

14 Beethoven's shadow: the nineteenth century

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For aspiring symphonists of the nineteenth century, Beethoven was at once both an inspiration and an obstacle. The responses to his shadow were many and varied, and they changed gradually over the course of time, but from Schubert to Mahler, any composer who engaged with the genre had to come to terms with Beethoven's legacy in one way or another. The first generation that came of age after Beethoven – which is to say, in the 1820s and 30s – included an extraordinary array of composers who took up this challenge: Franz Berwald (1796–1868), Franz Schubert (1797–1828), Hector Berlioz (1803–69), Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47), Robert Schumann (1810–56), Franz Liszt (1811–86) and Richard Wagner (1813–83). Yet with the exception of Berlioz, every one of them struggled with the genre in his youth and then abandoned it for a time before returning to it later in life, often with great ambivalence.

Schumann's early efforts in the genre exemplify the difficulties composers faced in the immediate wake of Beethoven. Like others of his generation, Schumann wanted to prove his artistic mettle by writing a symphony, the most prestigious of all instrumental genres and 'a veritable touchstone for composers and listeners alike', as the critic Adolph Bernhard Marx had noted in 1824.¹ By November 1832, Schumann had managed to complete the first movement of a Symphony in G minor and was even able to hear it performed publicly in his home town of Zwickau. Dissatisfied with what he had heard, he made substantial revisions, acknowledging in the process to a friend that while orchestrating the first movement he had sometimes mistaken 'yellow for blue', and that only through 'many years of study' would he gain 'certainty and mastery' of the art of instrumentation.² The young composer nevertheless persevered, added a second movement, and heard both movements performed in the nearby town of Schneeberg on 18 February 1833. Here, however, the still-fragmentary symphony shared the programme with Beethoven's Seventh. No account of the evening survives, but listeners – including the 22-year-old Schumann – could scarcely have avoided making comparisons, even if only in private. After one more performance of the two movements in Leipzig two months later, Schumann abandoned the work entirely and would not return to the genre for another eight years.

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Writing a symphony was difficult enough – in addition to a thorough knowledge of orchestration, it required an ability to handle large-scale forms – and sharing a concert programme with Beethoven could only make matters worse, for it made audible to the public what composers themselves had already recognised, that the standards laid down by the older composer in the first three decades of the nineteenth century could not be easily rivalled. Beethoven's nine symphonies would inhibit Schumann and a host of other young composers from competing on this terrain. Yet even after abandoning the genre, Schumann continued to think about it: as editor of the newly founded *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, he assigned himself all but a handful of reviews of new symphonies and as late as 1840 was still feeling caught between the demands of originality and the shadow cast by Beethoven:

It is said so often and to the great irritation of composers that 'coming after Beethoven' they have 'refrained from symphonic plans'. It is true, in part, that aside from a few significant works for orchestra (which were nevertheless of greater interest for the development of their particular composers, and which exercised no decisive influence on the masses or on the progress of the genre), most of the others were only a pale reflection of Beethoven's manner – not to mention those lame, boring symphony-makers who had the ability to imitate adequately the powdered wigs of Haydn and Mozart, but not the heads underneath them.³

In his earlier (1835) review of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, Schumann had named names, identifying a series of composers (other than himself) who had attempted to write symphonies in the wake of Beethoven. He began his list with comments about Ferdinand Ries, 'whose decided individuality could be eclipsed only by a Beethovenian one'; Ludwig Spohr, whose 'gentle speech in the great vaults of the symphony, in which he attempted to speak, did not resonate strongly enough'; and Johann Wenzel Kalliwoda, that 'happy, harmonious being' whose later symphonies proved more technically proficient yet less imaginative than his earlier ones. Schumann concluded his survey by citing only the names of 'younger' composers 'whom we know and value': Ludwig Maurer, Friedrich Schneider, Ignaz Moscheles, Christian Gottlieb Müller, Adolph Friedrich Hesse, Franz Lachner and Felix Mendelssohn, 'whom we intentionally name last'. (Schumann at the time would have known only Mendelssohn's relatively modest Symphony No. 1 and would not have been aware that Mendelssohn had written but withheld from publication two other highly original works, the 'Reformation' and 'Italian' symphonies.) For Schumann, Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* was an anomaly, the work of a Frenchman, the exception that proved the rule, and it was almost certainly this work that he had in mind when he later spoke of

those significant orchestral compositions that had exercised 'no decisive influence on the masses or on the progress of the genre'.

