Music and Monumentality

Commemoration and Wonderment in Nineteenth-Century Germany

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CHAPTER ONE

The Time of Musical Monuments

Making Music Last

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, in March 1800, the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* decided the time was ripe for musical monumentality. Johann Friedrich Christmann, Lutheran pastor, composer, and regular contributor to the journal, waxed lyrical in a paean to the century just passed. Germany had produced a great many gifted composers that laid the foundation for the present glory of German music throughout Europe: "You gave us a Handel and a Gluck, a Graun and a Hasse, and through them you established respect of the genius of the Germans at the banks of the Thames, the Tiber, and the Seine." The idea of honoring the great composers of the eighteenth century, of preserving their memory, was all the more important as their work was by its very nature ephemeral and especially endangered. No other artistic work, the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*'s founding editor Friedrich Rochlitz emphasized, "contains so much that is perishable within the imperishable, so much that is mortal within the immortal" as that of the musician.

Calls for "musical monuments" in the sense of collections of historical works had, in fact, appeared repeatedly in the previous years. Johann Nikolaus Forkel (who was to erect a national monument to Johann Sebastian Bach with his patriotic biography of the composer in 1802) had also made an urgent plea in 1792 to make rare, historically significant musical works more widely available. Likewise, the Viennese musician Joseph von Sonnleithner announced his plan to produce a "history of music in monuments" in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in 1799. Unfortunately, this ambitious project was nipped in the bud: apparently the printing plates of the first volume, just
finished, fell victim to the Austro-French war in 1805 and were forged into bullets. It seems that music was perishable in more ways than Christmann may have imagined.

The monuments that the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* had in mind for the change of the century were more lasting, and it peeked beyond the borders of the German lands for comparison. Abroad everything was much easier, sighed the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*: England had London, and London had its Westminster Abbey; similarly, France had Paris, and Paris had its Pantheon—both nation-states had successfully institutionalized the honoring of their worthies, including musicians. And what did Germany have to offer? Germany had no central “capital (only capitals) and cannot have one, because of her statistical conditions”—by which he meant that Germany had no genuine political unity—and therefore she cannot have a Pantheon or a Westminster Abbey. In this dire political situation, international recognition of German music was all the more important. The fact that Handel had even made it into Westminster Abbey was a case in point for Christmann: “Albion’s mausoleum had to accept the urn with the ashes of a Handel.” This ceremonial burial abroad was not only a testament to the outstanding quality of Germany’s music that was recognized abroad but also underlined the urgency of Germany to follow suit and create its own Hall of Fame. This would not happen for another forty years, when the Walhalla was opened near Regensburg at the behest of the Bavarian King Ludwig I, as shown in figure 1.1. But even then, as the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* presciently recognized, the results would be somewhat parochial.

The root of Germany’s problem, the journal asserted always with an envious sideways glance toward France and England, was its lack of a cultural center that would promote a unified taste and artistic manner. For now, all that could be done in Germany, Rochlitz concluded, was to mark important sites—birthplaces, death places, or places of work of the great masters—by dedicating plaques or columns to their memory, as had already been done with Haydn at Rohrau, C. P. E. Bach in both Weimar and Hamburg, and Mozart at Schloss Tiefurt near Weimar (figure 1.2a). Just to show what was possible elsewhere in comparison with these rather humble memorials, he added an illustration of the spectacular sculpture of Handel in Westminster Abbey, which effortlessly blends an apparently realistic likeness of Handel at work on Messiah with an allegory and glorification of his musical genius (figure 1.2b).

It would take several decades before any artist’s countenance was represented in Germany in an even remotely comparable manner to the London Handel memorials in Westminster Abbey and Vauxhall Gardens. But underneath Rochlitz’s musings on the sorry state of monuments emerged another thought. Germany may not have been able to provide an infrastructure that would support the honoring of its great composers, so it would be a true test of the strength of German music to effect a role reversal: German music would become its own monument.

The *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* could fall back on other important reflections on the nature of monuments. In his groundbreaking *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (1771), Johann Georg Sulzer had defined the monument, in a pronounced curatorial vein, as a “work of art located in public sites that is meant to perperually sustain, and disseminate to posterity, the memory of noteworthy persons or objects.” The most basic monument was writing, Sulzer mused: a simple inscription would fulfill the minimum purpose. However, insofar as Sulzer considered the purpose of art to reside in the emotions and evoke virtuous sentiments, the essence of the artistic monument for him ultimately coincided with that of art itself. From this perspective, music’s monumental task was its natural destiny.

More than Sulzer and intellectuals at the time, however, the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* was more concerned with how such a feat would actually be possible to achieve. Whereas the cultural-political bases in the scattered, decentralized German states were insufficient, the institutional structures necessary for musical production and reproduction were plentiful, as Christmann
detailed in his paean to the eighteenth century. Besides the wealth of great German composers, Christmann's personified eighteenth century had also bestowed another important gift upon humankind: modern musical print, particularly the "beautiful invention of the Saxon musical typeset under Father Breitkopf." This invention was providential, he proceeded to argue, as it allowed composers' fame to spread far beyond their immediate sphere of influence.
Christmann addressed himself directly to the eighteenth century, in assessing the value of Haydn, one of the principal heroes of his reflections:

Perhaps you sensed the value of this rare man [Haydn] even before he could compete for the laurel wreath which now decks his brow. For like a tender mother, who takes care of the abiding happiness of her children with great foresight, you, too, were concerned to protect the spiritual fruits of the muses by this great foster-child of the art and of nature, and alongside him those of other excellent composers, to protect them from falling into oblivion in future epochs and to deliver them to posterity.  

Christmann went on to outline the institutional achievements of the eighteenth century, such as they are: besides his gratitude for the great composers and for musical typeset, he also lavished praise on the instrumental pedagogical treatises of his time, the publishing industry, a recognition of musical talent, the evolution of German opera, and finally even music criticism, theory, and the musical chroniclers of the century, Burney and Forkel. Music had performed commemorative and celebratory functions before—think of Josquin's lament of Ockeghem or Couperin's Apotheosis of Corelli and Lully—but only now was such music in a position to reach out beyond a specialist circle into the public sphere and become a driving force of culture.

