

IS THE SUBLIME A MUSICAL TOPOS?

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During the 1990s the sublime became a popular trope for musicologists examining the late eighteenth-century repertory, and several important essays arose from that preoccupation. There was Elaine Sisman's elegant application of Kant's mathematical sublime to the notorious coda of the finale of the 'Jupiter' Symphony;¹ A. Peter Brown on Haydn's 'London' symphonies, resurrecting Mr Crotch's early nineteenth-century efforts to distinguish between the sublime, beautiful and ornamental styles;² James Webster on the sublime in Haydn's vocal music, following on his discussion of the symphonic sublime in the 'Farewell Symphony' book;³ an earlier, lesser-known but valuable essay by Judith Schwartz, 'Periodicity and Passion in the First Movement of Haydn's "Farewell" Symphony', with its rewarding discussion of long excerpts from Michaelis, the first German Romantic to venture a description of the musical sublime;⁴ and finally Mark Evan Bonds's 'The Symphony as Pindaric Ode', an analysis of J. A. P. Schulz's 1774 article on the symphony in Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* – a crucial document for those who would locate the musical sublime in this period.⁵ Richard Taruskin also put his imprimatur on the late eighteenth-century musical sublime in his discussion of the last four Mozart symphonies in his *Oxford History of Western Music*. The finale to Mozart's 'Jupiter' Symphony Taruskin describes, with a glancing reference to Sisman's Kantian analysis, as 'a movement that created, *without recourse to representation*, the same sort of awe that godly or ghostly apparitions created in opera. . . . That awe was the painful gateway to the beatific contemplation of the infinite, the romantics' chosen work'.⁶

Truth be told, these efforts to back the sublime into the late eighteenth century make me a little queasy. There isn't all that much evidence for the musical sublime in this period. Quibbles I have with these essays suggest some authorial grasping at straws. These include the fact that Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, the source for his mathematical sublime, was not published until 1790, while the 'Jupiter' was composed in 1788. Or that

- 1 Elaine Sisman, *Mozart: The 'Jupiter' Symphony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 79.
- 2 A. Peter Brown, 'The Sublime, the Beautiful, and the Ornamental: English Aesthetic Currents and Haydn's London Symphonies', in *Studies in Music History, Presented to H. C. Robbins Landon on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Otto Biba and David Wyn Jones (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 44–71.
- 3 James Webster, 'The Creation, Haydn's Late Vocal Music, and the Musical Sublime', in *Haydn and His World*, ed. Elaine Sisman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 57–102; James Webster, *Haydn's 'Farewell' Symphony and the Idea of Classical Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 162–163, 230–231, 247–248, 365, 369.
- 4 Judith L. Schwartz, 'Periodicity and Passion in the First Movement of Haydn's "Farewell" Symphony', in *Studies in Musical Sources and Style: Essays in Honor of Jan LaRue*, ed. Eugene K. Wolf and Edward H. Roesner (Madison: A-R Editions, 1990), 293–338.
- 5 Mark Evan Bonds, 'The Symphony as Pindaric Ode', in *Haydn and His World*, 131–153. Concerning the article's authorship, as Sulzer explains in his Preface to volume 2 of his *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, first edition (Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben und Reich, 1771–1774; facsimile edition Hildesheim: Olms, 1967), he was assisted in the writing of articles with a specific musical focus first by Johann Philipp Kirnberger (through to letter K), and then by Johann Abraham Peter Schulz (L to R). Sulzer's failing health prompted him to turn over to Schulz all the articles from S to Z (*Aesthetics and the Art of Musical Composition in the German Enlightenment: Selected Writings of Johann Georg Sulzer and Heinrich Christoph Koch*, ed. and trans. Nancy Kovaleff Baker and Thomas Christensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 14, note 22).
- 6 Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, volume 2: *The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 646.