Neither was Schumann alone in his estimation of the challenge. Already during Beethoven's lifetime critics had perceived the growing reach of his symphonic shadow. The influential critic Amadeus Wendt complained in 1822 that 'the gigantic works of Beethoven appear to have scared off successors in this sphere'.⁴ An anonymous reviewer of the premiere of Beethoven's Ninth observed that Beethoven had long since raised the genre to such a height that other composers found it 'difficult to reach even the approaches to this Helicon'.⁵ A mere two years after the premiere of the Ninth, the composer and theorist Gottfried Weber identified that work as representing 'an ominous culmination and turning point' in the genre of the symphony.⁶ And in his obituary of Beethoven, Friedrich Rochlitz observed that 'for some time now, not one of his competitors has dared even to dispute his supremacy' in instrumental music. 'Strong composers avoid him on this ground; weaker ones subjugate themselves, in that they labour mightily to imitate him.'⁷

In the wake of Beethoven, then, debate centred not on who might step forward as his symphonic successor, but rather whether *anyone* could step forward: the very future of the genre lay in doubt. As identified in Chapter 1, Wagner was neither the first nor the last to proclaim the death of the symphony. This was, however, the first time in the history of music that the future of an entire genre had been called into question not because it was perceived to be old-fashioned, but because the accomplishments in that genre by a single composer were perceived to be unsurpassable.

Beethoven's shadow

I

What had led to this perception? Not everything can be pinned on Beethoven alone. Indeed, the symphony had already established itself as the most demanding and prestigious of all instrumental genres by the end of the eighteenth century, even before Beethoven had ventured into the arena. But in the decades around 1800, a number of broad and fundamental changes on the musical scene had begun to converge in ways that would eventually help endow Beethoven's symphonies with an even greater aura of insuperability:

1. *The growing importance of originality.* Originality had long played an important role in Western music aesthetics, but it took on unprecedented significance in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, driven in part by the theories of Kant and then later by those of the early Romantics. Beethoven began his career in an age

in which the essential nature of the true artist was perceived to lie in the quality of original genius. Composers were coming to be seen as high priests, mediators between the earthly and the divine, and the public began to take an interest in their lives as individuals, as witnessed by the growing number of biographies of composers that began to appear around this time, including such figures as Mozart (Niemetschek, 1798), J. S. Bach (Forkel, 1802) and Haydn (Griesinger, 1810).

2. *The rise of historical awareness.* It is no coincidence that the first attempts at a comprehensive history of music appeared in the second half of the eighteenth century.⁸ By the time Beethoven arrived on the scene in the 1790s, the musical public was beginning to think more and more in terms of historical significance, beyond the circumstances of the here-and-now. The first long-running music journal, the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of Leipzig, began publication in 1799, and its essays on historical topics appeared alongside appraisals of the latest music, including E. T. A. Hoffmann's celebrated review (1810) of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The Hegelian view of history that began to take a (strangle-)hold in German-speaking lands later, in the 1820s, further reinforced the notion of a teleological progression in which Haydn and Mozart paved the way for the all-subsuming phenomenon of Beethoven.
3. *The emergence of the musical canon.* Outside the church, Handel was the first composer whose works enjoyed widespread public favour half a century or more after his death. Poets had laboured under the burden of the past before,⁹ but composers had never had much of a past to confront, at least not in the concert hall, for the simple reason that the works of earlier generations had rarely stayed in general circulation. All this began to change in the decades around 1800: the late symphonies of Haydn and Mozart continued to be performed after their composers' deaths, and the public became increasingly conscious of the importance of accurate, authoritative musical texts – hence the posthumous publication of a substantial body of works by Mozart (1798–9) and an attempt to publish a comparable series under Haydn's own supervision (beginning in 1802).
4. *The rise of public culture.* The public concert was scarcely a new phenomenon in the early nineteenth century, but it took on unprecedented importance around this time. Broadening interest in music, the gradual decline of aristocratic patronage and the emerging sense of public culture – manifested in the phenomenon of mass politics and large public gatherings – all helped reinforce the significance of the symphony as a genre. More than any other kind of instrumental music, the symphony gave voice to the drive towards the monumental.
5. *The prestige of the sublime.* By virtue of its size, volume, timbral variety and textural complexity, the symphony was perceived as the sublime musical genre *par excellence*. It accorded perfectly with Edmund Burke's oft-quoted definition of sublime objects as 'vast in their dimensions', as opposed to beautiful ones, which he described as 'comparatively small'. 'Beauty', Burke maintained, should be 'smooth and polished . . . light and delicate', while the great should be 'rugged and negligent . . . solid, and even massive'. Beauty 'should not be obscure', whereas 'the great ought to be dark and even gloomy'. The sublime and the beautiful 'are indeed ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure'.¹⁰ More than one critic of Burke's time compared the

symphony to the Pindaric ode, not only because of its size and breadth, but also because of its combination of originality and artifice, achievable through the medium of an orchestra consisting of the widest possible variety of instrumental types: strings, winds, brass and percussion. Many critics perceived the symphony as a communal genre, a work that could give voice to the emotions and aspirations of a large body of performers and listeners alike. The symphony, like the Pindaric ode, was considered a sublime genre, capable of arousing a sense of awe and even delightful fear in the spirit of its assembled listeners.¹¹