With all these institutions in place, it seems, music could overcome its perishable state. No longer did it need to be likened to the fragrant scent of perfume—as Kant, for one, had argued: a fleeting, incidental phenomenon, which engaged the senses but not the intellect, at best pleasant, at worst annoying, as it invariably envelops the general public without allowing dissenters a way out of its sphere. With these achievements handed down by the eighteenth century, music now received its own rigorous pedagogy, wide circulation of compositions, enjoyment by an educated public, a national repertory that would soon become canonical, critical attention by the guardians of taste, and, last but not least, its own history. It became a force that was there to last. Bolstered by this institutional support, the curtain could rise for German music singing its own praises.

This new task for music required one further move. The heterogeneous musical practices and traditions scattered across the German lands had to be unified and subsumed under music's higher mission. "What the new century will have to offer, we do not yet know," the Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung concluded in another comprehensive survey of the eighteenth century by Johann Karl Friedrich Triest, theologian and regular contributor, but "on the level of the particular, where art depends on genius, study and taste, it is the work of humans, who can be commended or reprimanded for their progress or regress. As a whole, however, we may only imagine music as the workings of a higher force which can never, ever take any real steps backwards—or else, the highest in the world is nothing but a soap bubble."  

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts—with this thought began the unparalleled rise of German music to pre-eminence in the national consciousness as well as in subsequent music history books. At the cusp between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the scene was set for musical monumentality.

When compared, in hindsight, with our knowledge of the later nineteenth-century musical repertoire, one thing is particularly noticeable in the centennial reflections of the journal: its authors kept silent about the nature of the music that was to become monumental. One might think that this was because they felt that the music of the eighteenth-century composers they singled out as exemplary spoke for itself. In fact, however, when we read the Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung carefully, we find that they were acutely aware of a lack of certain components in their conception of musical monumentality. Thus, it was in a footnote that Triest added to his reflections on the eighteenth century that music was still missing two things: a "proper aesthetic theory" for this new music, one that would ideally "treat music metaphysically," as well as "truly musical German poems," which should be sonorous, singable, and at the same time of a high literary standard.

The Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung was by no means a radical, or at that time even a particularly progressive forum: it championed primarily vocal music and had little interest in the new developments in instrumental music that were going on elsewhere around the same time. (A review in the Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung of a work by Beethoven, his sonatas for violin and piano opus 12, reacted predominantly with distaste to the dramatic gestures and harmonic maneuvers of the music.) But it was exactly around this body of wordless, instrumental works that another, well-known assemblage of musical thinkers—E. T. A. Hoffmann, Jean Paul Richter, Johann Gottfried Herder, Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, and Ludwig Tieck, to name but the most important ones—built precisely the metaphysical music aesthetics that Triest imagined, which made music absolute and let it be fully monumental as a musical work. As Bernd Sponheuer puts it, the national cultural myth began with "the formation of an imaginary 'spiritual realm' of German music in which absolute music retroactively furnishes a meaningful identity." The Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung had outlined the institutional base, as it were, to the Romantics' philosophical superstructure of absolute music. With the new found confidence in music, Horace's "exequies monumentum aere perennius (I have erected a monument more lasting than bronze) could also be applied to music itself.
The idea of absolute music has been thoroughly contextualized, historicized, critiqued, deconstructed, and rehabilitated in recent years. What matters for our purposes here is that monumental music is subtly but distinctly different from absolute music. Put briefly, with its important task of invoking memories, the monument is meant to mean. As an artifact that carries a message, coded or explicit, abstract or concrete, monumental music is by definition neither self-contained nor devoid of social function. In other words, monumental music cannot be absolute—in the narrow sense of wordless, non-referential, and non-functional musical entities. And as we shall see in the six case studies that make up the following chapters, musical monuments tend to be conceived less as self-contained, abstract works than as objects, concrete manifestations of music, which in some cases can, and are supposed to, be literally possessed and cherished. It is for this reason that the monuments examined in the following chapters are all musical arrangements of sorts, as these arrangements show most clearly the multifarious ways in which the monument plays with, instantiates, or manipulates the “higher” concept of music, which Triest and others called for. The concept of Workkreis, or fidelity to the work, came to mean something very different in the context of musical monumentality.

Strictly speaking, as an entity that is neither necessarily self-contained nor functionless, monumental music should rather be understood as non-purposive with a purpose; it therefore doubly falls short of the Kantian categories for beautiful art, which also eventually came to set the standards for the musical work. Yet musical monuments are unthinkable without the rise of the idea of absolute music: as absolute music came to mean so much more over the course of the nineteenth century, as the musical work conquered the whole metaphysical realm of the absolute in the romantic imagination, monumental music partook of (or, depending on one’s viewpoint, became parasitic on) the new prestige of music, along with its rituals, practices, and authorities. It came to inhabit part of the same rarefied aesthetic sphere as absolute music. Both suggested that the here and now can be transcended.

**Thinking Big**

The monument performs work. The Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung with its emphasis on the institutional basis, rather than the musical sound world, seems to have had an implicit understanding of this—including the double meaning of the concept, where “work” stood for both labor and opus. The monument needs to perform labor, at times in secret, in order to create the sense of being a self-sufficient musical object that radiates greatness as though out of itself; and it piggybacks on the newly minted work-concept that had bestowed new prestige on the art of music and that only made this monolithic, self-reliant impression possible.

The work that the nineteenth-century musical monument was to perform effectively consists in bringing together two distinct types of magnitude: one component, historical greatness, can be summarized under the modern keywords of collective memory and identity formation, while its other component, physical size, shows a marked tendency toward dramatic proportions (or even lack of any proportionality) that would elicit astonishment from its audiences. This tendency, which is often associated with the sublime and which manifests itself in the grandiose (or bombastic) qualities already touched upon, is perhaps better understood as an aesthetics of wonderment. Since these two components will be critical to the concept of nineteenth-century monumentality in music, which resides precisely between them, it is worth reviewing each in turn in somewhat greater detail here.

