ the dark, remote, and mysterious being of memory.” (Poulet, 1956, p. 28) The dramatic character of the temporal rupture expressed in Romantic art is aptly illustrated by Poulet when he describes the relationship between the present and the past as one among which “there reappears a sort of dead duration, a kind of negative time composed of destruction and absence, an existence finished.” (*Ibid*) Then he adds (Poulet, 1956, p. 29):

And so there opens, at the center of man’s being, in the actual feeling of his existence, an insupportable void which real existence borders on every side; existence in time. It is as if duration had been broken in the middle and man felt his life torn from him, ahead and behind. The romantic effort to form itself a being out of presentiment and memory ends in the experience of a double tearing of the self.

The exalted air that surrounded Classical symphony precisely due to its ability of dissolving present and past, in Romantic art gets clearly and exclusively connected to the past, which is emphatically distinguished from present time. A Romantic work of art in its wholeness can no longer claim to be a revelation of the absolute: this would need the unification of past, present, and future, and the harmony between its parts and its totality. In a Romantic work, it is only the voice of the past (which has always been past-like even in its present time) that can sound the metaphysical strings, similarly to a revelation beyond language that can only be emitted by the partial (as in 1 Corinthians 13).

According to Monelle’s analyses, the *Romantic* symphony is a *symphony* only in terms of its formal structure but no longer in terms of temporal dynamics, which are more decisive than the formal structure. The proper formal structure is indeed not enough to secure the nature of symphony which is conceived as a source of speechless rapture and undisturbed spiritual devotion. After all, the function and validity of the compositional form is defined by the specific temporal experience aimed by the musical work, but it is precisely the distance

<sup>12</sup> Regarding the expression of the infinite, and for a comparison between Romantic music sensibility and parallel painterly developments, see László Földényi’s studies on Caspar David Friedrich (1993).

between the temporal dynamics of Classical and the Romantic symphony that is insurmountable. Of course, all this does not mean that the temporal dynamics of Romantic music would be some kind of return to the Baroque paradigm. On the contrary, it differs from it in its temporality just as much as the Classical symphony differs from the music of the Baroque era. Additionally, while the Classical symphony still maintains a hidden connection with the temporal experience of Baroque music, in the case of Romanticism, the difference becomes irreversible and final.

For, in the Classical symphony, the sections of a temporal progression step out from the flow only to reunite in the moment of fulfillment and synthesis, preserving thus the experience of the festive time. In contrast, the double temporalization of Romantic music is irreducibly heterogeneous in its nature: it cannot become an ecstatic unity of action and suffering, but is constantly realized as a conflict of these two aspects. The time of progressive thematic argumentation must endure the violent intrusions of a motionless reverie or timeless nostalgia (or utopian dream) again and again; and vice versa, the exclusive moments of remembrance and imagination are again and again disturbed by the compulsion to settle into a formal structure. The synthesis that transforms past, present and future into a single spiritual still life (or even a trance-like state) cannot be born here out of the interplay between the individual elements of the work; but directly emerges out of the operation of the extraordinary, and the charming moments of the work, which saturate the powers of imagination.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, while the experience of transcendence is promised by the Classical symphony through the indistinguishable unity of temporal co-progression and timeless revelation (i.e. the phenomenal and the noetic), the Romantic piece of music entrusts the same to an exclusive, out-of-structure material, which is in fact alien to its own musical context. At this point, Monelle introduces the notion of “genre”<sup>14</sup>, relying on Michael Riffaterre’s literary analyses, which can be applied mainly to the sub-themes of the Romantic symphonies, but also to the main themes and transitional passages (the so-called *Gang*). The genre is a kind of poetic parasite: regardless of formal and stylistic constraints, it creates a global feel, and a general atmosphere or content to a section of a narrative-dramatic work of art, but never to the whole. The genre has evocative power and the illusion of verisimilitude. These qualities, however, do not come from its internal qualities, but from its contextual position. And it gains its effectiveness in a contractual way: Romantic music places the natural power of art into the genre that fulfills the condition for the emergence of the unlikely verisimilitude.<sup>15</sup>

Genre can only be thought of as opposed to structure, which carries it, gives space to it, and organizes it. However, for Romantics, structure is exactly the

<sup>13</sup> Monelle (2000, pp. 137-145) provides an outstandingly illuminating example of this in his analysis of Tchaikovsky’s Sixth Symphony.