To what degree Beethoven contributed to these changes and to what degree his reputation benefited from them are less important than the fact that already during his own lifetime he was perceived to have raised instrumental music – and the symphony in particular – to unprecedented heights. The generation after Beethoven magnified this perception, for what might be called the ‘Age of Carlyle’ was inclined to understand history of all kinds as the accomplishments of Great Men: critics found it far more reasonable (and straightforward) to ascribe monumental change to a dominant individual than to amorphous, discontinuous and gradual changes in aesthetics and social practices. Changing conceptions about the role of the listener, the relationship of music to ideas, the nature of art in general and the social function of the symphony all seemed secondary, at the time, to the power of Beethoven’s music. And while no responsible historian openly advocates the ‘Great Man’ school of music history nowadays, its residue remains amply evident. Even Carl Dahlhaus, who was acutely aware of the perils of this approach, argued that ‘the new insight that Beethoven *thrust upon the aesthetic consciousness of his age* was that a musical text, like a literary or a philosophical text, harbors a meaning which is made manifest but not entirely subsumed in its acoustic presentation – that a musical creation can exist as an “art work of ideas” transcending its various interpretations’.¹² The image Dahlhaus presents here is one of a composer dragging his generation, seemingly against its will, into a higher state of consciousness about the nature of music, and specifically, about the essential nature of purely instrumental, non-programmatic music. Beethoven’s music certainly helped promote this attitude: he was indisputably the leading composer of instrumental music in the early decades of the nineteenth century and repeatedly hailed as such at the time. But it does not follow that his music actually created these changes. The premises for such changes in perception were already firmly in place by 1800, before Beethoven had finished his First Symphony.¹³

II

Still, we must try to separate our perceptions today from those of composers, critics and listeners of the nineteenth century, who for the most part

did in fact ascribe to Beethoven an almost mythic power in the history of music, and most particularly in the realm of the symphony. However we may feel about hero-worship nowadays, we cannot ignore the fact that nineteenth-century culture venerated its Great Men, be they from the realm of politics (Napoleon), philosophy (Hegel), or the arts (Goethe). In the post-Napoleonic era, Beethoven emerged as *the* central figure in music, the 'hero' of his art.¹⁴

Beethoven's nine symphonies, though far fewer in number than Haydn's or Mozart's, stood out all the more by virtue of their variety. In an age that worshipped originality, Beethoven's symphonies, especially from the *Eroica* onwards, were decidedly different from one another. Together, they created what Dahlhaus has aptly termed a 'circumpolar' approach to the genre in that it encompassed a broad spectrum of types, including both long and short (nos. 7 and 8); serious and comic (nos. 5 and 8); heroic and pastoral (nos. 5 and 6); characteristic (nos. 3 and 6); cyclically integrated (No. 5); and even vocal (No. 9). Beethoven also got credit for formal innovations demonstrably not his own: the unexpected return of music from the third movement in the course of the Fifth Symphony's Finale, for example, had a direct forerunner in Haydn's Symphony No. 46 in B major (1772), a work Beethoven may have known from his Bonn years. But Haydn's symphony had been all but forgotten by the nineteenth century, and in the end, public perception trumped actual precedence.

Without question, Beethoven hastened the transformation of the symphonic minuet into a scherzo, a longer, faster and sometimes (as in the case of the Fifth and Ninth) more demonic movement than that found in the typical symphony of the eighteenth century. But it was in his finales that Beethoven posed the greatest challenge to future symphonists. Most spectacularly in the Fifth and Ninth, but also in the Third, Sixth and Seventh, Beethoven explored the various ways in which a finale could function not merely as a last movement but as a culmination of the whole. To underscore this point, the Fifth and Ninth explicitly evoke and reject themes from one or more earlier movements, in effect subsuming and elevating all that has gone before. After Beethoven, the symphony was no longer a series of movements but a closely integrated whole, a drama whose crux occurs only towards the end. Composers responded to this problem of the finale in a variety of ways, as we shall see.

The symphony also came to be seen as something more than a means of entertainment. With or without a verbal programme, descriptive title or evocative movement headings, a symphony was assumed to 'mean' something. In the polemics that erupted in the middle of the nineteenth century over the relative merits of 'absolute' and 'programme' music, everyone wanted to claim the mantle of Beethoven, and both sides pointed to the same works to

justify their respective claims. Advocates of absolute music emphasised the technical elements of works like the Fifth Symphony, with its transformation of an opening four-note motive across all four movements. Advocates of programme music, in turn, argued that this same transformation portrayed a series of psychological states, which suggested an implicit story behind the music. Anton Schindler's testimony (1840) that the composer had meant the opening four-note unison motive to represent 'fate pounding at the portal' encouraged listeners to hear the trajectory of the Fifth as a struggle through darkness to light, culminating in the triumph of C major in the Finale. Encouraged by the overtly programmatic elements of the Third and Sixth symphonies, nineteenth-century commentators supplied storylines of varying degrees of detail for the Fourth, Seventh and Eighth symphonies as well. This kind of approach would eventually extend to the symphonic genre as a whole. As the critic Gottfried Wilhelm Fink observed in 1835, a symphony is 'a story, developed within a psychological context, of some particular emotional state of a large body of people', a 'representation of the *Volk* through every instrument drawn into the whole'.¹⁵ Two decades later, the English critic Henry F. Chorley observed in 1854 that a symphony, 'besides being a good symphony, must now express the anguish of the age, or of some age past. There must be story, inner meaning, mystical significance – intellectual tendency'.¹⁶