The historical component of the monument was perhaps best captured by the Austrian art historian Alois Riegl. Writing in the early twentieth century, in an age where modern museum culture took off, the question of monuments was for him in the first place determined by curatorial issues of preservation and explanation. As we will have the opportunity to examine some of Riegl’s work more closely in chapter 5, it suffices to say for now that for him, the “cult of the historical monument,” as he called it, was inextricably bound up with a tangible conception of historicity. He explained at the outset of his reflections: “Everything that has been and is no longer we call historical, in accordance with the modern notion that what has been can never be again, and that everything that has been constitutes an irreparable and irremovable link in a chain of development.” In such an evolutionary frame of mind, every object becomes worthy of collecting and commemorating, as each object contains the developmental history of the whole. In principle, then, even the least remarkable scrap or pebble could achieve the status of a monument, a commemorative object, if only it somehow succeeded in triggering the imagination in this historical dimension. Monumentality in this conception is therefore based on the idea of an evolutionary history, that “each successive step implies its predecessor and could not have happened as it did without that earlier step,” a concept that accords privileged importance to heritage and traditions. Historical monumentality approaches the fundamental question of who we are by telling us where we come from. It instructs us simply to look backwards for an answer.

The physical, or aesthetic, form of monumentality is principally associated with architecture. In its purest form, it excludes the historical dimension and...
concentrates instead of the immediate and present effect. The purpose of this kind of monumentality is to inspire, by means of splendor and representation of power, what historian Lewis Mumford has called “awesome terror” (in obvious parallel to Edmund Burke’s rather more restrained “delightful horror,” which characterized for him the sublime). In a German context, this form of aesthetic monumentality was articulated in Goethe’s early essay “Von deutscher Baukunst” (1772) in which he used the Gothic Strasbourg Minster to bring together the aesthetics of the sublime and the revolutionary, original genius who created the building. These ideas were swiftly transferred to the music of Handel and Bach—who, as we saw, were considered key players in the idea of musical monumentality. Aesthetic monumentality answers the question of identity by reassuring us of our greatness and our lasting ability to overcome the challenges of others, by suggesting that we will go far. It tells us to look around ourselves and to have confidence in the everlasting future.

Historical and aesthetic monumentality both demonstrate persistence and suggest longevity—one by surviving over generations in traditions and commemorations, the other by grandiloquence and the sheer force of art. Both sides exhibit a tendency to self-stylization, which can be affective, emotional or representational, but which results in different forms. Historical monumentality suggests that what has prevailed has withstood the trials and tribulations of time; physical magnitude demonstrates that strength will be victorious. One side appeals to memory, while the other particularly avails itself of awe. Both of them demonstrate, on the one hand, immortality and, on the other hand, a superhuman quality, which implicitly miniaturizes the individual and the everyday.

With this somewhat schematic separation of historical and aesthetic aspects of the monument in mind, we should now turn to the ways in which monumentality was taken up by musical thinkers. It is in fact well over a century after the appeal of the Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung before anyone attempted to capture monumentality in exclusively musical terms. In 1935 the musicologist Arnold Schering proposed a succinct definition, according to which the monumental is a “grand, significant” object that is worthy of “being permanently preserved in the remembrance of posterity.” (The date is no coincidence here: during the twelve-year reign of the National Socialist regime questions of monumentality were discussed with particular vigor.) We see in this definition that both aspects that we just took apart temporarily, historical and aesthetic, appear in neat unity. As if in keeping with the eighteenth-century roots of musical monumentality, Schering’s idea was epitomized by Handel’s and Bach’s music.

Meanwhile, such clear-cut definitions are few and far between. The majority of nineteenth-century commentators remained on the metaphoric level. In the absence of concrete examples, a ubiquitous image to capture monumentality in music was that of the mountain range. A stock-in-trade figure of the sublime, the use of this metaphor may still seem surprising in this function, as the image of the mountain range cannot convey either associations of musical sound or commemorative values. Regardless of their historiographic and political leanings, music historians of the nineteenth century tended to be in agreement on the usage of such mountainous metaphors. Thus, the Leipzig editor of the progressive Neue Zeitschrift für Musik and founder of the New German School, Franz Brendel, who will feature prominently in chapter 3, wrote in 1859 in his brochure Franz Liszt als Symphoniker: “To a later era, the whole epoch [from Mozart to Liszt and Wagner] will appear as one great mountain range with various summits. I repeat: the principle is the same for all of these greatest artists; only within it can particular modifications be differentiated.”

To take a figure from the other end of the spectrum, let us consider the Berlin philologist and Bach researcher, Philipp Spitta, who will be discussed at greater length in chapter 5. He elaborated further on the mountain metaphor a propos of the inauguration of his series Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst in 1892:

When talking of the great German composers of the past, we still think first of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. We have gradually grown accustomed to the fact that Handel and Bach should also be included. But in the public imagination they rise up like peaks in the wilderness. . . . If there are figures in the history of art that are unanimously accorded towering greatness, it does not follow that less great artists are negligible for posterity. With the same justification we could argue that the alpine landscape should be done away with for the sake of a few of the highest peaks.

The correct mode of appreciating Bach and Handel, Spitta concluded, is in relation to their context, to use them to survey the whole great alpine landscape of the musical past: “Bach’s and Handel’s creations are like two great mountains, from which vantage point the eye can perceive how rich and flourishing the world used to be around them.”

It is immediately apparent that Brendel and Spitta twist the mountain metaphor in two different directions, corresponding to their respective interests and proclivities. Brendel was eager to counteract a dusty classicist music
for a philologist like Spitta, the mountain metaphor is ultimately not about well-founded historiography so much as about the establishment of cultural norms. Their mountain ranges by their respective favorites is less an irony of circumstance than precisely the reason for the proliferation and popularity of the mountain metaphor. For while the mountain metaphor implies a clear historicist Bach paradigm paralleled by an aesthetic Beethoven paradigm—but in practice, again, such a neat separation between these two poles very rarely held in the context of nineteenth-century monumental history. Rather, the mountain metaphor seems to initiate a particular mode of thought that complements the concept of monumentality: it seems that the mountain range functions so well because it allows a series of ambiguities, which only show up at closer inspection and therefore allow the leap between our two kinds of magnitude with such ease—the overwhelming physical size of the mountains is metaphorically transferred into colossal artistic or historical greatness. Moreover, it suggests that these supreme peaks of human achievement are as durable as the mountains themselves. The mountains represent apparently irrefutable norms of eternal validity. The fact that both historians, Brendel and Spitta, use these implications of immutability to expand their mountain ranges by their respective favorites is less an irony of circumstance than precisely the reason for the proliferation and popularity of the mountain metaphor. For while the mountain metaphor implies a clear historical model, the image itself connotes an essential timelessness. Even for a philologist like Spitta, the mountain metaphor is ultimately not about well-founded historiography so much as about the establishment of cultural norms.