<sup>14</sup> Meaning as a ‘kind’, a ‘type’ or a ‘stylistic sort’.

<sup>15</sup> Concerning the ‘natural powers’ of art explained from another perspective and in comparison with the opposing aspects of the sociohistorical contexts, see Richard Shusterman’s idea of “art as dramatization.” (2001)



non-artistic part in art. The structure is a mere fabrication, a shot of artificiality, as opposed to the genre, which is – like nature itself – the most homely and most terribly alien at the same time. Genre is an initiation into reality, both as act and as result. It is therefore based on a kind of cultic agreement that is re-established and ritually validated between the creator and the recipient during each aesthetic experience. This cultic agreement manifests itself in nothing else but in its practice: on the one hand, in the ever-reproducing bilaterality of the art experience, which not only separates the acting parties (the artist who performs the initiation and the audience as the initiate) but also generates their virtual community; on the other hand, in those transcendent moments that are offered each time by the effects of verisimilitude in a Romantic work. The cohesion in this community is not ensured by a formal treaty, but by a prior understanding among the members regarding this particular cult of the musical piece, more specifically, about the common belief of what kind of needs music could respond to and what kind of expectations it anticipates. In fact, these expectations can be varied and different in the case of a Romantic musical experience, but the promise of allowing potentially all sorts of expectations goes even beyond this diversity. For, the genre offers a verisimilitude in which the objects of desire can bathe.

##### 5. Time Components of Musical Semantics

The historical dynamics of the changing temporal experiences and conceptions of European music is relevant not only with regards to the history of ideas, or with regards to a better description of the semantics of the concert repertoires. Exploring these dynamics may also encourage drawing practical lessons for today's musical thinking. Above all, the historical dynamics of musical semantics works in the complex interplay that operates between the temporality of a piece of music and the audience's experiential horizon. The problem of musical time cannot be reduced to the enquiry that examines the nature of temporality operating in a piece of music. Such an enquiry should also include the temporality of the listening experience. "What happens in a piece of music, and what does that happening mean?" This was the question asked by classical musicology, based on an idea of "sounding forms in motion" (Hanslick, 1986), mostly in harmony with the newer musicology's program of a musical semantics (Meyer, 1956). "What happens in music listening, and what does that happening mean?" This would be the leading question in a discipline of the history of musical hearing, thus complementing mainstream music history. It is clear that the two questions are not mutually exclusive but mutually presupposed. Musical works cannot be imagined without a reference to the spatio-temporal experiential horizon of an era. And vice versa: musical hearing unfolds and evolves through the acquisition of the spatio-temporal features offered by musical works. Neither can be reduced to the other, but none can be thought through without the other.

Another lesson follows from this: the *temporal paradigms* of European music in the modern era play a decisive role in what can be called the history of musical hearing. Not incidentally, the deteriorating condition of the latter in the 20th

century was characterized by Adorno (1991, pp. 29-60) simply by the phrase “regression of listening”. However, in the perspective of Monelle’s reasoning, it is uncertain whether Adorno’s undoubtedly high-impacting thesis is accurate enough. It seems more appropriate to speak of an all-encompassing *romanticization* of musical hearing, that is, to speak of the fact that the temporal experience of ‘textual schizophrenia’, stretching between structure and genre in Romantic music, has retroactively reached the music of earlier ages (and other cultures) as well. As a compensation, however, this changed sensibility subsequently entered into a cultic deal related to the ‘genre’ in all cases: all musical productions in every culture have an almost equal chance to apply for the enforcement of the lightning-like effects of rapture and ‘verisimilitude’.<sup>16</sup>

As an example, here is a remarkable scene from E.M. Forster’s novel *Howards End* (chapter V), which presents the romanticization of a great Classical symphony, the then hundred-year-old Beethoven Fifth in a complex way. It also shows the varied and divergent ways listeners can experience musical time. So, this example also speaks about a process that coincides, from a sociological point of view, with the growing separation of the ‘beau monde’ and the ‘audience’.