Responses to Beethoven

I

Given these perceptions, we can better understand why so many composers of the first post-Beethovenian generation struggled to write symphonies. Berwald suppressed his First Symphony (in A Major) after its unsuccessful premiere in Stockholm in 1820 and would not return to the genre until 1842. Schubert took leave of the symphony in early 1818 after finishing a series of impressive but relatively small-scale works. He returned to the genre briefly in the autumn of 1822 with his Symphony in B minor, D 759, but the work would remain unfinished not so much in spite of its impressive first two movements but because of them: he sketched out a scherzo but could not create a satisfactory finale. In March 1824, Schubert wrote to his friend Leopold Kupelwieser that although he had not composed many new songs recently, he had tried his hand

at several instrumental works, for I wrote two quartets for violins, viola and violoncello, and an octet, and I want to write another quartet; altogether, I want to pave my way toward the grand symphony in this manner. The latest in Vienna is that Beethoven is to give a concert at which he is to present his new Symphony [Op. 125], three movements from the new Mass

[Op. 123], and a new overture [Op. 124]. God willing, I too am resolved to present a similar concert next year.¹⁷

Schubert's efforts would eventually lead to the 'Great' Symphony in C major, D 944, but this work would remain unknown for all practical purposes until it was discovered by Schumann on a visit to Vienna in early 1839 and conducted by Mendelssohn in Leipzig later that same year. Schumann praised the work for its 'complete independence' from Beethovenian models, wilfully ignoring close parallels between Schubert's second movement and the Allegretto of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony.¹⁸

Mendelssohn wrote more than a dozen symphonies for string orchestra as a youth and even completed a symphony for full orchestra in 1824 but had second thoughts about it, withholding it from publication for another ten years before issuing it as his Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 11. In the meantime, he completed his 'Reformation' and 'Italian' Symphonies (1830, 1833) but harboured doubts about those works as well: both would remain unpublished at the time of his death.¹⁹ Only by the time he was into his thirties did he gain the confidence to compose symphonies and publish them without substantial delay. He premiered the *Lobgesang* Symphony (No. 2, in B-flat major) in 1840 and saw it into print in 1841, and finished the 'Scottish' Symphony (No. 3, in A minor) in 1841 and had it published two years later. Liszt followed a similar path. He abandoned his unfinished 'Revolutionary' Symphony in 1830 but returned to the genre with great success in the mid-1850s with his *Faust* and *Dante* symphonies. Wagner completed his Symphony in C major in 1832 and started another symphony (in E major) two years later but then abandoned the genre, even as he harboured deeply ambivalent attitudes towards it until the end of his life.

Fully aware that it had become a 'colossal undertaking' to write a symphony in the wake of 'Beethoven's nine masterpieces', as the critic Ignaz Jitteles observed in 1837, symphonists of the next generation were more inclined to put off tackling the genre until they had developed the requisite skills.²⁰ Anton Bruckner (1824–96) did not venture into the field until 1863, when he was 38. Johannes Brahms (1833–97) seems to have begun several symphonies during his twenties and thirties but invariably transformed these projects in the direction of other genres such as the piano concerto or the serenade; he did not complete his First Symphony, Op. 68, until the age of 43, and even then only after a protracted struggle. He famously despaired to the conductor Hermann Levi in the early 1870s that he would 'never compose a symphony! You have no idea how it feels to our kind [i.e. composers] when one always hears such a giant marching behind.'²¹ The giant, of course, was Beethoven, and Brahms would eventually deal with him in his own distinctive way, as we shall see.