No one has put this as concisely as Friedrich Nietzsche, for whom this conception characterizes the essence of "monumental history":

That the great moments in the struggle of the human individual constitute a chain, that this chain unites mankind across the millennia like a range of human mountain peaks, that the summit of such long-ago moments shall be forever still living, bright and great—that is the fundamental idea of the faith of humanity, which finds expression in the demand for a monumental history.

Nietzsche was quite skeptical of monumental history, and we do well to take this apparent celebration of monumentality with a large grain of salt here—he would point out the pitfalls in the very concept of monumental history only a few paragraphs later. Such skepticism, however, was rare in the nineteenth century, and his description, ironic though it is to a certain extent, perfectly describes the spirit in which the mountain metaphor was typically employed at the time.

The ambitions and stakes of Brendel's and Spitta's project suggest that the mountains conjured up here are less Parnassus than Olympus. The task of monumentality covers great cultural acts; its protagonists are not effete "sons of the muses" but rather superhuman heroes, who commit great deeds in the musical and cultural realm. The impact of Nietzsche's monumental history will be a central theme in chapter 2. As we shall see there, in some cases, a heroic composer issues forth directly out of the mountainous nature—as in Schumann's ironic suggestion to have Beethoven's likeness hewn into a great mountain. This musical Mount Rushmore clinches all the riches that the metaphor has to offer.

Most often the monumental mountain range is encountered in a form that has already transferred the nature image into the cultural realm: as a frieze, a series of busts or inscriptions of the names and countenances of great masters, whose communion forms a circle of perennial validity in which they guard the grand concert halls of the nineteenth century. (We shall encounter such classicizing busts again in chapter 4.) Alfred Einstein, for one, begins his reflection, *Greatness in Music*, from his American exile in 1941—here the date is no coincidence either—with precisely this image: "In Munich, where I was born, there is still in use today a concert hall of classical style—the Great Odeon Hall—with a wide apse for the orchestra, in the semi-circle of which are a number of round niches, filled with busts of musicians. They are of plaster; materially and artistically their value is nil." The ideal value of these plaster figures, however, was all the greater. Einstein remembers how this collection of timeless greatness was continuously adapted to the changing times: for the inauguration in 1811 Michael Haydn stood next to his brother,
and closely followed by Cimarosa, while at the beginning of the twentieth century, Liszt and Wagner found themselves beside the firmly established busts of Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, and Weber. Einstein is unsure whether Mendelssohn managed to keep his place throughout the twentieth century. Nothing is quite as provisional as the immutability of eternal values.

But is it really the composers who constitute the heroes of monumental history? We noticed that Spitta and Brendel tend to speak about great works, while Nietzsche talks of great moments; it is only in the plaster busts that the composers themselves are represented. In fact, it is precisely the flexibility at the core of the concept of monumentality that allows these imaginary connections between composers, their work, or even the effects of their work to be linked in creative ways. This is the "Midas touch" that the machinations of monumentality exercise and that is capable of extending its qualities to everything within its reach—gilding and solidifying it by association.

Ultimately, this is the strength of the mountain metaphor: it refuses to pin down anything; it does not explain anything but it presents everything in suggestive and awesome ambiguity. The image of the mountain conjures up monumentality itself, stages it as a theatrical event, and turns it into a veritable "experience." It is no coincidence that cragged, shapeless mountains are part of the standard repertoire of the sublime at least from Burke onwards: just as the sublime itself, which exceeds human imagination, enters into the realm beyond representation, so the concept of monumentality, with its cognates of the "colossal" and the "monstrous," transcends conventional conceptions of proportion and beauty.

In fact, the invocation of mountain ranges is as frequent as thorough explanations of the nature of monumentality are rare. As Riegl noted in 1903, the monument had been the token of the conviction throughout the nineteenth century that there was an immutable canon of art and an artistic ideal of indisputable, absolute validity. The awkward fact that no one had succeeded in delineating this ideal with general rules did not deter historians of the time from continuing to have faith in and endorse this transcendent but elusive canon. In this respect, too, the Alpine image may have been helpful: the authority emanating from the majesty of the mountain commands silence from any disbeliever.

**Transcendence and Beyond**

On the metaphoric level, the mountain range might successfully integrate the historical and aesthetic aspects of the monument and pretend that there is a smooth, seamless connection. But the most refined rhetoric can only get us so far. We should now explore how some of the ideas we have covered so far can be conceptualized so as to get closer to a working model. How can we integrate the commemorative aspects of the monument with its sounding surface?

The doyenne of modern German cultural memory studies, Aleida Assmann, conceives the monument, though not necessarily the musical monument, as that "which is determined to outlast the present and to speak in this distant horizon of cultural communication." In comparison with the rather more self-absorbed, iconic mountain metaphor, her focus is on communicative potential: in her conception, the monument is a conscious sign for posterity, a message addressed to an implied future interlocutor, which in this way aims to bridge two levels of time.

We can juxtapose her, too, with a figure from the other end of the spectrum, Arnold Schering, who also tried to capture the musical monument in its capacity for communication—although, admittedly, in a rather different sense. For him the significance of monumentality resided in its ability to inspire posterity by means of its greatness, as he saw exemplified in Bach's and Handel's works. We should, however, take this with some caution, as we will further see in chapter 6. Schering was clearly aware of the monumental sound world of the nineteenth century. He explained: "While every age has its great composer, and especially the nineteenth century has characteristically striven for monumental effects, there are only few composers"—by which he was referring to Bach and Handel—"with whom we can associate this concept so completely and unreservedly."46