Bonds consistently attributes to the distinguished Sulzer an article written by his musical operative Schulz, while Sulzer himself, as Matthew Riley states, ‘hardly ever mentions the sublime in connection with music, and never with instrumental music’.⁷ Or that the symphonies Schulz used as his examples were those of the two Grauns, Hasse and the Netherlander Pierre Van Maldere, whose title to sublimity few today would grant. English usage would seem to suggest a translation problem. In English translations of the Schulz article the score is three for and five against: Sisman and Bonds use the term ‘sublime’, while Bathia Churgin, the original English translator, and James Webster back ‘noble’ and ‘elevated’, Leonard Ratner uses ‘exalted’ and Nancy Baker turns the substantive adjective into a noun, ‘grandeur’.⁸ In his article on eighteenth-century instrumental styles Michael Broyles splits the difference, translating *erhaben* as ‘elevated’ in one sentence and ‘sublime’ in the next.⁹

Indeed, the German word for sublime, *erhaben*, has about it a certain semantic slipperiness. Reading Samuel Monk’s exegesis of the sublime in English literature – first published in 1935, its modest mastery of the subject has not yet been superseded – one is surprised by the bustling and various traffic in the sublime between the 1674 publication of Boileau’s translation of pseudo-Longinus and 1790, when *The Critique of Judgment* appeared. Addison, Baillie, Hume, Burke, Kames, Daniel Webb are a few of the household names Monk discusses.¹⁰ The sublime admits of many degrees of difference. It begins as a lofty style of oratory – the ‘noble’ mode. But loftiness should strike us like a thunderbolt, so the sublime becomes all that is vast, astonishing, irregular, original. A concern with how such objects strike the human soul moves the sublime away from rhetoric to Burke’s sensationalist (in both senses) psychology. Gripped by the obsession with ghosts, plagues and charnel houses haunting the works of his contemporaries, the ‘Graveyard Poets’, Burke limits the sublime’s effect on us to simple terror.¹¹ His famous essay entered the cultural mainstream, to seed the obsession with Gothic horror that developed later in the century. Kant sent the sublime on a sterner trajectory, a genuinely philosophical one; it became a crucial element in his epistemology. For us human beings, imprisoned in our a priori perceptual categories, the sublime is our only contact with the noumenal, the Absolute, which lies beyond our perceptions. In the original ‘shock and awe’ moment, confronted in some wise with the vastness of the universe (the innumerable starry skies, in the mathematical sublime), we are stopped in our tracks – blown away, as it were – and through that blocking experience transcend ordinary means of knowing, to attain an intimation of our supersensible faculty of cognition. One famous sentence turns St Anselm’s ontological proof of the existence of God neatly on its head in order to elevate human

7 Matthew Riley, ‘Civilizing the Savage: Johann Georg Sulzer and the “Aesthetic Force” of Music’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 127/1 (2002), 2, note 5.

8 In this article Schulz uses the word ‘sublime’ only twice, once as a noun and once as an adjective. In her translation Bathia Churgin uses ‘noble’ and ‘elevated’ (‘The Symphony as Described by J. A. P. Schulz (1774): A Commentary and Translation’, *Current Musicology* 29 (1980), 10–14). Sisman uses Churgin’s translation of Schulz’s article ‘slightly modified’, the modifications consisting of the substitution of ‘sublime’ for Churgin’s ‘noble’ and ‘elevated’ (*The ‘Jupiter’ Symphony*, 9). Bonds’s translation is his own (‘The Symphony as Pindaric Ode’, 132, 133). James Webster uses ‘noble’ and ‘elevated’, and points out that Schulz used the word ‘sublime’ ‘in contexts that clearly perpetuate the traditional rhetoric of “high” style’ (‘The Creation, Haydn’s Late Vocal Music, and the Musical Sublime’, 61). Both Ratner and Baker quote Schulz’s article in its citation by Koch, who reprints it with some omissions, including the second occurrence of the word ‘sublime’ (Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition* (Leipzig: A. F. Böhme, 1782–1793), volume 3, 302–304; Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer, 1980), 145; Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Introductory Essay on Composition*, trans. Nancy Kovaleff Baker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 198). To the ‘sublime’ list one could add Thomas Christensen, but he justifies ‘sublime’ by a mistranslation of another term (see note 16).

9 Michael Broyles, ‘The Two Instrumental Styles of Classicism’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 36/2 (1983), 213, 214.

10 Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1935).