It will be generally admitted that Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony is the most sublime noise that has ever penetrated into the ear of man. All sorts and conditions are satisfied by it. Whether you are like Mrs. Munt, and tap surreptitiously when the tunes come – of course, not so as to disturb the others – or like Helen, who can see heroes and shipwrecks in the music’s flood; or like Margaret, who can only see the music; or like Tibby, who is profoundly versed in counterpoint, and holds the full score open on his knee; or like their cousin, Fraulein Mosebach, who remembers all the time that Beethoven is *echt Deutsch*; or like Fraulein Mosebach’s young man, who can remember nothing but Fraulein Mosebach: in any case, the passion of your life becomes more vivid, and you are bound to admit that such a noise is cheap at two shillings. (Forster, 2007, p. 34)

This audience is going through extremely heterogeneous aesthetic experiences. Yet, it can be stated that in the intersection of their heterogeneous attention, there stands the temporal dynamics of the piece. And this is only possible because all of them listen to Beethoven’s symphony (perhaps with the exception of Margaret) in a Romantic way, so the experience of transcendence or rapture makes the work of art fragmentary for all of them. The ‘great moments’ of the symphony that stir the feelings and the imagination of the listeners belong to a temporal experience that is no longer based on the development of the musical structure. The genre is located as an enclave in the musical process and functions as a take-off point for the listener’s experience. This take-off opportunity is by no means surprising to the audience, indeed, they expect it as one of the best deals achievable in their

<sup>16</sup> The significance of this change in sensibility is best understood when modern practice driven by a historical approach is compared to the premodern view that judges musical productions of earlier generations barbaric and unworthy of cultivation (not to mention the music of non-European cultures).

lives. After all, for two shillings, they can get the happiness of having their desires 'taken to stage'.

## 6. Romantic Sensibility as Determinant of Experiencing Music in Modernity

In contrast to the spellbinding genre sections, which saturate mostly the sub-theme, in terms of the structural progression there does not seem to be a latent contract between the composer and the listener of the Romantic piece of music. This is no wonder, however, since, according to the Romantic conception of art, structure is a mere fabrication, not bound to the expectations for verisimilitude; and consequently it possesses a weightless freedom of assemblage.

This liberty is only available in certain twentieth-century music poetics, but not yet in Romantic music. Romantic composers, in addition to their responsibility for the genre, take on another responsibility as well: the compulsion to a rational and discursive musical form. Monelle (2000, pp. 115-146) gives detailed examples of how works of Schumann, Brahms, Dvořák, and Tchaikovsky demonstrate rivalry between the need for verisimilitude through genre and also need for discipline in musical form-giving. Sometimes it is the genre that overwhelms the other (making all structural elements insignificant), sometimes it is the discipline of form-giving that prevails (thus preventing the genre from reaching its full completion). As a result, on the discursive-structural side there is almost always a collapse due to the conflict; while on the side of the genre, there is almost always an authentic expression. Yet, responsibility for the formal structure can claim a crucial place in Romantic music works because the genre and the ecstatic time experience it promises can only enforce its powers in a contextual way. The genre, as a manifestation of the really real that is recalled through memory and imagination, always needs the formal structure, as a counter-balance: a seemingly progressive, in fact meaningless machinery of the empty present time. Sometimes the past gets stuck between the gears of the present-machine, or the future sparks between them for a moment; and in these cases the greatest pain coincides with the greatest pleasure. It is only due to a Mephistophelian treaty about the musical structure that provides an illusion of progress that the angelic invitation to daydream of the utmost reality can prevail.

Even if it is easy to see that the concept of genre fundamentally presupposes the notion of structure, and that the time of daydreaming is complementary to the time of present-machinery, the question remains as to why structure articulates itself in the 19th century (and in many cases even in the 20th century) within the frameworks of classical ideals of musical form. Why do Romantic composers still call their works a symphony or a sonata? Why do they insist on argumentative forms? Why do they not replace them by static forms in which the timelessness of the genre is not threatened by the compulsion to progress?

As a matter of fact, at least partly, they are indeed abandoning argumentative forms and re-focusing their activities to bagatelles, impromptus, character

pieces, interludes, intermezzi and similar genres, typically compiled into series. But this can only be done because the prestigious Classical symphonic forms are also preserved in Romantic repertoire; and the aesthetic paradigm of the genre / structure divide is coded by these masterworks in each and every composition. Therefore, even in the case of the Romantic repertoire, symphonic works, especially the compositions in sonata forms, should be the focus of research about musical experience. However, the question provoked by the constant presence and unceasing cultural importance of these Romantic symphonies remains valid: Why does the sonata form not disappear along with the temporal dynamics of the Classical symphonies?