A musical monument can only be "something grand, significant," Schering explained, "of which one can assume that the force of its contents will still be able in the most distant times to appear alive and capable of creating moments of elation, of pride, of self-confidence." He made a dual demand on the musical monument, which for him primarily builds on the aesthetic aspect of monumentality: the monument is not only concerned with the representation of greatness, celebrating it in sound, but at the same time it is supposed to be awe-inspiring itself, to enact this greatness. The other aspect of monumentality, its historical magnitude, is subsumed by this conception: for Schering, the temporal distance between a monumental artwork and the observer is a sign of the success of the monument. In other words, once a musical work has prevailed for centuries in cultural memory, as is the case in Bach and Handel, it has succeeded historically, which for Schering is tantamount to eternal validity. The central concern of Schering's investigation, then, is the question of which musical means produce the kinds of effects that he considers to be in force in a truly monumental musical work.
The mountainous monuments aspired to an apparently autonomous effect in timeless space, which is to say that the agents who secretly removed the obsolete sculptures or enriched the canon with their musicalological arguments were only allowed to act out of sight behind the scene. Schering's argument, by contrast, inscribes a forward-looking temporality into the monument, as it is obliged to project its identity-shaping authority into the future. This difference between Assmann's and Schering's conception of the monument is crucial: Assmann concentrates on the means of communication, that is the "how," the mediating elements in monumentality, while Schering is centrally concerned to identify the "what," a specific musical essence of the monument. Thus, while Schering is convinced by the mysterious "force of contents," which he holds to be responsible for the monumentality inherent in a work of music, neither forces nor contents seem to matter much in Assmann's model. This focus in Schering's essentialist model therefore leads us inevitably to the origin of the monument—the only point in time that is fixed and identifiable, from which the "forces of contents," which characterize Schering's model, emanate.

The central question of how such a monument should be constituted in order to make optimum use of its special capacities was tackled in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with rather less compunction than nowadays. For Schering's musical physiognomy may ostensibly build on Bach and Handel, but it ultimately aims to capture something more general, some-thing similar to what Nietzsche expressed when he claimed that Wagner's Lohengrin was music capable of hypnosis—both possessed "forces of content" that exerted a immediate and lasting impact on their environment and on posterity. To be sure, Schering's efforts represent the only sustained attempt to compile a physiognomy of musical monumentality, but there is no shortage in the psychological-empirical aesthetics of the later nineteenth century of efforts to concretize the notion of the sublime in music, which were largely congruous with Schering's ideas. Thus, Adolph Zeising, for one, attached central importance to various structural elements such as fugatos; for Arthur Seidl, such events as rallentandos or pedal points were signs of the sublime in music; while Hugo Riemann considered large orchestral tutti to exceed the capacity of subjective imagination—which was determined for him by the human voice—in both range and force. Hermann Stepanhi, meanwhile, regarded intensification and contrast more generally as characteristics of sublime music.

Even without going into any detail here, it is obvious that such typologies can easily be applied, and have been, to many of the chief works of the long nineteenth century. This is, after all, the age of Wagner's Ring, Brahms's German Requiem, Mahler's Symphony of a Thousand, Strauss's Alpine Symphony, and Schoenberg's Gurrelieder. Or, since the idea of musical monuments was obviously not limited to German culture alone, we can expand our view beyond the Germanic cultural borders: it is also the age of Tchaikovsky's 1812 overture, Berlioz's Les Troyens, Verdi's Requiem—that is, of works that might well confirm Schering's hopes of radiating the force of their musical contents into the most distant future.

The list, however, does not end here. Is this also the age of Joachim Raff's oratorio Weltende—Gericht—Neue Welt (1880)? Of Siegmund von Hausegger's Natursymphonie (1912)? Or of Franz Schmidt's Buch mit sieben Siegeln (1937)? These works are second to none as concerns scope, ambition, and overwhelming size, but their place in the collective memory is highly doubtful. Worse still, works that fall into the category of what Alois Riegl would call "intentional monuments," explicitly commemorative works—take, for example, Beethoven's Wellington's Victory, Brahms's Triumphlied, or Bruckner's Helgodon—have largely fallen out of favor, notwithstanding the stature of their composers and the high esteem in which they themselves may have held these works. Issues of canonicity, monumentality, and the sublime may indeed have close associative ties, but the compositional factors Schering foregrounds—force, nature, and means of musical expression—are not in themselves sufficient to guarantee monumentality in the historically significant sense that Schering grapples with. Nor does it seem possible, conversely, to identify the canonical value of a composition analytically: attempts to determine the boundaries between greatness and bombast or Kitsch by means of detailed analysis, as had been popular up until the 1960s, are now considered untenable. In other words, Schering has talked himself into a corner: historical significance is not a consequence of musical effect.

One common reaction is to defuse this precarious situation by reverting to a differentiation between "monumentality" as a mere stylistic notion of the over-proportionate and bombastic, and the "monument" as such, which fulfills a representative commemorative function. As we recall, this is very much the case in late twentieth-century German culture: embarrassed by the supremacist excesses of fascist culture in the middle of the century, monumentality as a style is all but defunct; meanwhile the monument, as an object of remembrance, is more widespread than ever. In any case, with such a categorical distinction between the (commemorative) monument and the (overwhelming) style of monumentality, any attempt to approach the issue of musical monumentality from the stylistic angle, as Schering did, would necessarily be doomed. Nonetheless, it would mean to throw out the baby with the bathwater to cut the connection between monumentality in the sounding
Arnold Schering illustrates the sound of monumentality with a short snippet of music from Handel's *Utrecht Jubilate Deo*. Very similar moments are found in Handel's *Messiah* and the anthem *O be Joyful in the Lord*—each time to the word "Glory."

Musical monumentality works, the invisible hands that removed the Cimarosas and Michael Haydns from the Munich Odeon Hall, the imagined stonemasons carving Beethoven's countenance into the mountain, and the authorities behind the musicological verdicts must be brought out into the sunlight.

Acknowledging that there are invisible hands at work is not the same as to argue that these works, composers, or histories should not be there. Nor is it to say that they are arbitrary and easily replaceable by others. On the contrary, it serves to underline that they are there for a reason, and that they are fulfilling a very specific purpose, which often could not be fulfilled by another composer or piece of music. *Contra* Sulzer's earlier argument that every work of art is a monument, we should further specify that while every work of art could be a monument, not all of them are monuments at all times. This simple distinction—we could also call think of it as monument *in potentia* and *in actu*—is fundamental to understanding the workings of the monument: it might be useful at this point to recall that musical monumentality is far from being the self-evident, self-sufficient musical effect as which it habitually presents itself, but rather the product of surprisingly complex cultural mechanisms. Both the specificity of the sounding structure and the particular context in which it is sounded remain crucial to its monumental work, and both need to be carefully scrutinized.