II

Among composers of the first post-Beethovenian generation, Berlioz alone succeeded in establishing himself early on with a series of ambitious and highly original works. Perhaps not coincidentally, Berlioz was the only major symphonist of his time working outside the Germanic-speaking realm. He was also, significantly, the only composer of his generation to confront Beethoven directly from the very start. His *Symphonie fantastique: Épisode de la vie d'un artiste* (1830) is in many respects both a homage and a retort to Beethoven's Third, Fifth, Sixth and Ninth symphonies. The 'hero' of this symphony is an artist who imagines his beloved in the form of a theme Berlioz called the *idée fixe*. Like the short-short-short-LONG motive of Beethoven's Fifth, it resurfaces in every movement, but always in a new guise (the details of this process, and similar techniques in *Harold en Italie*, are addressed in Chapter 9). The happy feelings in the countryside – Berlioz's third-movement 'Scène aux champs' – begins with the obligatory shepherds' calls, but the happiness soon dissolves: one of the two parties disappears towards the end of the movement, and the artist immediately connects this non-response with his own love-life: 'What if she has been unfaithful?' he wonders. What had begun as a serene moment of pastoral repose ends with distant and dissonant thunder on the menacingly soft timpani. In the movement that follows, the 'March to the Scaffold', the thunder is transformed in the artist's mind into the sound of military drums accompanying him to the gallows, where he will be executed for the crime of having killed his beloved. Beethoven's funeral march in honour of a hero has been supplanted by accompanimental music for a convicted criminal. Berlioz called his Finale a 'Dream of a Witches' Sabbath', and here he transforms Beethoven's Elysium into Hades. He presents the *idée fixe* on an E-flat clarinet in a guise he himself called 'trivial and grotesque'. With the intoning of the funereal plainchant *Dies irae* in the low winds (bar 127), he creates a counterpart to the 'Seid umschlungen, Millionen' theme of Beethoven's Ninth. The parallels become more apparent still when Berlioz combines this new theme, first introduced well into the course of the Finale, with the movement's central theme, the 'Witches' Round Dance' (bar 414). In this Finale, the joy of Elysium has been transformed into the joy of Hades.

Berlioz pursued similar strategies in *Harold en Italie*, a 'Symphony in Four Movements with Solo Viola' (1832). Again, the idea of an anti-hero lies at the centre of the work. Loosely based on the character of Byron's epic poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, this Symphony also presents its central theme across all four movements, though with relatively little change. For all his wanderings through the Italian countryside, our hero

(in the guise of the solo viola) changes very little. The second-movement 'Pilgrims' March', like the second movement of Schubert's 'Great' C major Symphony and the second movement of Mendelssohn's 'Italian' Symphony – both unknown to Berlioz at the time – takes the Allegretto of Beethoven's Seventh as its model. The Finale systematically recalls the opening of each of the Symphony's three previous movements, only to reject each one, not in favour of any transcendent theme along the lines of the 'Ode to Joy', but rather to make way for the decidedly unlyrical 'Orgy of the Brigands'. As in the Finale of the *Symphonie fantastique*, the forces of evil win out. Harold – the solo viola – disappears for most of the movement and makes only a feeble reappearance just before the end. Berlioz's second symphony is at once both a homage to and refutation of Beethoven, a classic instance of what the literary critic Harold Bloom has called a 'misreading' of a work by an acknowledged predecessor.²²

With his 'Dramatic Symphony' *Roméo et Juliette* (1839), Berlioz directly confronted the dichotomy between instrumental and vocal music, moving back and forth between the two throughout this seven-movement work. The Finale owes much to opera, but the key moments of Shakespeare's drama, including the crucial scene at the tomb, are given over entirely to instruments. Whereas Beethoven had held the soloists and chorus in reserve until the very end of the Ninth, Berlioz used voices to introduce the instrumental movements. In 1858, long after the work's premiere, Berlioz explained that 'if there is singing, almost from the beginning, it is to prepare the listener's mind for the dramatic scenes whose feelings and passions are to be expressed by the orchestra'.²³

When Schumann resumed writing orchestral music in 1841, he did so with such intensity that subsequent writers have dubbed it his 'Year of the Symphony'. In a remarkably short span of time, he completed the first version of his Symphony in D minor (eventually published as No. 4, Op. 120), his First Symphony in B-flat major, Op. 38, and the *Overture, Scherzo und Finale*, Op. 52, which lacks only a slow movement to conform to the standard outline of a four-movement symphony. The two full-fledged symphonies align themselves with two different composers: the First Symphony reflects Schumann dealing with Schubert's 'Great' C major Symphony, which Schumann himself had discovered in Vienna a few years before, while the Fourth Symphony represents a direct confrontation with Beethoven. In its original form, the D minor symphony was a work in four movements to be played without a pause, thereby emphasising the none-too-subtle thematic links among its constituent parts. The debt to Beethoven's Fifth is particularly evident in the gradual acceleration and breakthrough from D minor to D major at the join between the third-movement Scherzo and the Finale.

Liszt, who had similarly abandoned an early symphonic project around 1830, found other creative outlets for his orchestral ambitions in the second half of the 1840s, when he began writing a series of concert overtures, programmatic one-movement works he would later rechristen as 'symphonic poems'. Indeed, the first movement of the unfinished 'Revolutionary' Symphony of 1830 would form the basis of the *Héroïde funèbre* (1849–50; rev. 1854–6). Liszt became the leading composer of orchestral music in what would come to be known as the 'New German School', a movement whose adherents strove for new forms and genres that could synthesise literary and musical arts, with or without a sung text. In this sense, Liszt's initial rejection of the genre of the symphony reflects the power of Beethoven's influence. Yet Liszt would eventually go on to write two multi-movement symphonies, one based on Goethe's *Faust*, the other on Dante's *La divina commedia*, both culminating in passages for chorus and orchestra. These works, together with his symphonic poems, reflect his ambivalent attitude towards the symphony and above all his fascination with the challenges posed by the Ninth Symphony.