The answer can be discovered precisely along the aspect of temporality. If Romantic compositions had turned to the problem of musical structure and process in an original way – rather than focusing on the genre as the mouthpiece of subjectivity – they would have had to legitimize present time, in which every process of form unfolds. But the Romantics identify the present with nullity, invalidity, and emptiness; there is no reason for them to turn to it as a phenomenon with its own value. They were only interested in showing their back to the present.

In connection with the Romantic repertoire, it is a common belief that the formal-structural continuity associated with the Viennese classics should be interpreted here as a tribute, an obvious gesture of historical consciousness. Brahms, for example, arguably expresses his respect for Beethoven through formal features of his works. Respect, however, cannot be the final word with regards to the formal discipline of Romantic works, since, for example, Schumann does not replace the argumentative forms at hand with Baroque structures due to his passion for Bach, and his stylistic and textural allusions are inserted and applied into Classical, argumentative forms.

The Romantic composer thus identifies above all with a specific position in art history. He sees himself as a descendant of Viennese classics, and as an heir of the aesthetics of ‘absolute music’ traced back to Bach (and even Palestrina) in a retroactive way, while he interprets this heritage in various ways.<sup>17</sup> The historical situation of his own position does not dissolve his self-consciousness, however. This is obvious from the contradiction that, while asserting the sublime heritage, the artist is still unable to identify with the formal requirements of tradition, that is the temporal dynamics that operate in the Baroque or Classical repertoire. Unlike the classics who turned to the problems of musical form and discourse, the Romantics turn away from questions of structure – or at least they relate to these in an ambivalent way, because they see them as tied to the dullness of the present time. As George Sand put it in her *Lelia*: “I became aware that the present did not exist for me [...] and that the occupation of my life was to turn ceaselessly toward the lost joys or toward the joys still possible.” (cited in Poulet, 1956, p. 26)

The task that Sand is talking about is an internal and spiritual coercion that

<sup>17</sup> See the problems of the “New German” school and Wagner, as discussed in Dahlhaus (1989, pp. 128-140).

drives the artist toward the really real. This is counterbalanced by another coercion: the denial of the vacuous present, which is accomplished by deliberately letting the formal structure empty out. Maintaining an inherited structure seems, at first glance, the result of a conformist social contract. The formal-structural sample and validity of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony that is upheld also in its wake through Romantic symphonies, allows for the realization of spooky communities such as Forster reports on. The diverse artistic experience of such communities – and its various consequences in how one experiences oneself – can be called spooky because the total musical event falls apart fatally and irrevocably into the divides of the consensual experience of *chronos* and individual experience of *kairos*. The chronological homogeneity of the series of musical events rests on its own structure, which maintains, however, only an illusory interrelation between its parts and its whole in the Romantic works. This illusory chronological homogeneity takes the audience into the misconception that their individual revelations have a common focus, although there are only specific sections and segments, which are responsible for producing those effects that invite one for trance and revelation.

So, what seems to be a guarding at first glance, and the preservation of a consensual cultural treasury, is shown in a more thorough investigation that it hides actually an emptying and an annihilation of that treasury of musical forms. Thus, actually it is nothing more than the trampling of the inherited cultural consensus. When music composing does not replace empty structures with new, valid, or updated ones, and when refused consensual forms are not replaced by consensus-seeking novel forms, not only a certain consensus is eliminated, but the possibility of consensus in general is denied. The Romantic composer has the authority and contract to use the evocative and enchanting power of what Monelle called the 'genre'. This gives the right, initially undercover, to destroy conventions by invoking spiritual coercion. This act, with all its consequences, can be justified only by a spontaneous audience that needs the camouflage of the old structure less and less, for it no longer expects either art-historical or comprehensive discursive-cultural validity from the work. It only expects 'big moments' from music. Waiting for these, however, becomes more and more in vain especially in pure instrumental music, above all because of the lack of consensual structural and formal patterns.

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