Wagner's Romantic harmony always looms large in all matters monumental and can serve as an example here. According to the music historian August Reissmann, Wagner availed himself of the stylistic means of Meyerbeer's grand opera but concentrated them by focusing on its harmonic expression, as Reissmann explained in a number of examples. He commented on these examples: "Catchy harmonies, such as [example 1.2], may not lose their effect on the layman, but for the professional musician who knows the mechanics of these procedures they will soon lead to tedium, even when he ignores all other demands and fully submits to the effect of the music."

Schering had highly specific ideas about the sound of monumentality: as example 1.1 suggests—the only music example he presents in his essay, taken from Handel's *Utrecht Jubilate Deo*—he was particularly interested in expansive blocks of static sound overlaid with sparkling textures. We need not go as far as Schering did to see that, nonetheless, in the nineteenth century there is undeniably something of a monumental style, parts of which are captured quite well by the phenomenology of the musical sublime. The crux is, rather, that the existence of such a style alone does not lead to any historical guarantees.

A more fruitful approach would be to scale back the ambitions of monumentality. The appeal to transcendence on which monumentality operates must be historicized. This is to say, the mysterious "force of contents" that Schering conjures up must be examined more closely, and the "most distant future" into which monumentality allegedly projects its values needs to be more firmly identified than Schering was willing to do. To understand how
these harmonies mainly consists in third-related progressions and chromatic variants. Reissmann particularly complained about Wagner's undifferentiated application of these stylistic means, which he, as the examples demonstrate, employed in very different dramatic situations. It is by no means a paradox that the passages that Reissmann dismissed as banal and oversused are the same kind as those to which Nietzsche assigned hypnotic power.

Without being aware of what he was doing, Reissmann's observation also brings into play a factor that is crucial to the concept of musical monumentality: Reissmann conceded that the audience reacts differently to such musical effects. The mass of amateurs, whose artistic instincts Reissmann did not trust, is highly susceptible to those effects that are also claimed by monumentality. To accept this discrepancy as significant, and to accept the layperson's reaction as fully legitimate, however, would lead to painful consequences. It is no less than an admission that monumental effect and normative artistic values might diverge. An approach, however, that aims to pinpoint monumentality in the structure of the composition, such as Schering's, cannot accommodate a differentiated listening experience because a piece's artistic values are supposed to be conveyed by means of the sounding structure. A legitimate mode of reception, under Schering's regime, would necessarily have to be unified.

It would be wrong to argue that the listeners' response is irrelevant to Schering's model—he spoke, after all, of "moments of elation, of pride, of self-confidence"—but for the most part he nonchalantly committed those moments to the most distant future and no longer considered them in his examination. However, as soon as we lend more weight to the reaction of the masses, the communicative character of the monument shifts away from the origin, from the sender of the message, toward its recipient. Riegl's concept of the historical monument, too, draws attention to the fact that as soon as the concept of "eternal values" conveyed by the monument is given up, we are necessarily referred back to the values of the present. For it is only with the view to the values of the present—which in this case is the "present" of the group of recipients whenever they lived—that we can explain how and why an artistic object may be assigned the status of a monument.

It is precisely at this point that the crucial difference to Assmann's cultural-anthropological approach comes to the fore: Schering has salvaged the element of transcendence in his model so that it conveys, in his words, "the impact of the initial impression across all ages." Not unlike a Voyager missile on its indefinite trajectory into outer space, Schering's monument carries its man-made message to whomever it may concern, confident that it will speak for itself. Assmann, meanwhile, speaks of two distinct temporal dimensions, two epochs that come into contact by means of the monument. For her, the monument is an "established sign, codifying a message" that is "directly related to an addressee." Assmann's monument, in other words, is staged so as to become legible for posterity and to facilitate a dialogue between two ages. With this, the context of the recipients also contributes decisively to a notion of monumentality and instructs us to consider its mass effects as part of the concept. At the same time we can get beyond the idea of universal canons or transcendent values and instead concentrate on an examination of how these coded values are received in specific situations.

**Masses for the Masses**

By combining the hermeneutic aspects from Assmann's cultural-anthropological model with a modified version of the specific musical aspects that are Schering's main concern, both the commemorative and the sounding aspects of musical monumentality can be captured and brought together in one concept. When viewed from this angle, the idea of musical monumentality turns out no longer to be identical with the musical sublime itself. It should rather be understood as the attempt to convey the sublime to the masses.

In this much less self-confident formulation, the troubling aspect of transcendence only remains as an aspiration. The ambition of the monument to convey high culture and eternal values to the audience, which had turned out to be largely untenable, is no longer pre-supposed as the automatic effect of the monument, but rather the key to the work it performs. It cannot quite be laid to rest, for no monument can liberate itself completely from the nimbus of transcendence without putting at risk its very claim to monumentality. The effect of transcendence should rather be understood as the result of a successful monumentality. At the same time this means that the attempt to convey the sublime to the masses may well fail, in a way that can be no less spectacular than its success.

It is also for this reason that many, though not all, of the following chapters cast a spotlight on musical objects that are no longer present in the collective memory, that no longer possess the monumental power they were once endowed with. Rummaging through the proverbial "dustbin of history"—a term that by its very definition seems irreconcilable with the transcendental aspirations of monumentality and that, needless to say, should be used with gingerly circumspection—may in fact remind us of our own cultural forgetfulness and can help us to clarify the demarcations and limits of our collective
memory. The differences that separate us from the figures of the past often allow a clearer view of the mechanisms and authorities that once made possible and sustained the illusion of transcendence.

Of course, we should not stop here: if a renewed acquaintance with some of the forgotten music discussed over the next chapters served to rekindle our interest in these musical objects, if we agreed to pick them out of the "dustbin of history" and, indeed, if we rethought the very notion of a dustbin of history in conjunction with the vicissitudes of monumentality, then we will have come a long way in dialethically recuperating a monumentality for the twenty-first century. And perhaps we will find, at least in some cases, that the differences are not so great after all. In other words, a deepened engagement with those forgotten musical objects may make us question in turn precisely how those differences that appear to set us apart from the figures of the past have come about in the first place and may cause us to examine more closely the mechanisms and authorities that prop up visions of transcendence in our own musical culture. This would be the first step toward de-solidifying monumentality, toward demystifying its claims to transcendence, and toward understanding the golden shimmer that it once received thanks to its "Midas touch."

It is impossible to give an adequate description of the mechanisms and authorities that sustain monumentality in the abstract. But it may nonetheless be useful to sketch out some of the basic interactions of the critical institutions on which this form of monumentality relies, as we will encounter these or similar ones again and again in ever-changing constellations over the following chapters.

