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NICHOLAS MATHEW
POLITICAL BEETHOVEN

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Nicholas Mathew's *Political Beethoven* presents a seeming contradiction. The lapidary title presages a book of great moment, yet the subject matter, Beethoven's patriotic works of 1813–1814, is unlikely to win over even the most sympathetic listener. While Mathew treats these ugly ducklings lovingly, his deeper interest lies with the insights they can provide into the composer's less overtly political music. Mathew's finely nuanced argument radiates backwards to the Third and Fifth Symphonies and forward to the Ninth Symphony and the *Missa solemnis*, and it ends with a bracing challenge to entrenched hermeneutic habits. The result is a persuasive and original book that will shape future writing on the political meanings and capital of Beethoven's music.

Mathew's first chapter ('Music Between Myth and History') rehabilitates the category of the occasional work. As he notes, occasional verse suffers no opprobrium in literary histories akin to the scorn heaped on *Wellingtons Sieg* or *Der glorreiche Augenblick*. (Critics do not sideline Victor Hugo's early odes as legitimist propaganda, for example, although he unabashedly glorified the Bourbons and even drew a royal salary.) Beethoven scholars have dismissed these works as disposable ephemera, yet, as Mathew argues, they served an opposite function: 'They make a historical moment permanent . . . the book of eternity lay open on the music desk' (30–31). Mathew's argument becomes most interesting when he points out the similarities between the heroic gestures and topics of the patriotic *Gelegenheitsstücke* and those of the Third or Fifth Symphonies. To safeguard the latter works for posterity, critics have had to read them 'under erasure', cleansing them of political context just as Beethoven rubbed out the Napoleonic dedication on the *Eroica* score: 'Musical autonomy is constituted by a gesture in which music is seen to reject the history with which it is otherwise complicit' (57).

Chapter Two ('Beethoven's Moments') offers a technical explanation for the occasional quality of the composer's patriotic works, a discussion that again opens onto the canonic mainstream. Mathew calls attention to the static, tableau-like moments throughout the Congress of Vienna works and *Fidelio* that dispel the illusion of process-driven musical development. Such moments proceed additively, by parataxis, rather than through the goal-directed processes celebrated by the 'Beethoven–Hegelian' tradition stretching back from Dahlhaus, Adorno and Schenker to A. B. Marx. The absence of an autonomous musical logic is precisely what moors (or maroons) Beethoven's occasional works in their historical moment: 'From the perspective of the Beethovenian analytical tradition, what motivates the drawn-out culmination that is *Der glorreiche Augenblick* can only be understood in terms of external historical contexts rather than internal formal processes' (78). In a now familiar manoeuvre, Mathew proceeds to uncover similarly unmotivated *Augenblicke* in the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies and *Egmont* overture, arguing that it is these moments that have prompted programmatic readings and political interpretations. This insight leads to a more ominous recapitulation of his earlier conclusion: 'Demonstrations of music's processual rigour, which critics from Marx to Adorno have regarded as protection against facile exegeses of poetic content or ideological co-option, are precisely what make music most vulnerable to ideologies – eternalizing, naturalizing, and concealing the very moments in which musical forms are most obviously in dialogue with the world around them' (101).

Mathew has missed a chance to strengthen this argument further by examining the role of allegory in the Congress of Vienna works. The cast of *Der glorreiche Augenblick* – Leader of the People, Sybil, Genius, Vienna – belongs to a renaissance allegorical tradition that was revived simultaneously by the patriotic Nazarene painters in such works as Johann Friedrich Overbeck's *Italia und Germania* (1811–1820) or Hieronymus Hess's *Glaube, Hoffnung und Liebe* (1819). As embodiments of spiritual abstractions, allegorical characters disrupt the mimetic unfolding of the drama just as the static moments in Beethoven's music disrupt its processual logic. The 1814 *Fidelio* revision also tends to allegorize the characters from the 1805–1806 versions – Leonore



now appears as a celestial messenger, Rocco is a hapless victim rather than a venal pragmatist, and Don Fernando is a channel of divine justice instead of the clay-footed fellow whose vindictive rage at Pizarro must be moderated by Florestan and Leonore. The revised *Fidelio* renders the dramatis personae transparent to the divine order reinstated by the Congress of Vienna, a historical contingency that directors erase when they stage the opera as a triumph of liberal humanism.

In his third chapter ('The Sounds of Power and the Power of Sound') Mathew reconstructs an interpretative context for Beethoven's patriotic works by focusing on the listening experience of his audiences. He notes the ubiquity in musical life of Handel's choral music and its Viennese imitations, a repertory that pervaded concert life and echoed in contemporary symphonies. Mathew links the Handelian chorus to the category of the sublime as theorized by Burke, Kant and Schiller, and emphasizes the authoritarian connotations of the sublime in Beethoven's Vienna, its role as 'a displacement of direct forms of power into aesthetic experience' (108). The Handelian tradition informed the reception not only of *Der glorreiche Augenblick* and *Fidelio*, but also of Beethoven's symphonies that had absorbed traces of the 'choral sublime'. Mathew provocatively argues that the authoritarian sublime plays a crucial role in musical subject formation, a process he likens to Hegel's master-slave dialectic in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). The liberating effect of Beethoven's music thus involves the prostration of the listener: 'The subject emerges as free only through an almost annihilating encounter through which it registers its limits' (133).