The shadow of the Ninth

Because of its unusual vocal Finale, with its integration of so many different forms and styles, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony became an object of protracted attention for critics and composers alike. The critical reception of the Ninth was mixed in the early decades. Even Mendelssohn, the one post-Beethovenian composer who seems to have grasped Beethoven's late style better than any of his contemporaries, harboured ambivalent feelings about the Ninth's Finale. 'The instrumental movements belong to the greatest of all that I know in the world of art', he wrote to his friend the historian Gustav Droysen in 1837. But 'from the point at which the voices enter', Mendelssohn confessed, 'I, too, do not understand the work; that is, I find only isolated elements to be perfect, and when this is the case with such a Master, the fault probably lies with us. Or in the performance.' Schumann felt similarly divided, confiding to his diary in February 1841 that although the first two movements had brought him 'great pleasure', he had 'not yet entirely understood the last two movements, in which I can not yet find the thread'. The noted conductor Hans von Bülow condemned the Finale for having 'trespassed over music's boundaries' and even omitted it from performances, conducting only the first three movements. And most famously of all, Wagner pointed to the Ninth's Finale as evidence that instrumental music had reached its limits and that even Beethoven, the greatest of all instrumental composers, had been compelled to 'redeem' music from its 'intrinsic element' by introducing a sung text.²⁴

Mendelssohn nevertheless openly used the Ninth as a model for his *Lobgesang* (1840), with three instrumental movements followed by a lengthy Finale for orchestra, vocal soloists and chorus. Although warmly greeted at its premiere for Leipzig's festival honouring the four-hundredth anniversary of Gutenberg's printing press, the *Lobgesang* eventually became a whipping boy of sorts, a work that imitated Beethovenian forms all too closely. Without citing it by name, Wagner wrote scornfully of it:

And why should this or that composer not also write a symphony with chorus? Why should 'The Lord God' not be praised full-throatedly at the end, once He has helped bring about the three preceding instrumental movements as dexterously as possible? . . . As soon as Beethoven had written his last symphony, every musical guild could patch and stuff as much as it liked in its effort to create a man of absolute music. But it was just this and nothing more: a shabby, patched and stuffed bogeyman. No sensate, natural man could come out of such a workshop any longer. After Haydn and Mozart, a Beethoven could and had to appear. The spirit of music necessarily demanded him, and without waiting, there he was. Who would now be to Beethoven that which he was to Haydn and Mozart in the realm of absolute music? The greatest genius would be capable of nothing more here, precisely because the spirit of absolute music no longer has need of him.²⁵

Wagner would express no such scorn for two works written a few years later by his close friend and future father-in-law, Franz Liszt, whose *Faust* and *Dante* symphonies both end in brief choruses.

In the end, only a relatively small number of nineteenth-century symphonies would culminate in a vocal finale, as Table 14.1 explains. Far more numerous were those works that end in what might be called an implicitly vocal finale, that is, a movement that evokes the sound of a chorus through purely instrumental means alone (see Table 14.2). The Finale of Brahms's First Symphony (1876) is the best-known instance of such a finale, with multiple 'vocal' themes: the lyrical main melody openly reminiscent of the 'Ode to Joy' (bar 62); an alphorn-like theme that evokes the *ranz des vaches* of alpine shepherds (bar 30); and a chorale-like apotheosis presented by the brass (bar 47). But this is merely one in a long line of symphonic finales that in one way or another suggest the sound of a chorus through instruments alone. Berlioz, Mendelssohn, Gade, Spohr, Raff, Rubinstein, Saint-Saëns and Bruckner had all employed a similar device in at least one earlier symphony, and Mahler would bring the tradition to a spectacular close in the nineteenth century with his First and Third Symphonies.

With the passage of time, Beethoven's shadow began to recede: composers like Berlioz, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Brahms had demonstrated beyond question that the symphony remained a viable genre, an

Table 14.1 *Nineteenth-century symphonies with choral finales*

Date	Work
1824	Ludwig van Beethoven, Symphony No. 9
1839	Hector Berlioz, <i>Roméo et Juliette</i> (incorporates voices throughout the entire symphony)
1840	Felix Mendelssohn, <i>Lobgesang</i> (premiered as a Symphony, later renamed a 'Symphony-Cantata')
1842	Berlioz, <i>Symphonie funèbre et triomphale</i> (originally written 1840; re-arranged, with choral parts added to the finale in 1842)
1856	Franz Liszt, <i>Eine Symphonie zu Dantes Divina commedia</i>
1857	Liszt, <i>Eine Faust-Symphonie</i> (optional vocal ending added to a work that was largely completed by 1854)
1894	Gustav Mahler, Symphony No. 2