The scaled-back ambition of a monumentality that is no longer transcendent does not make its work any easier. On the contrary, its job comes close to squaring the circle. The monument is charged with the task of both celebrating the loftiest achievements of a culture and presenting them in an immediately appreciable form, their intellectually demanding and often also elitist nature notwithstanding. From this angle, again, monumentality emerges as the attempt to bring together two distinct quantities, which result from their temporal and aesthetic aspects, respectively. Here the quantities in question are immediacy, as a consequence of the overwhelming effect of physical monumentality, and permanence, as the correlate of the longevity of historical monumentality. These two aspects are juxtaposed in such opposites as fashion vs. classicity, entertainment vs. education, popular culture vs. canonical high culture, or newness vs. age. The monument promises to bring both aspects to the fore—mass appeal and elite—as if there were no tension between the two. In a word, the monument must do no less than to heal the rifts of modernity, or at least, it is supposed to bandage them.

Theodor W. Adorno famously held Mozart's *Magic Flute* to be the last example in music in which popular culture and high art could cohabite. It was a farewell to an idealized eighteenth century of a harmonious equilibrium between pleasure and enlightenment, an age before the indomitable spirit of modernity and progress unleashed the combined forces of class, history, and nation onto nineteenth-century culture. In combination, this triumvirate, the three pillars of nineteenth-century European culture, formed an exceptionally close interactive system that both gave rise to the monument (in its nineteenth-century guise) and was in turn held together by it.

Let us briefly sketch these pillars and their interactions here. The rising bourgeoisie, to begin with, with its self-definition based on *Besitz und Bildung*—property and education—increasingly gained the role of the principal carrier of culture. Second, historicism, understood in its broadest terms as the valorization of the past as a key source of knowledge over the present, formed the background against which the identity-shaping forces of the monument came to the fore (as Nietzsche above pointed out). And third, cultural nationalism provided the illusion that class differences can be leveled out with the view to a higher spiritual community, commensurate with national or cultural borders, building on the traditions, rituals, and spiritual links to the past that historicism provided. Music, with its "community-shaping powers," as Paul Bekker memorably put it, became an important instrument within this triumvirate. As monumental music, indeed, it seemed to increase this power exponentially.

With this in mind, we can now turn to the interactions between the three pillars. Given that the aristocracy typically formed the foil for bourgeois ambitions in the nineteenth century, it is no surprise that the modes of representation the bourgeoisie settled on for monumentality were primarily oriented by the monarchic monuments of the eighteenth century. (Nor should it surprise us that Handel is such an important figure in the establishment of musical monumentality, despite his complicated position within German music.) In the field of sculpture, the monuments of the eighteenth century had mainly celebrated military and political rulers; in the nineteenth century this space came to be increasingly occupied, sometimes literally, by monuments to the cultivated nation (or *Bildungs- und Kulturnation*), as historian Thomas Nipperdey calls it, with its heroic writers, philosophers, and artists. Not only did the bourgeoisie exert a growing economic and social influence, but the cult of the genius, celebrated in these monuments, also became a central institution in the writing of history. To speak with Hegel, the world spirit manifested itself through the genius and history actualized itself through his works. The Germanophile Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle expressed this
in his unmistakably titled lectures On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History (1840): “The History of the World ... was the Biography of Great Men.” Carlyle’s heroic historicism had given up Hegel’s idealistic outlook and embraced a reverential empiricism bordering on religious worship of the heroic deeds of great men.

As sociologists have been arguing for some time now, however, the relation between bourgeoisie and genius is reciprocal. In other words, the genius only exists _qua_ genius—that is, as a creator merely of works, but of _great_ works—in symbiosis with its community of admirers who recognize it as such and praise its achievements. In other words, the community of admirers is united around a set of shared interests, which are attached to the genius, but which also, first and foremost, reflect the values of the group itself. The community creates a canon of values for itself and installs the genius as its representative and authority figure. Pace Carlyle, the genius _is_ made to make history.

What matters, then, is the relationship between the groups of recipients and the monument, no matter whether this is the sculpture of a musical genius or the experience of his or her (though usually his) music. It is with this in mind that the revised definition of the musical monument, as the attempt to convey the sublime to the masses, should be understood. This new definition brings with it one further complication: the masses are not further specified, as identification only occurs around and under the influence of the monument. The nameless masses are not a priori identical with the nation. There is no compelling reason why the musical monument, or genius worship, would have to take place in a national framework. (As Ernest Gellner cautioned, a desire to belong to groups may be natural, but there is nothing natural about the specific desire to belong to a nation.) In the nineteenth century, however, where nationalism became a driving force, monument and nation came to be almost inseparably commingled. There are some good arguments for this: if we approach the nation as an “imagined community,” in Benedict Anderson’s influential term, it draws, like the monument itself, on a strong concept of education that is determined by selective historical reception as well as by a firm belief in the perpetual presence of the past. That is to say, the musical monument becomes the petrified, sonic impulse that brings together this imagined community and enables it to identify as a group.

Again, it was Nietzsche who pinpointed, caustically but concisely, the stakes of the monumental task of German music. With reference to the increased importance of nationalism in the wake of the revolutions of 1848/49, he wrote:

Today German music is more than any other, the music of Europe, if only because it alone has given expression to the transformation of Europe through the Revolution. Only German composers know how to lend expression to an excited mass of people, creating an immense artificial noise that does not even have to be very loud—while Italian opera, for instance, features only choruses of servants or soldiers, but no “people” [Volk].

Nothing would be more misguided than to consider Nietzsche’s appraisal of a European quality in German music as an admission that he would buy into the frequent claims of its cosmopolitan nature. On the contrary, the privileged position German music assumes among the chorus of national styles is only in tune with a European spirit insofar as it reflects the spirit of the times: German music has learned to perfect its tasks and powers in representing, shaping, and homogenizing the Volk. Where the revolutions may have failed on the political forum, music continues its cause from the aesthetic realm. We need not go into great detail here—though it is tempting to think of Wagner’s _Meistersinger_ here as a paragon of that “immense artificial noise” that can at times be quiet—to see that the monument joins forces with communal identity by representing a fixed point, often suggesting a stable, immutable origin.