This splendid chapter exemplifies Mathew's approach to hermeneutics. Instead of imputing meanings to the work, he has focused on the conditions that make possible those meanings. In terms of C. S. Peirce's semiotic theory, Mathew has reconstructed the 'interpretant' rather than the object (that is, signified) of the sign (see James Jakób Liszka, *A General Introduction to the Semiotic of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 18–52). The interpretant is a sign that translates the original sign and thereby makes sense of its relation to an object; the Handelian chorus provided this point of reference for Viennese audiences, enabling listeners to read political content in Beethoven's music. This chapter validates Mathew's introductory dictum that, 'like any human action or utterance, a work of art is political only to the extent that it is so in a particular context' (15).

His philosophical reconstruction of the sublime, however, is less innovative. The Kantian sublime has become naturalized in critical discourse about Viennese classicism, but its relevance to Beethoven's Congress of Vienna works is less than obvious. The most important source for conservative aesthetic politics was surely Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), published the same year as Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Burke's work was translated by Friedrich Gentz, Metternich's secretary, and was read attentively by Beethoven's romantic contemporaries. Burke mapped the vigour and dynamism of the sublime onto the bourgeoisie and commoners, as opposed to the beautiful aristocracy. Adam Müller absorbed Burke's model in his *Elemente der Staatskunst* (1809), the most systematic romantic political treatise, which portrays the body politic as a polarity of sublime bourgeoisie and beautiful aristocracy (see my *Beethoven after Napoleon: Political Romanticism in the Late Works* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 161–175). The violent energies that Burke and the Romantics located in the sublime appear less in Don Fernando's triumphal entrance, as Mathew suggests, than in the vengeful mob scene that the 1814 finale replaced. Mathew's invocation of Kant's Third Critique smacks of the old orthodoxy of late Beethoven as bastion of Enlightenment values, an image the book seems otherwise to challenge.

Mathew's fourth chapter ('The Inner Public') sweeps hermeneutic speculation aside and instead focuses again on interpretative context. He cleverly threads his discussion of the Ninth Symphony through the Choral Fantasy, returning to its thematic source, the early song 'Gegenliebe'. 'Gegenliebe' realizes the late eighteenth-century ideal of naive song as a mediator between individual and collective identity: 'To listen to a song is to recognize it, and to recognize it is – whether inwardly or outwardly – to sing along . . . listening becomes a sort of joining in' (141). Not just joining in, but joining up: participatory song became an enlistment tool for the Viennese militias during the Wars of Liberation. After carefully reconstructing the nationalist and patriotic uses of song, Mathew gives a whiff of grapeshot to the New Musicologists (the present author included) who have assailed the Ninth Symphony:



Maybe, by apotheosizing the eighteenth-century folk ideal, the Ninth gives musical form to one of the most basic narratives of the Christian West, performing a musical return to a lost paradise.

Or not. One thing is more certain than all this hermeneutic speculation: whatever audiences and critics have understood the Ninth to have been saying, they have often felt that its music is saying it directly to them – that they are being addressed and enlisted by it. (173)

Mathew's hermeneutic fatigue is evident in this casual backhand, as he deflects attention from semantics to pragmatics, from referential meaning to communicative act. It is an elegant stroke and refreshingly original.

His final chapter ('After the War') begins by exploring the nostalgia that Beethoven's patriotic works aroused during the prosaic Restoration, after their historical *raison d'être* had passed. Mathew detects the same nostalgia in modern enthusiasts of Beethoven's public works as they cling anxiously to their faith in the music's political relevance: 'It is as if Beethoven's interpreters need continually to refuel these masterpieces with the importance that their rhetoric calls for – something that becomes ever less supportable as the cultural presence of this music wanes in the twenty-first century . . . the action has always just happened, the great deeds belong to history now, and the best we can do is recall or commemorate the past in reading and contemplation' (196). Critics must confine themselves to 'gestural politics', wielding conference papers and monographs instead of muskets and sabres.

Political Beethoven shows symptoms of a broader disenchantment with hermeneutics. Like Carolyn Abbate, Mathew has little patience with 'gnostic' decipherment but shows much interest in the effects of music as performance (see Carolyn Abbate, 'Music: Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Inquiry* 30/3 (2004), 215–256). His book succeeds not only in reconstructing the listening experience of Beethoven's contemporaries, but also in explaining the qualities that have allowed the composer's public works to speak so potently in later historical contexts. If anything, perhaps, Mathew draws these transhistorical connections too firmly. There is a trace of Adornian fatalism in his elegiac conclusion, a pining for the Great Synthesis of collective and individual among whose ruins we are fated to wander. Yet the Ninth Symphony has continued to resonate with the ethical and political concerns of audiences, if not critics, who seem to feel no sense of belatedness. If, as Mathew claims, all political experience of music belongs within its own context, then who are we to question its relevance?

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VINCENZO MANFREDINI (1737–1799), ED. MASSIMILIANO SALA
*REGOLE ARMONICHE: FACSIMILE OF THE 1775 VENICE EDITION WITH AN ANNOTATED
ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY ROBERT ZAPPULLA*

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The composer and music theorist Vincenzo Manfredini (born 1737 in Pistoia, died 1799 in St Petersburg) was the offspring of a family of musicians who, over several generations, contributed to the musical life of Pistoia in Tuscany and other cities in Italy, and enjoyed the patronage of the European nobility in places as far apart as Monaco and Moscow. Trained in music by his father Francesco Onofrio (1684–1762), choirmaster of the Pistoia Cathedral, in 1752 Vincenzo Manfredini went to study with Giacomo Antonio Perti, choirmaster of the Basilica of San Petronio in Bologna, and subsequently with Giovanni Andrea Fioroni, choirmaster of Milan Cathedral. In 1758 Manfredini travelled to Russia as a member of an opera troupe. He found employment