11 The best-known of this group are Thomas Gray (1716–1771), Oliver Goldsmith (1730–1774), William Cowper (1731–1800) and Christopher Smart (1722–1800). Many of them were elegists, who meditated on the twilight of man’s life.



reason: ‘The sublime is that, the mere ability to think which evidences a faculty of the mind surpassing every standard of sense.’¹²

But *erhaben*, this term of eighteenth-century aesthetics and epistemology, also continued to function as a humble descriptive adjective in its original Longinian meaning of ‘lofty’, ‘elevated’, ‘noble’, or (in the most casual usage) ‘something really special’, say a ‘sublime meal’. The tussle over how to translate the two occurrences of *erhaben* in Schulz’s 1774 article on the symphony is more than trivial.¹³ As late as 1802 in his *Musikalisches Lexikon* Heinrich Christoph Koch’s description of the musical style of the *erhaben* still falls well short of the vast and disjunctive gestures of the radical sublime. It is

a serious, slow movement, a full and powerful harmony, and melodic phrases without many ornaments, which, however, proceed in bold, firm paces, and often progress in large intervallic leaps. In performance the *erhaben* requires a marked and strongly sustained tone, and a rather prominent grammatical accent.¹⁴

This sounds like a description of the topos I have dubbed the ‘exalted march’ – Donna Anna’s ‘Or sai chi l’onore’, for example.¹⁵ It is music to accompany the steady tread of Aristotle’s ‘great-souled man’, who ‘pursues few things rashly’ and ‘thinks nothing to be great’ – a lofty citizen, but with no intimation of the philosophical sublime.¹⁶ Strikingly, in these discussions of the *erhaben* by Schulz, Koch and Türk, among others, the word continually turns up paired with the *feyerlich*, the ‘ceremonial’: ‘der Ausdruck des Grossen, des Feyerlichen und Erhabenen’ (the expression of the grand, the ceremonial and elevated), as Schulz put it, something like pomp and circumstance. It is a matter of translation: ‘ceremonial and sublime’ make for rather an odd couple.¹⁷

Neither Burke nor Kant put much stock in the musical sublime. One gets the impression that for Burke, while the beautiful may be formed music, the sublime is principally natural noise – ‘vast cataracts, raging storms, thunder, or artillery’.¹⁸ It was left to Christian Friedrich Michaelis, a follower of Kant writing just

- 12 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), paragraph 25, ‘Explanation of the Term Sublime’ (‘Namenerklärung des Erhabenen’), 89. ‘Thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived’; Saint Anselm, ‘Proslogium, or Discourse on the Existence of God’, in *Basic Writings: Proslogium, Monologium, Cur Deus Homo*, trans. S. N. Deane, second edition (La Salle: Open Court, 1962), 7.
- 13 *Erhabenheit* occurs twice in discussions of particular musical repertoires (the French and the ecclesiastical, which features *ein stille Erhabenheit* nurtured by the pathetic rather than the exalted). Johann Georg Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste*, second edition, volume 4 (Leipzig: Weidmannschen Buchhandlung, 1794), ‘Symphonie’, 480.
- 14 Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Musikalisches Lexikon* (Frankfurt am Main, 1802; facsimile edition Hildesheim: Olms, 1964), see entry for ‘Erhaben’. In his *Versuch* Koch said that the first movements of symphonies should possess ‘the character of magnificence and the *erhaben*’ (‘Der Charakter der Pracht und des Erhabenen’) (*Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition*, volume 3, 301), and it is here that he quotes Schulz’s article listing ‘the grand, the ceremonial and the *erhaben*’ as characteristics of the symphony in general: ‘Die Symphonie ist zu dem Ausdrücke des Grossen, des Feyerlichen und Erhabenen vorzüglich geschickt’ (303).
- 15 See Wye J. Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: ‘Le Nozze di Figaro’ and ‘Don Giovanni’* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 19–22.
- 16 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1125a12–16 (translation mine).
- 17 Daniel Gottlob Türk also uses this trio as the first three hallmarks of the symphony, which should be ‘von einem grossen, feyerlichen, erhabenen, kühnen, feurigen u. Charakter’ (of a great, ceremonial, elevated, bold, fiery etc., character) (*Klavierschule, oder Anweisung zum Klavierspielen für Lehrer und Lernende* (Leipzig, 1789), 391–392). Thomas Christensen translates the trio as ‘grandeur, passion, and the sublime’, giving an incorrect emotional upgrade to *feyerlich* (could he possibly have confused it with *feurig*, which appears later in Schulz’s article?). This error effectively normalizes its partnership with ‘sublime’ (*Aesthetics and the Art of Musical Composition*, 106).
- 18 Edmond Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 75.