With this thought, we return to the point at which we started this section—the rise of monumentality among the vicissitudes of modernity. Thinkers from Novalis to Georg Lukács and beyond have identified the modern condition as a kind of transcendental homelessness. When monumentality came to the fore in the nineteenth century, it acted as a probate remedy against this transcendental homelessness by providing a compelling vision of stability within the unstoppable surge of progress.

**Turning Back**

The call for monuments made by the _Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung_ in 1800, at the moment that time folded in on itself to begin another centennial cycle, was born out of an impulse to take stock at the turn of the century. Matthew Head has shown, in a fascinating examination of questions of canonicity, historicity, and monumentality surrounding Haydn’s _Creation_, how important the precise starting point of the new century—1800 or 1801?—was to the contributors of the _Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung_. They finally offered an ingenious musical solution to this conundrum, presented with an ironic wink,
to be sure: as figure 1.3 shows, a centennial four-part fugue worked the theme “When does the nineteenth century start?” into an imitative whole, in which the beginning and end of the subject were impossible to pinpoint with absolute certainty. As we will have occasion to observe in greater detail later on in the book, anniversaries of any kind offer a heightened psychological incentive to look forward and backward in time, to contemplate where we stand and who we are—precisely the questions that the monument promises to be able to answer. And yet, with the view to the monumental music of the later nineteenth century, it was much more than just a timely reflection. It was also a sign that the times demanded this kind of historical awareness, and that from now on this reflexivity was going to stay with music. The centennial reflections of 1800 also showed that it was time to consider the new tasks for art and to prepare its role as a self-conscious cultural agent.

As we have seen, monumentality was not just a matter for composition itself, but for everybody and everything associated with music. Triest knew that this included the crucial relationship to its audiences, and that a bond needed to be formed between them that would allow music to unfold its capacity for wonderment and awe. In this sense, Triest exhorted his readers to “lavish all conceivable attention on those who have demonstrated their inner calling, through genius and diligence, for the creation and elevation of an art whose ambitions exceed the value of a fleeting means of sensual delight, nay which, like the creative spirit that molds it, is capable of perfection into the infinite.”

Without calling it such, Triest’s call for a new music in the nineteenth century brought together all the germane aspects of monumentality—including the call to the public to revere composers and creation as one, which, as we saw above, made the sprawling “Midas touch” of monumentality possible. With the united forces of all the institutions of music—chief among them composers and performers, pedagogues and educators, critics and historians, editors and publishers, and last but certainly not least listenership and public—it would be possible to fix music historically and gain “perfection into the infinite.” In other words, by the time the nineteenth century came around, the time had come for German music to take on its monumental task.

It goes without saying, by now, that the very notion of the nineteenth century was not excluded from the twists and turns of monumental history. It is only fitting, then, that the reflexive, multi-referential view of music established circa 1800—which was to clear the path for the timeless “mountain range” view of monumental history—embraces much more than the chronological nineteenth century. Just as the nature of the monument is characterized by excess at all levels, so it becomes impossible to keep the nineteenth-century monument neatly confined to its period: its commemorative aspect allows it

**Figure 1.3** A short four-part fugue on the theme “When does the nineteenth century start?” From *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, September 18, 1799. Reproduced by permission of the Eda Kuhn Loeb Music Library of the Harvard College Library.
to extend backwards toward an apparently stable point of origin, while the aesthetic aspects projects a utopian point promising an everlasting future. Thus, within the confines of monumental history and its capacity to forge associative connections, it is no problem at all that figures such as Heinrich Schütz or historical events such as the German reunification of 1989 can feature prominently under the banner of nineteenth-century musical monuments. As we shall explore in the following chapters, both are firmly anchored, irrespective of their position in chronological time, in complex constellations that link it back or forth with the compositions, institutions, traditions, or with the ideology of the nineteenth-century monument.

Triest and the other thinkers of musical monumentality circa 1800 may not have envisioned the extent to which the concept would turn into the vast, sprawling phenomenon that it was to become over the course of the century, and beyond. To be sure, none of the facets that Triest and his colleagues consider to be constitutive of the foundations of monumentality can be said to be monolithic and immutable: the eighteenth-century sublime was hardly the same as its nineteenth-century equivalent; fundamental notions of canonicity, listening experience, musical media, and musical education were subject to wide-ranging changes; and last but not least, as the political systems changed between monarchic, democratic, militaristic, and totalitarian forms in the course of German history, so did the appearances and usages of musical monuments. In this sense, the image of Beethoven that forms the basis of the monument we will encounter initially on our journey through the next six chapters, at the Bonn Beethoven festival of 1845, can hardly be said to be the same as the one we finally revisit in the Epilogue in 1989, indelibly marked and irreversibly altered as it is by the intervening experiences of German history in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Nonetheless, across these transformations, the monument works to establish a sense of continuity that counteracts all the vicissitudes of modernity. It continually seduces us into believing that these traditions, and what they stand for, must abide—that the two Beethovens of 1845 and 1989 really could be one and the same, that the circle of monumental history can be squared. More than that, the musical monument encourages us to experience that this is so.

CHAPTER TWO | Musical Apotheoses

**Liszt's Apotheoses**

Let me express to you, best of men, my astonishment at your enormous productivity! You have a Dante symphony in your head, have you? And it is to be finished in the autumn? Do not be annoyed by my astonishment at this miracle! When I look back upon your activity in these last years, you appear superhuman to me; that must truly have its special significance.

With this accolade, Wagner began what was to become a rather famous letter to Liszt in Weimar, dated June 7, 1855. He could hardly have chosen a better attribute than "superhuman" for Liszt. For, as the reverent biographer Lina Ramann put it in 1887, Liszt's Weimar activities included "groundbreaking reforms" as a conductor and "groundbreaking reforms" in keyboard pedagogy, which produced a number of star pianists. In addition, his theoretical writings are a "triumph of genius"—which is tantamount to saying that he introduced groundbreaking reforms—and his symphonic works "introduce a new period of music history," which was no less than the fulfillment of Beethoven's heritage. In fact, by the time Wagner wrote his letter, Liszt had virtually completed a consciously Beethovenian set of nine full-length symphonic works, most of which he had shown to Wagner. Wagner's epiphany refers in particular to these symphonic works.

What is more, "superhuman" may also refer to the musical style of Liszt's compositions of those years. As the continuation of Wagner's letter shows, he regarded the connection of life and music as the essence of artistic existence: