

FROM TELEMANN TO HAYDN

Concertos and Quartets from the Enlightenment

Here we are in the presence of the grand musical movement, one that is national and democratic at the same time.

Romain Rolland

Voyage musical au pays du passé, 1922

Between the Baroque period, whose solid, unified musical structures culminated in the works of Bach and Handel, and the Classical period, with Haydn and Mozart at its apogee, there was a period of several decades that specialists call, somewhat pejoratively, the Pre-classical, the Rococo, or the Galant. During this period music went through the important change in mentality that characterized the Enlightenment.

Composers abandoned counterpoint, which was now considered irrational, and developed expressive and singing melodies. They wrote lighter and more agile bass lines, put the conventional dance rhythms aside, sought out surprising harmonies and rhythmic effects, and juxtaposed disparate compositional methods. For each instrument they wrote in a style suitable to that instrument. Finally, they introduced a second theme into the movements of sonatas and symphonies. This ferment of experimentation did not always immediately pay off, but some of these experiments had effects that were felt well beyond the Classical period.

It was German musicians who made these profound changes in style, mainly by developing specifically instrumental musical forms – the symphony and the string quartet. In doing so they became aware of their own particular genius and overcame the former supremacy of the Italians. With their new ways of writing, they emphasized the expressive possibilities of what was called the galant style, and they stipulated, under the rubric of the *Empfindsamkeit* (sensitivity) movement, that art must express personal emotions rather than, as in the preceding period, stereotyped and codified emotions. As well, in the spirit of *Sturm und Drang*, they associated the minor keys with passionate emotion.

The first composer north of the Alps to write in this new style was Georg Philipp Telemann; he was willing to innovate throughout his long life, and was a pioneer in this important evolution. Among his most notable works are some 50 *quatri*, in which, unlike the more contrapuntal Baroque trio sonata, each instrument in turn, either wind or string, takes the lead in the musical conversation that was called a *concertant* quartet. For the result to be balanced and fair, each instrument has to have its own thematic material. Telemann, everyone agrees, excelled at composing such conversations.

Similar developments were being made for string quartets. Already, Alessandro Scarlatti and Telemann were writing compositions for two violins, viola, and cello, without any basso continuo, but it was still contrapuntal writing that gave unity to these ensembles. When, beginning in the 1760s, German musicians led by Haydn began working on this form, which was destined to become one of the most important in the history of music, they made sure that the first violin did not have all the glory while the other lines just provided filler. Instead of elaborating their melodies using the old contrapuntal techniques, they relied on the new style of writing in sonata form with two themes.

Joseph Haydn, the principal architect of this transformation, worked indefatigably, making hundreds of trials of the new way of doing things, ceaselessly inventing, and posing compositional problems for the pleasure of solving them in numerous masterpieces. His workshop was the string quartet and the symphony; within these forms he tried out, amongst many organizing forms and musical expressions, all the structural formulae that the sonata form allowed him. His style shows unfailing invention, melodic spontaneity, and consummate craftsmanship. His Quartets opus 20, composed in 1772, were published two years later in Paris. They have become known as the Sun quartets, because of the frontispiece engraving on the edition published in Berlin in 1779. The fifth of these, in F minor, "follows more less in the quite strict Baroque tradition," says Marc Vignal. But in the last movement Haydn effectively returns to the old counterpoint as if to assure the equality of all the players and to show his mastery of the compositional technique by exhausting all its possibilities.

Musical life in the Germanic countries was not centralized. Musicians worked in the numerous princely courts of the cities. At Mannheim, the capital of the Palatinate, Elector Karl Theodore — himself a flute player— kept a full orchestra for several decades, and appointed Johann Stamitz, a musician who came originally from Bohemia, to direct it. Witness were unanimous; the precision and virtuosity of the players allowed previously unheard-of innovations such as impressive crescendos and decrescendos. Many members of this orchestra were themselves composers, including the Moravian Franz Xaver Richter, who came to Mannheim in 1747. The remarkable work done by this 'army of generals', as Burney called the orchestra, led Marcel Beaufils to write: "The Mannheim school, with Stamitz, laid the foundations of the great stylistic reform that, one after another, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven took possession of finally perfected."

Unlike the symphony and the quartet, the concerto remained more traditional. Nonetheless, the desire for virtuosity led to thematic elaboration, to more dialogue between soloist and orchestra, and to a more important role for the orchestra than Vivaldi had given it. In its own way, with its expressive melodies and minor-key dramatics, the concerto contributed to changing musical tastes. These contributions, according to Beaufils, meant that, "the innumerable concertos for soloists barely hindered the gestation of a new musical era." It was probably the young flutist Johann Baptist Wendling, at the beginning of a long and notable career (he was later associated with Mozart), who first played the

concertos that Stamitz and Richter wrote at Mannheim for flute — which was, at the time, *the* instrument for expressing feeling.

At first glance, music, with its mysterious qualities and powers, seems only distantly related to the ideas that shape our civilization. Historians have long considered this art to be a somewhat out of touch, a curiosity relegated to the sidelines. The new understanding of early music serves as an antidote to this attitude. In *La civilisation de l'Europe des Lumières*, historian Pierre Chaunu does not hesitate to conclude that, "It is in musical expression that the key to the profound thoughts of the 18th century is to be sought, and the concrete application of its grand designs to be found."

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Translated by Sean McCutcheon

Self-regarding Germany recreates itself as a whole in the art that it considers to be essentially and specifically its own. In this art it invests immense capacity, effort, tenacity, and work on brute matter. Once it had defined its personal aesthetics, shaped its instruments, and quarried and chiseled its musical language, it chased away the Italians and took over from them the favored positions next to its own princes in its own country. This is national thought in its activated form. [...] An entire generation of beauty-loving bourgeoisie had attempted to define German music when it is not at court, as being vocal music. So all the music of the pre-Romantic lied was, sadly, but an abortion? Or truly German national music was born in the courts, and culminated in instrumental music? A paradox? Not at all; what makes a nation is not what it wants to do, but what it can do.

Marcel Beaufils,

Comment l'Allemagne est devenue musicienne, (1942) 1983.