after 1800, to imagine a musical sublime that mirrored Kant's epistemology, giving scholars of the phenomenon the first real hook for their analyses. Michaelis stressed the disjunctiveness of the sublime, its unformedness and immeasurability. (Sulzer, on the other hand, had insisted that the sublime be grounded in the measurable, else it would be beyond our comprehension.¹⁹) Michaelis offers two alternatives for causing musical shock and awe: it can be effected 'by uniformity so great that it almost excludes variety', or by too much diversity, causing 'a thundering torrent of sounds' that in their intractability confuse and terrify the listener, thrilling him 'with horror and rapture, with a sweet dread'.²⁰

Perhaps it is not entirely surprising that efforts to pin down characteristics that might translate these views of the sublime into recognizable musical topoi have not been particularly fruitful. Topoi have no place in the Absolute. The universe of topical types may be infinite, but their configurations each by each are finite and knowable – a knowledge that is the result of that rubbing-together of shoulders we term 'sociability'. Musical topoi current in late eighteenth-century music are signs by virtue of referring to some musical style or practice in common currency – remarkably precise, delimited expressions of our common humanity. Unlike these topoi, the sublime does not have an immediate musical and human referent that is identifiable no matter what the context: a recognizable metre and tempo, as in a march or minuet, reflecting the way we walk or dance, or a certain type of figuration, like the cantabile style, that bodies forth in instrumental music the all-important singing voice. Hence the sublime suffers from indiscriminate application over a wide variety of musical circumstances. Grasping at straws in his article on the *erhaben* in the *Lexikon*, Koch quotes a vague formulation by Johann Friedrich Rochlitz (who was, according to Nancy Baker, one of Koch's go-to guys for trendy new ideas in aesthetics²¹): 'The material of a sublime composition results from the visible attributes of sublime objects, as if analogous with them.'²² Thrusting alps, an infinity of stars, . . . 'How do you catch a cloud and pin it down?'.²³

For most of the gestures that have been identified as incidences of the sublime in Haydn or Mozart are hard to pin down. They are not topoi, but quantitative dynamic devices, what Leonard Meyer would call 'secondary parameters',²⁴ admitting only of more or less: the extremely loud, the extremely soft, a contrast of the two; large musical forces or a sudden solo; a strong cadence, a weak cadence; musical confusion or musical silence; a term as simple and musically undefinable as incongruence. They can appear in a variety of contexts that fall well short of sublimity. To paraphrase Freud, sometimes a contrast is just a contrast. Is a *misterioso* passage sublime, or just mysterious? The performances of Handel in the gargantuan Westminster Abbey celebrations of 1784 made an extraordinary noise, more than had ever been made before. This, it was universally agreed, was the musical sublime in action. But in a Haydn or Mozart symphony, how much noise is the most noise? How often in a movement can one encounter sublime-like gestures without finally experiencing ennui? In a music that insists on resolution, is the customary galant cadential formula

19 Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, 'Erhaben', volume 2, 98. The sublime needs a worldly yardstick [*Maß*] – a comparator – to keep it within normal limits.

20 All the citations of Michaelis are taken from Schwartz, who uses the le Huray and Day translation but includes the original German ('Periodicity and Passion in the First Movement of Haydn's "Farewell" Symphony', 325–329). Strikingly, Michaelis claimed that only 'men of the noblest intellect' could respond to the sublime, betraying his interest in identifying a romantic musical elite. For Kant, of course, the emphasis is on the sublime as it reveals general humanity's 'supersensible faculty of cognition' (*Critique of Judgment*, 'Explanation of the Term Sublime', 89).

21 Baker and Christensen, *Aesthetics and the Art of Musical Composition*, 130.

22 Friedrich Rochlitz, 'Rhapsodische Gedanken über die zweckmässige Benutzung der Materie der Musik', *Der neue teutsche Merkur* 10 (1798). Cited in Baker and Christensen, *Aesthetics and the Art of Musical Composition*, 130.

23 In a rather less sublime but still alpine association, the Salzburg nuns in *The Sound of Music*, baffled by their rebellious charge, Maria von Trapp, ask themselves this question.