Table 14.2 *Nineteenth-century symphonies with implicitly choral finales*

Date	Work
1808	Ludwig van Beethoven, Symphony No. 6 ('Pastoral'). The Finale, labelled 'Hirtengesang', features an implicitly vocal theme that passes through many instrumental groups; concludes with a four-part, chorale-like setting, <i>pianissimo</i> .
1824	Muzio Clementi, 'Great National' Symphony. Uses 'God Save the King' at the end of finale (as well as in the slow movement).
1830	Hector Berlioz, <i>Symphonie fantastique</i> . The 'Dream of a Witches' Sabbath' uses the <i>idée fixe</i> in call-and-response solo/chorus fashion, followed by the <i>Dies irae</i> in low brass.
1830	Felix Mendelssohn, 'Reformation' Symphony. Finale built around variations on the chorale melody of 'Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott'. The original version had included a flute 'recitative' leading from the slow movement into the Finale.
1832	Ludwig Spohr, Symphony No. 4 (<i>Die Weihe der Töne</i>). Third movement incorporates an 'ambrosiansicher Lobgesang', and the Finale consists of variations on the chorale 'Begrabt den Leib in seiner Gruft'.
1842	Mendelssohn, Symphony No. 3 ('Scottish'). Concluding Allegro maestoso evokes the sound of a men's chorus.
1842	Niels Gade, Symphony No. 1. Finale features return of a folksong-like theme (Gade's own) from first movement.
1843	Gade, Symphony No. 2. Finale based on a chorale-like theme.
1851	Anton Rubinstein, Symphony No. 2 ('Ocean'). Chorale-like theme appears at the end of the finale in the work's original four-movement version.
1855	Camille Saint-Saëns, Symphony No. 1. Finale begins with a 'gathering' of instruments into a homorhythmic chorale.
1861	Joachim Raff, Symphony No. 1, Op. 96 (<i>An das Vaterland</i>). Incorporates the patriotic song 'Was ist des deutschen Vaterlands?' into both fourth and fifth movements, most spectacularly in the Finale.
1872	Raff, Symphony No. 5 (<i>Lenore</i>). Agitated Finale ('Wiedervereinigung im Tode') concludes with a quiet chorale.
1873	Anton Bruckner, Symphony No. 3. Finale transforms minor-mode theme of opening movement into major at end, with brass 'chorale' at very end.
1876	Bruckner, Symphony No. 5. Finale centres on and ends with brass 'chorale'.
1876	Johannes Brahms, Symphony No. 1. Finale incorporates three implicitly vocal themes: the 'Ode to Joy'-like theme, the 'Alphorn' theme and the 'Chorale'.
1886	Saint-Saëns, Symphony No. 3 ('Organ'). Finale culminates in chorale-like theme.
1889	Gustav Mahler, Symphony No. 1. Finale concludes with a theme reminiscent of 'Hallelujah' from Handel's <i>Messiah</i> ('And He shall reign for ever and ever').
1896	Mahler, Symphony No. 3. Chorale-like theme throughout the Finale.

attitude that was by no means a given half a century before. These later composers, moreover, had created shadows of their own, so that from the 1840s onwards, layers of influence become all the more difficult to distinguish. The symphonies of Niels Gade (1817–90), for example, bear

unmistakable traces of Mendelssohn's approach to the genre in their thematic material, orchestration and formal design. The Symphony in D minor (1888) by César Franck (1822–90), in turn, owes much to Beethoven's Fifth, with its cyclic form and minor-to-major trajectory, yet it could also be argued that Franck's chromaticism, orchestration and intricate web of thematic transformations were shaped even more profoundly by the later music dramas of Wagner.

By the end of the century, the symphonic landscape had changed profoundly. The profusion of individual styles, the growing importance of nationalistic tendencies, the ever-expanding range of harmonic possibilities and the expansion of the orchestra itself all combined to create a broader range of options for symphonists. Composers could also count on more venues in which to present their symphonies, for by 1900 every municipality with aspirations to cultural status either had or wanted to have its own standing orchestra. Even in the New World, an orchestral backwater for most of the nineteenth century, civic orchestras had become a point of special cultural pride. Ensembles that still exist today were established in New York (1842), St Louis (1880), Boston (1881), Chicago (1891), Cincinnati (1894) and Philadelphia (1900).

'A symphony', Mahler is alleged to have declared to Jean Sibelius in 1907, 'must be like the world: it must be all-embracing.'²⁶ And what was to be embraced, in Mahler's view, included even Beethoven's shadow, so that when in his Second Symphony he reverted to a pattern of tumultuous instrumental movements 'redeemed' by subsequent vocal ones, even the harshest of his contemporary critics did not take him to task for following the model of the Ninth Symphony too closely. Mahler, and other composers after him in the twentieth century, would continue to look to Beethoven as the paradigmatic composer of symphonies, but by 1900, time had healed all – or at least most – anxieties.

Notes

1 Adolph Bernhard Marx, concert review of 13 December 1824, *Berliner Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 1 (29 December 1824), 444. For references to other comments of a similar nature from around this time, see Mark Evan Bonds, *Music as Thought: Listening to the Symphony in the Age of Beethoven* (Princeton, 2006), 118, n. 4.

2 Letter of 17 December 1832 to Friedrich Hofmeister; see Akio Mayeda, *Robert Schumanns Weg zur Symphonie* (Zürich, 1992), 175.

3 *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 12 (10 March 1840), 82.

4 Amadeus Wendt, 'Über den Zustand der Musik in Deutschland. Eine Skizze', *Allgemeine*

musikalische Zeitung mit besonderer Rücksicht auf den österreichischen Kaiserstaat, 6 (1822), 762.

5 Anonymous, *Wiener Allgemeine Theater-Zeitung*, 58 (13 May 1824), 230–1, quoted in David Benjamin Levy, 'Early Performances of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony: A Documentary Study of Five Cities' (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1979), 47.

6 Gottfried Weber, 'Teutschland im ersten Viertel des neuen Jahrhunderts', *Cäcilia*, 4 (1826), 109–10.

7 Friedrich Rochlitz, 'Nekrolog', *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 29 (28 March 1827), 228.

8 The most notable of these are John Hawkins's *General History of the Science and*

- Practice of Music* (1776) and Charles Burney's *General History of Music* (1776–89). Giovanni Battista Martini's *Storia della musica* (1757–81) and Johann Nicolaus Forkel's *Allgemeine Geschichte der Musik* (1788–1801) would both remain incomplete and end their coverage with antiquity and the Renaissance, respectively, but are nevertheless products of the same broader impulses.
- 9 See Walter Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970).
- 10 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of The Sublime and Beautiful*, 2nd edn (London, 1757), Part III, Section XXVII, 'The Sublime and Beautiful Compared'.
- 11 See Mark Evan Bonds, 'The Symphony as Pindaric Ode', in Elaine Sisman, ed., *Haydn and his World* (Princeton, 1997), 131–53.
- 12 Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music* trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), 10, emphasis mine.
- 13 See Bonds, *Music as Thought*, chapters 1 and 2.
- 14 See Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton, 1995).
- 15 Gottfried Wilhelm Fink, 'Ueber die Symphonie, als Beitrag zur Geschichte und Aesthetik derselben', *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 37 (1835), 559.
- 16 Henry F. Chorley, *Modern German Music: Recollections and Criticisms*, 2 vols. (London, 1854), vol. I, 369.
- 17 Letter to Leopold Kupelwieser, 31st March 1824, in Otto Erich Deutsch, ed., *Schubert: Die Dokumente seines Lebens* (Kassel, 1964), 235. See also John M. Gingerich, 'Unfinished Considerations: Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony in the Context of His Beethoven Project', *19th-Century Music*, 31 (2007), 99–112.
- 18 See Mark Evan Bonds, *After Beethoven: Imperatives of Originality in the Symphony* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 115–16.
- 19 On Mendelssohn's struggles with these works, see Judith Silber, 'Mendelssohn and his "Reformation" Symphony', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 40 (1987), 310–16; John Michael Cooper, "'Aber eben dieser Zweifel": A New Look at Mendelssohn's "Italian" Symphony', *19th-Century Music*, 15 (1992), 169–87.
- 20 Ignaz Jeitteles, 'Symphonie', in *Aesthetisches Lexikon*, vol. II (Vienna, 1837).
- 21 Max Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, 4 vols. (Vienna and Leipzig, 1904–14), vol. I, 171–2.
- 22 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York and Oxford, 1973); Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York and Oxford, 1975). For more on *Harold en Italie* as a misreading of Beethoven, see Bonds, *After Beethoven*, chapter 2.
- 23 Berlioz, Preface to *Roméo et Juliette*, trans. in D. Kern Holoman, *Berlioz* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 261.
- 24 Mendelssohn to Gustav Droysen, 14 December 1837, in Carl Wehmer, ed., *Ein tief gegründet Herz. Der Briefwechsel Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdys mit Johann Gustav Droysen* (Heidelberg, 1959), 49; Schumann, *Tagebücher: 1836–1854*, ed. Gerd Nauhaus (Leipzig, 1987), 147 (entry for 11 February 1841); Hans von Bülow, letter of 17 November 1888 to Siegfried Ochs, *Briefe und Schriften*, ed. Marie von Bülow, 8 vols. (Leipzig, 1895–1908), vol. VIII, 229.
- 25 Wagner, *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1849), in his *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, 3rd edn, 10 vols. (Leipzig, 1887–8), vol. III, 100–1.
- 26 Erik Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius*, trans. Robert Layton, 3 vols. (London, 1976 and 1997), vol. II, 76–7.