24 See Leonard B. Meyer, *Style and Music: History, Theory, and Ideology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).



appropriate closure for the sublime?²⁵ Finally, Kant's reading of the shock of the sublime as a means of confirming the supremacy of our faculty of reason is a trope that defies musical configuration altogether.

I'm puzzled by this regressive search for the sublime; it seems a yearning to take up an old yoke. You all know the history: for decades the early romantic aesthetics of autonomy and transcendence were read backwards onto late eighteenth-century music, the label 'Classic' serving as a cover for the imposition of values from the domain of Absolute Music. Scholars, principally Leonard Ratner and his students, of whom I am proud to be one, finally raised the curtain to uncover in this music a world of embodied social meaning. Various scholars are making an effort to examine changing uses of musical topoi at the turn into the nineteenth century and to extend these social meanings into early romantic music as well.²⁶ The new sublime, on the other hand, offers a safely historicized version of the old aesthetic for those who feel its loss. E. T. A. Hoffmann set the narrative that supports this yearning, in his famous 1810 review of Beethoven's Fifth, where he dubbed Haydn and Mozart the 'first romantics', precursors to the *Ur*-romantic, Beethoven. In his 2006 book *Music As Thought: Listening to the Symphony in the Age of Beethoven* Mark Evan Bonds does a revealing close reading of Hoffmann's famous description of the quality of infinity in the music of these first romantics, pointing out that Hoffmann ranked them by their attainment of 'ever-greater degrees of sublimity'.²⁷ In Hoffmann's continuum Haydn's prelapsarian pastoral is twilit, and only falsely infinite, whereas Mozart's music dwells in the upper atmosphere, breaking into a bright night beyond finite earthly bounds. Beethoven's music, plunging into deepest night, suddenly 'opens the realm of the monstrous and immeasurable', where time has a stop. (It is an interesting residue of recent reception that our authors might well make Haydn, not Mozart, Beethoven's nearer neighbour.) Hoffmann's Hegelian teleology – this 'tendentious trajectory of historical progress', Bonds terms it²⁸ – still exercises a powerful hold, pulling Haydn and Mozart back into the orbit of the dead-handed aesthetics of the Absolute. Creatures of wishful thinking, of an earnest desire to be thunderstruck by the unknowable, we are too easily taken in.

I would like to challenge Hoffmann's teleology, and establish at least a *terminus post quem* for the entrance of the sublime as a musical category, by rereading a threshold example: the contrapuntal coda of the finale to the 'Jupiter' – where Sisman locates Kant's mathematical sublime and Taruskin the 'painful gateway to the infinite'. Five themes are introduced in the movement, which Mozart clearly devised so as to combine them in the coda for twenty-seven dynamic bars, in a double fugue and canon with five-part invertible counterpoint, resolving to a galant cadence. Says Sisman of the result: this 'mass of simultaneously writhing fragments . . . cannot be taken in. It reveals vistas of contrapuntal infinity. The coda thus creates a cognitive exhaustion born of sheer magnitude. It makes vivid the mathematical sublime.'²⁹ Sisman's reading is compellingly argued – and very tempting. But is this in fact the musical experience the coda offers?

Before turning to the coda itself, it is necessary to look at the movement's opening, which shapes its end. A 'white-note' ecclesiastical cantus firmus (Neal Zaslaw speculates that it is derived from 'Credo, credo'³⁰) is

25 The late eighteenth-century symphony came directly out of opera, and preserved that introductory function even as in the 1780s Mozart was developing his 'mature' style. First movements were fanfares, heralding the coming event. And last movements, finales, served as slam-bang, celebratory closures, like the choral happy endings that close Mozart's Italian operas. Both the first and the last movements of the 'Jupiter' – to which I shall shortly devote my attention – have a military air, with fanfares, trumpets and drums; like earlier symphonies, the work might have served as an opener for a subscription concert. We do not know the precise circumstances for which Mozart's last three symphonies were intended. For speculation about the possible occasions for which Mozart might have intended them see Neal Zaslaw, *Mozart's Symphonies: Context, Performance Practice, Reception* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 421–423.

26 The theme of the panel on which I first read this paper, at the International Musicological Society's conference held in Zurich in 2007, was 'The Topical Universe in Transition'.

27 Mark Evan Bonds, *Music as Thought: Listening to the Symphony in the Age of Beethoven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 48.

28 Bonds, *Music as Thought*, 51.

29 Sisman, *The 'Jupiter' Symphony*, 79.

30 Zaslaw, *Mozart's Symphonies*, 540.



detached from its usual contrapuntal context and treated as a singing allegro motive, *piano* in the violins, answered by a little galant march theme. It then becomes its own tutti counterstatement, still homophonic, but martial and grandiose. These eighteen bars are answered by a triumphant military cadence, a dotted descending motive in strings and winds that barely conceals a threefold rising terraced fanfare of four-bar overlapping entries in the winds and brass; it shines through the veil of the descending cadential motive and on its third iteration claims the stage entire (see Example 1). Here *erhaben* would seem to suggest Koch's 'lofty', not Hoffmann's 'sublime'. It epitomizes the noble heroic, domesticated by its galant periodic context; Leonard Ratner styled the symphony's eponym 'a laughing, not an angry Jupiter'.³¹ The 'exalted march' that begins so many symphonic movements had its origin in the grave *alla breve* rhythms of the church fugue.³² In this movement the relation is actualized rather than immanent; the theme of the exalted march is an ecclesiastical cantus firmus.

In the recapitulation this opening is massively truncated. A dense passage in bound style – the cantus firmus with suspensions in sequence – compresses forty-five bars into twenty-one, taking off from bar 8 in the exposition, after the cantus firmus and its galant answer, and usurping in one sweeping gesture the exposition's tutti statement of the first theme, the military cadence with its terraced fanfares and an ensuing fugal episode. This brilliant elision tightens the recapitulation so that it can hurry on to the famous coda (see Example 2).

The coda reads like the *lieto fine* of an opera buffa – no writhing themes, no *horror mundi*. Never was mighty complexity kept so simple, the innumerable so carefully counted. The contrapuntal maelstrom is adroitly organized by the steady tread of the *alla breve* theme, alternately in galant question and answer for seven four-bar entries, precisely so that we *can* comprehend it. After the first four entries the macro-rhythm pauses for a half cadence, before trumpets, drums and horns enter to help demarcate the consequent phrase. The eighth statement of the cantus firmus comes as a cunning surprise. If the main theme were not counting out its entries so carefully, we would not realize what a rescue this is. Slyly, *comically*, the theme makes its final entrance askew, overlapping itself on the fourth bar of the seventh utterance, brushing aside the complicated counterpoint like a cobweb. Set on the tonic, rather than the expected dominant, it puts a halt to what would otherwise have been an endless I–V alternation of the cantus firmus. (Beethoven later faced the same problem at the end of the first movement of the 'Eroica', where he set up a pendulum motion between tonic and dominant versions of the opening four bars that did not in themselves offer a method of resolution.) This *deus ex machina* is answered, with clever economy, by bars 13–30 of the exposition – the first tutti statement of the theme and the military cadence that was omitted in the compressed reprise. This section now returns whole cloth to shape a comedically triumphant close. Suddenly, out of the distance, there emerges the happy clangour of the only theme that has been heard just once before – the rising fanfare motive. Here come the marines! Terraced again in its threefold repetition, first in horns, then winds, then full blast in trumpets, horns and drums, this motive's military dress suggests the approach from the distance of a marching band. It recalls the final finale of *Figaro*, where the singers invoke the approach of a virtual march, calling out to one other to 'run off and celebrate' – a *buffa*esque assertion of the triumphant here and now (Example 3).

This ending is not an *invocation* of the infinite, but an *evocation* of operatic closure. It suggests a theatrical celebration of the communal happy ending – an affirmation of the social contract, the celebration of things as they are. If the finale reaches into the nineteenth century, it is not via the sublime but via opera – the rescue operas common early in the century, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, for example, where brash brass fanfares celebrate the approach of the socially beneficent. Only with Beethoven's symphonies did musical closure become a transcendental leap into the Beyond, toward that hard-yearned-for infinity.

31 Ratner, *Classic Music*, 395.

32 Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, 18–22.

V

269



12

19

a 2

terraced fanfares

military cadence

I

Example 1 *continued*



25

31

p

Example 1 continued

231

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Double Bass

Piano

Compressor

Score for "The Rose Tree" (Op. 10, No. 1) by Johannes Brahms. The score is in 3/4 time, key of D major, and consists of 231 measures. The instrumentation includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, Double Bass, Piano, and Compressor. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 1-10) features a melody in the Violin I part, with the Piano providing harmonic support. The second system (measures 11-20) continues the melody and includes a section for the Compressor. The third system (measures 21-30) concludes the piece with a final chord. The score is written in a standard musical notation style, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 3/4. The tempo is marked "Allegretto".

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237

243

Example 2 continued



exposition, bar 56

Example 2 *continued*

I would like to deliver a coda of my own, riffing on a thought-provoking paper by Matthew Head entitled ‘Gothic Voices: From Ombra Topic to Supernatural Ontology in Mozart’s Music and Reception’.³³ Our points of view are nearly opposite, and therefore make for an instructive comparison. I am interested in the imbrication of topoi, Head in their dissolution. The title says it all. He feels that topical analysis locks Mozart into a priori categories, whereas his music is much more ‘nuanced and fluid’ – permeated, in fact, by the musical supernatural, most particularly the *ombra* style, which ultimately exceeds the boundaries of the notion of topic to become the ontology of music itself, ‘always and already supernatural’. This is Hoffmann’s Beethoven, whose dark night is full sublimity. But how to tease the darker topoi – *ombra*, the pathetic – out of the interwoven strands of the topical dialectic of late eighteenth-century music? Topics fleetingly succeed one another, no one standing alone in this *speculum mundi*. Their ebb and flow demarcate the compositional process: in a music dedicated to resolution it is the function of the darker styles to cede at the close to the music of ceremonial celebration. And that trumpet-and-drums cadential topos is not material to be transmogrified into the music of infinite longing.

Schiller remarked that ‘beauty is for a happy race; an unhappy one has to be moved by sublimity’.³⁴ Perhaps the sublime was a trope more appropriate to the troubled end of the century, to the distanced perspective of an older man, Haydn, and to the sacred vocal music he turned to at the end of his life. But can

33 This paper was delivered in the same session of the Zurich International Musicological Society conference (‘The Topical Universe in Transition’) as mine, on 11 July 2007.

34 Schiller to Professor Süvern, Weimar, July 26, 1800, in *Correspondence Between Schiller and Goethe from 1794 to 1805*, volume 2, trans. L. Dora Schmitz (London: George Bell, 1879), 326.



372

Flute

Oboes

Bassoons

Horns in C

Trumpets in C

Timpani in C/G

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Cello

Bass

1

2

378

3

f

Example 3 Mozart, Symphony No. 41 in C major ('Jupiter'), K551/iv, bars 372–423



384

Bsn 1

Bsn 2

4 half cadence 5

390

6

Example 3 *continued*



396

7

8 overlap on tonic!

402

Bsn 1/2
a 2

Cello and Bass

Example 3 continued



408

a 2

terraced cadences from exposition

413

Example 3 *continued*



Example 3 *continued*

text-based music participate in the sublime? Not in the true romantic sublime, Taruskin argues. He points out that the single most cited example of late eighteenth-century vocal sublime, Haydn's 'Let there be light', is "'imitation" rather than expression', because it depends on the word. He quotes Madame de Stael's disparagement of this much cherished soundbite as 'labor of mind'.³⁵ And so the early romantic writers firmly believed: only instrumental music can express the romantic sublime; vocal music is made earthbound by the tawdry particulars of the word. Perhaps the sublime appears only when all topoi disappear, and this super-topos becomes music's ontology. But time does not really have a stop with Beethoven. As Bonds points out, elsewhere Hoffmann is capable of writing about Beethoven in conventional terms that sound almost topical: 'joy and pain, sorrow and ecstasy . . . co-exist but are not synthesized in [a] totalizing manner'.³⁶ Perhaps the musical sublime exists only in the mind of the beholder. This was how Kant saw it: even the vastest of natural forms are never beyond our actual understanding except in our mental apprehension. Having 'lost paradise and peace', Hoffmann and other early romantic writers took refuge in the sublime, in thought dissolving music into infinity. But the music of the romantic century continued on in its variousness, obeying no such teleology.

³⁵ Taruskin, *Oxford History of Music*, volume 2, 645–646.

³⁶ Bonds, *Music as Thought*, 58.