



**OXFORD JOURNALS**  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

---

Musical Genius--Evolution and Origins of a Concept

Author(s): Edward E. Lowinsky

Source: *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Jul., 1964), pp. 321-340

Published by: [Oxford University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/741019>

Accessed: 07/04/2013 10:19

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Oxford University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Musical Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# MUSICAL GENIUS—EVOLUTION AND ORIGINS OF A CONCEPT\*

By EDWARD E. LOWINSKY

WE ARE living in an age in which musical and technical developments suggest the possibility that mathematical formulas and computer machines or “chance”<sup>1</sup> may take over essential areas of musical creativity. “Total organization” or “chance” are two sides of the same process. Both rule out the free act of creation that we ordinarily associate with the nature of genius. At the same time we observe a deflation of the idea of genius. In a recent book the Italian architect Leonardo Ricci wrote: “if we say we no longer believe in genius, this does not mean only the genius of the past. It means also that we no longer believe in the possibility of our being geniuses ourselves.”<sup>2</sup> “A future civilization, the civilization of Anonymous (20th Century), will be a civilization without heroes, without geniuses, without paladins, without gallery-gods.”<sup>3</sup>

This, then, is an appropriate time for the historian to examine the concept of genius, the concept of creativity as we have known it, and to ask whence it came.

## I

One might suppose that the concept of musical creativity is as old as musical creation itself—speaking, of course, of musical creation in an

\* The present paper was prepared for and read at the symposium on “Creativity” on May 4, 1962, arranged by the University of Rochester in commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the Eastman School of Music. A revised version of this paper was read in Chicago at the Fall meeting of the Midwest Chapter of the American Musicological Society on Nov. 10, 1962.

<sup>1</sup> What I mean by “chance” is not the same thing that Professor Janson described in his brilliant paper on “Chance and the Creative Process in the Visual Arts,” read at the same symposium. Professor Janson’s “chance” is a happy accident that the artist uses and integrates into his own vision. What I mean is chance, pure and simple, taking the place of spontaneous invention and artistic vision.

<sup>2</sup> Leonardo Ricci, *Anonymous (20th Century)*, New York, 1962, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

advanced civilization.<sup>4</sup> Nothing could be further from the truth, however, as we shall see presently. The opposite of the concept of creativity is the concept of art as a craft; the corresponding personal opposites are genius and craftsman.

Nowhere have these two opposites been contrasted more sharply than in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*. Walter is an idealization of genius, Beckmesser a caricature of the craftsman. Walter personifies the artist whose creativity rests on inspiration, and whose inspiration springs from an imaginative mind and a generous and sensitive heart, open to love and enthusiasm. Beckmesser's art rests on the pedantic observation of time-worn rules. His pedantry is at home in a small, petty, scheming mind, equally incapable of noble emotions and of the flight of fancy. Between these two extremes stands Hans Sachs, his roots in the world of the mastersingers, but his heart and mind open to Walter's freely inspired art, in which, he confessed,

No rule would fit, and yet  
no error could I find.<sup>5</sup>

The opposition between conventional rule and fresh inspiration, the idea that the genius, unlike the mere craftsman, can transcend rules without committing errors, and that in doing so he can make new revelations, is a leitmotif in the history of the concept of musical genius.

What is the origin of this concept? Oddly enough, in modern dictionaries of music the term is hard to find. In 19th-century dictionaries it occurs frequently, but without historical references. Historians of ideas have written on the concept of genius in general. Edgar Zissel's admirable book on *Die Entstehung des Geniebegriffes*,<sup>6</sup> for example, left music completely out of consideration. Music historians have not yet dealt with the

<sup>4</sup> Important characteristics of an advanced musical civilization are a rational system of pitches, rhythm, and consonances, as well as methods of transmitting music from one generation to the next.

<sup>5</sup> "Kein' Regel wollte da passen,  
und war doch kein Fehler drin." Act II.

<sup>6</sup> Tübingen, 1926. In this respect Zissel's work, overwhelming in the richness of its documentation in all other fields, suffers from a lack only too common in the works of cultural historians: the role of music and musicians in the cultural symphony is either ignored altogether or treated in marginal notes betraying a complete lack of understanding.

Thus Zissel wonders, in his account of the paragon of the arts in Renaissance literature, why it is that music, although in need of manual execution, nevertheless is not, like painting, considered a mechanical art, but instead succeeded in penetrating the circle of the seven liberal arts—"a curiosity," he says, "explicable probably through religious and liturgical [*kultische*] connections" (p. 151). The simple reason for the success of music where painting failed lay, of course, in its mathematical structure. Rhythm, melody, harmony are all expressible in mathematical ratios—

concept of genius in any systematic manner.<sup>7</sup> It is the purpose of this paper to sketch an outline of the evolution and the origins of the concept of musical genius.

Nineteenth-century Romanticism is often credited with having originated the idea of musical genius. A well-known music historian and Bach scholar wrote:

It is characteristic of Baroque mentality not to make the slightest fuss about a great artist's genius . . . Nowhere . . . is there a hint of the chosen nature of the great artist or of the divine origin of his creative gifts. These are concepts created by Romanticism. In Bach's time one does not yet speak of "depth of feeling," "originality," or "personal approach," and certainly not of a composition as expressing an attitude towards life and the world. These things lay outside of the Baroque world of thought.<sup>8</sup>

Let us then begin with the search for the Romantic concept of musical creativity. When Wagner in his *Meistersinger*, completed in 1867, presented the Romantic prototype of musical genius in the figure of Walter, he had only to lend life and color to an idea already developed in Romantic literature. Among the Romantic writers on music, none can claim greater authority than E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776-1822), poet, music critic, pianist, conductor, and composer, particularly of Romantic operas. Hoffmann exercised a great fascination over Wagner from the latter's youth on. Many passages in Hoffmann's writings deal with the composer. Few are more eloquent than the following:

To touch us, to move us mightily, the artist himself must be deeply affected in

---

sufficient reason for its admission into the *quadrivium* of the mathematical disciplines (see also the pertinent remarks in the next instalment of this article).

Zilsel in a footnote to the above remark promised to treat music in a later volume—a promise he did not live to fulfill. He then went on to characterize the position of the musicians in the Renaissance as "shifting: now they are counted among the learned clerics, now among the instrument builders, singers, minstrels — i.e., the mechanics and jongleurs." It is impossible to arrive at valid conclusions about the role of any art and its adepts if the literature dealing with that art is ignored—a practice that cultural historians indulge in only when it comes to music. But an attentive reader of Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch, Filippo Villani (see note 81), Castiglione, Aretino (see the concluding instalment of this article), and other luminaries among the great writers of the age would be sufficient to raise doubts concerning Zilsel's final conclusion.

<sup>7</sup> A recent history of music (*The Art of Music* by B. C. Cannon, A. H. Johnson, W. G. Waite, New York, 1960) treating Classical and Romantic music under the title *The Age of Genius* quotes Shaftesbury's, Addison's, and Young's essays, but not a single source on the nature of *musical* genius. While the latter, unquestionably, is only a facet of the general concept, it has, nevertheless, its own history illuminating phases of music history often in surprising ways and enriching the general history of the concept with a counterpoint of peculiar individuality.

<sup>8</sup> Arnold Schering, *Das Symbol in der Musik*, Leipzig, 1941, pp. 85-86.

his own heart. Effective composition is nothing but the art of capturing with a higher strength, and fixing in the hieroglyphs of tones [the notes], what was received in the mind's unconscious *ecstasis*. If a young artist asks how to write an effective opera, we can answer only: read the poem, concentrate on it with all the power of your spirit, enter with all the might of your fancy into all phases of the action. You live in its personages; you yourself are the tyrant, the hero, the beloved; you feel the pain and the raptures of love, the shame, the fear, the horror, yes, Death's nameless agony, the transfiguration of blissful joy. You rage, you storm, you hope, you despair; your blood glows through the veins, your pulse beats more violently. In the fire of enthusiasm that inflames your heart, tones, melodies, harmonies ignite, and the poem pours out of your soul in the wonderful language of music . . . Technical training, through study of harmony in the works of the great masters, and your own writing bring it about that you perceive your inner music more and more clearly; no melody, no modulation, no instrument escapes you, and thus you receive, together with the effect, also the means which you now, like spirits subject to your power, detain in the magic lines of your score. To be sure, all this amounts to saying: take care, my good friend, to be a very musical genius. The rest will come by itself. But thus it is, and not otherwise.<sup>9</sup>

Musical creation as the volcanic eruption of a glowing soul in the grip of ecstatic revelation, technical study as the magic means to summon the spirits of the art: this indeed is a truly Romantic concept. That it did not spring only from a poet's imagination, but rather constituted the individual expression of a general conception prevailing at the time, may be seen from a comparison with the sober definition by the author of a musical dictionary. Peter Lichtenthal, born in Germany in 1780, but a resident of Italy from 1810 till his death in 1853, wrote in his *Dizionario e bibliografia della musica*<sup>10</sup> under the entry *Genio*: "Musical genius is that inborn, inexplicable gift of Nature, or original faculty to create with facility esthetic ideas and to give them the most fitting expression in the melodic and harmonic organization of tones. It is that inner fire that burns in the composer, which continuously inspires in him new and beautiful melodies, lively expressions that go to the heart, and majestic harmonies that endow the melody with character." Lichtenthal goes on to say that talent imitates, whereas genius reveals itself in originality. However, Lichtenthal does not reject the rules. He merely adds that a genius does with ease and speed what for another would be a laborious enterprise.

The Belgian musician and writer, August Gathy, who lived for many years in Germany, in his *Musikalisches Conversations-Lexikon*<sup>11</sup> calls

<sup>9</sup> E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Dichtungen und Schriften, Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by W. Harich, Vol. XII. Weimar, 1924, pp. 7-8.

<sup>10</sup> Milan, 1826. I. 289-90.

<sup>11</sup> Second ed.. Hamburg, 1840, p. 163.

genius “a driving power, a divine instinct, guided by a divine thoughtfulness. It is the original, the inborn, it cannot be learned, it expresses itself unconsciously, it manifests itself in a high degree of characteristic productivity . . . Although it owes everything to itself and cannot be acquired through study, it can perfect itself through study.” And the same author, in his article on talent, makes **the attitude towards rules the touchstone of differentiation between genius and talent when he writes:** “Neither through contempt nor through worship of rules does the genius become what he is, he fashions his creations after himself; but where overwhelming creativity is lacking, there the talent will always succeed better with the help of the rules.”<sup>12</sup>

## II

The Romantic writers on music received their impetus from the 18th-century literary movement of the *Sturm und Drang*. Among its chief spokesmen are Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803)<sup>13</sup> and Christian Friedrich Schubart (1739-1791.) The latter interests us particularly through his essay *Vom musikalischen Genie*, written in 1784-1785. Not only a poet of distinction, but also a musician, a brilliant keyboard player, famous for his improvisations, and a composer, he was qualified to write on the subject. His *Ideen zu einer Aesthetik der Tonkunst*<sup>14</sup> of which the essay was a part, originated in the long years of imprisonment imposed on him for his philosophical beliefs as a freethinker. His views on the nature of creativity are not unrelated to his convictions on the nature of freedom of thought. His essay begins with these words: “No proverb is so true and so appropriate to the nature of the matter as this ancient one: **Poets and musicians are born.**” In elaboration of the old *Poeta nascitur non fit*,<sup>15</sup> to which he added the musician, Schubart

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 455.

<sup>13</sup> Herder was deeply absorbed in all problems concerning art and artists. His ideas on genius are laid down in the second part of *Kalligone*, 1800 (see *Herders Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Bernhard Suphan, Vol. 22, Berlin, 1880, pp. 202-07). They are a true mirror of Romantic ideas of the creative artist, distinguished as they are more by a rhapsodic *élan* and by imagination than by sharpness of definition and distinction. “Vergönne mir,” he cries, “noch einige Worte von dir zu stammeln, grosser heiliger Genius der Menschheit. Genius ist ein höherer, himmlischer Geist, wirkend unter Gesetzen der Natur, gemäss *seiner* Natur, zum Dienst der Menschen” (p. 205). (“Grant me to stutter a few words yet about thee, great, sacred genius of mankind! Genius is a higher, heavenly spirit, working, under the laws of Nature, according to *its* nature, in the service of Man.”)

<sup>14</sup> Ed. by P. A. Marbach, Leipzig, 1924, pp. 252-55.

<sup>15</sup> William Ringler, in his study “*Poeta Nascitur Non Fit: Some Notes on the History of an Aphorism*” (*Journal of the History of Ideas*, II, 4, Oct. 1941, pp. 497-504), traces the proverb back to a seventh-century commentary on Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, but shows how it gains currency only from the 16th century on.

continued: "Musical genius is rooted in the heart and receives its impressions through the ear . . . All musical geniuses are self-taught, for the fire that animates them carries them away irresistibly to seek their own flight orbit [*Flugbahn*]."

"The Bachs, a Galuppi, Jommelli, Gluck, and Mozart excelled already in childhood through the most magnificent products of their spirit. Musical harmony lay in their soul and they soon threw away the crutch of art . . . Nevertheless, no musical genius can reach perfection without cultivation and training. Art must perfect what Nature sketched in the raw."

Herder<sup>16</sup> and Schubart,<sup>17</sup> as well as E. T. A. Hoffmann<sup>18</sup> and other 19th-century writers were indebted to Jean Jacques Rousseau, who is perhaps the first author of a musical dictionary in which the term "genius" is entered. In his *Dictionnaire de Musique*, published in Paris in 1768, but completed in 1764 as the fruit of sixteen years of labor, Rousseau follows the article *Gavotte* with one on *Génie*. To understand this article, and in particular its surprising ending, we must recall Rousseau's passionate embracing of Italian, and his utter contempt for French, music. Here is Rousseau's article, which, because of its seminal significance, I translate in its entirety, with some interpolations.

"Don't ask, young artist, 'what is genius?' Either you have it—then you feel it yourself, or you don't—then you will never know it. The genius of the musician subjects the entire Universe to his art." Does this not sound like an echo and a revival of the myth of Orpheus, who subjects animals, human beings, and even the gods of the underworld to his art? "He paints all pictures through tones; he lends eloquence even to silence"—this is certainly one of the first attempts to characterize the expressive potentiality of a musical pause. "He renders the ideas through sentiments, sentiments through accents, and the passions he expresses he awakens [also] in his listener's heart. Pleasure, through him, takes on new charms; pain rendered in musical sighs wrests cries [from

<sup>16</sup> In his *Kalligone. Von Kunst und Kunstrichterei, Zweiter Theil* (1800), *loc. cit.*, pp. 178-91, Herder writes "Von Musik." Rousseau's inspiration hovers over this essay. In par. 9 (p. 182) Fontenelle's "Que me veux-tu, Sonate?" made famous by Rousseau's enthusiastic approval, is quoted without indication of its source.

<sup>17</sup> See Schubart's eulogy of Rousseau and his ideas on music with particular reference to the latter's *Dictionnaire de Musique* (*op. cit.*, p. 157).

<sup>18</sup> That Hoffmann's concept of genius is inspired by Rousseau's article is obvious from a comparison between their statements. That he actually knew it can be documented from a partial quotation of the article in his review of Andreas Romberg's setting of Schiller's *Die Macht des Gesanges* (*E.T.A. Hoffmanns musikalische Schriften*, ed by E. Istel, Stuttgart, 1907, p. 265; see note 21).

the listener]. He burns incessantly, but never consumes himself”—here the biblical miracle of the burning bush, symbol of the Divine, is transformed into a symbol of genius. “He expresses with warmth frost and ice”—this seems to be a simile taken from the Italian Renaissance madrigal, in which few conceits return more regularly than that of the lover “burning in ice” or “freezing in fire.”<sup>19</sup> “Even when he paints the horrors of Death, he carries in his soul this feeling for Life that never abandons him, and that he communicates to hearts made to feel it”—this is another favorite madrigalesque metaphor: to die living and to live dying.<sup>20</sup> “But alas, he does not speak to those who don’t carry his seed within themselves and his miracles escape those who cannot imitate them. Do you wish to know whether a spark of this devouring fire animates you? Hasten then, fly to Naples, listen there to the masterworks of Leo, of Durante, of Jommelli, of Pergolesi. If your eyes fill with tears, if you feel your heart beat, if shivers run down your spine, if breath-taking raptures choke you, then take [a libretto by] Metastasio and go to work: his genius will kindle yours; you will create at his example. That is what makes the genius—and the tears of others will soon repay you for the tears that your masters elicited from you. But should the charms of this great artist leave you cold, should you experience neither delirium nor delight, should you find that which transports only ‘nice,’ do you then dare ask what is genius? Vulgar man, don’t profane this sublime word. What would it matter to you if you knew it? You would not know how to feel it. Go home and write—French music.”<sup>21</sup>

It is easy to see why poets, musicians, and estheticians were stirred by Rousseau’s concept of genius. This was not an ordinary dictionary article; this was a dithyrambic ode, every word of which echoed Rousseau’s own intense musical experiences in the Venetian opera houses during his days as secretary to the French Embassy in Venice.

Creative activity engendered by enthusiasm, fire, imagination, and, above all, the ability to feel, and feel passionately—all of these essential elements in the Romantic concept of genius hail from Rousseau. In his

<sup>9</sup> See Alfred Einstein, *The Italian Madrigal*, Princeton, 1949, I, 187.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> In his rendering of this passage, E. T. A. Hoffmann carefully omits the slap at French music. He translates: “Bleibst du aber beim Anhören dieser Stücke kalt: Armer, dann bleibe zurück und—komponiere!”, adding: “Was er noch weiter sagt, brauchen wir nicht anzuführen” (*op. cit.*, p. 205). To be sure, in that translation, Rousseau’s statement has lost its *pointe* and his concluding sentence its meaning. The reason for the omission lay certainly not in Hoffmann’s free choice but in the presence of French garrisons on German soil. The article was written in 1811, two years before the “War of Liberation” from Napoleon’s yoke.



*Dictionnaire de Musique* Rousseau returns, significantly enough, to the idea of genius in his article *Pathétique*, which he defines as a “genre of dramatic and theatrical music which tends to paint and to set in motion the great passions and in particular anguish and melancholy.”<sup>22</sup> At the end of this article, after having exposed the inability of French as against Italian music to express real passion, he declares: “The true *pathétique* lies in the impassioned accent which is not determined by rules, but which the genius finds and the heart feels without art’s being able to formulate its laws in any manner whatsoever.”

The fundamental importance for the 18th century of the opposition between craft as dictated by rules and creation as issuing from the artist’s inspiration is evident from the testimony of the century’s most detached and rational thinker. Immanuel Kant, in his *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*,<sup>23</sup> calls genius “the talent (natural gift) which gives the rules to art.” This is an ingenious, indeed, an elegant definition in its studied avoidance of setting up an opposition between rule and inspiration, talent and genius. Kant succeeds, nevertheless, in making a sound distinction between them, especially, as he goes on to say that genius “is a talent to create that which escapes all definite rules: it is not natural skill for what can be learned according to any rule; hence, originality must be its first attribute.”<sup>24</sup> “Everyone agrees that genius must be opposed completely to the spirit of imitation.”<sup>25</sup> Thus Kant manages to avoid the emphasis on emotion that was contrary to the nature of his analytical mind, and yet to stay basically within the framework of thought of his time.<sup>26</sup> However, he did not succeed in escaping the criticism of the

<sup>22</sup> If Beethoven himself really entitled his piano sonata Op. 13 in C minor *Grande Sonate Pathétique* (under which name it appeared) as Riemann claims, although the autograph is lost (see Hugo Riemann, *L. van Beethovens sämtliche Klavier-Solosonaten*, 2nd ed., Berlin, 1919, II, 1), then it seems very possible that he was impelled by the reading of Rousseau’s article.

<sup>23</sup> *Immanuel Kant’s Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. by Karl Rosenkranz and Friedr. Wilhelm Schubert, Vol. IV, Leipzig, 1838, p. 176, par. 46: “Genie ist das Talent (Naturgabe), welches der Kunst die Regel giebt.”

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177: “Man sieht hieraus, dass Genie 1. ein Talent sey, dasjenige, wozu sich keine bestimmte Regel geben lässt, hervorzubringen, nicht Geschicklichkeitsanlage zu dem, was nach irgend einer Regel gelernt werden kann, folglich dass Originalität seine erste Eigenschaft seyn müsse.”

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 47: “Darin ist Jedermann einig, dass Genie dem Nachahmungsgeiste gänzlich entgegenzusetzen sey.”

<sup>26</sup> Otto Schlapp, in his *Kants Lehre vom Genie* (Göttingen, 1901, pp. 420-21), summarized his findings on Kant’s ideas of genius in relation to their time in these sentences: “Obeying necessity rather than his own impulse, he gave the demands of the period of *Sturm und Drang* their classical formulation, even though somewhat *post festum*, after the lapse of about twenty years. Nature, originality, opposition to

emerging Romantic movement led by Herder, who printed excerpts from Kant's definition of genius together with devastatingly sarcastic glosses.<sup>27</sup>

### III

That the concepts of musical and poetical genius go hand in hand is obvious from the mere observation that most of our authorities were not only musicians, but poets and writers as well. This is true of Richard Wagner and E. T. A. Hoffmann, of Schubart and Rousseau. But if we should assume that Rousseau is the initiator of the concept of musical genius, and that his *Dictionnaire de Musique* of 1768 is the precise frontier between the genius concept of the great apostle of Nature and the Baroque idea of the composer as a craftsman, a perusal of the writings of Baroque authors would quickly disabuse us of this notion. For one thing, the term *génie* occurs frequently in the writings of Rameau, Rousseau's great antagonist in the controversy between the adherents of French and Italian opera in Paris, the notorious *guerre des bouffons*. Rousseau's partisans accused Rameau of saying that according to his principles the composer needed no genius, only the science of harmony.<sup>28</sup> However, in his *Traité de l'Harmonie*, published in Paris in 1722, when Rousseau was a boy of ten, Rameau speaks constantly of *le génie et le goût*.<sup>29</sup> "There is a world of difference," he observes, "between a music

---

imitation, freedom from the rules, creative imagination, etc., these had already been the slogans of the young generation around 1770. How far removed Kant was from the movement may be deduced from the circumstance that his polemics against its spiritual leader, Herder, blunted the point of his theory of genius."

<sup>27</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 197-202. Some of Herder's criticism is mere carping, most of it is serious and substantial disagreement, as when he takes issue with Kant for his attempt to limit the concept of genius to the arts and to deny that the discoveries of a scientist such as Newton constitute the work of genius (see p. 199).

<sup>28</sup> This was, for example, the opinion held by Baron von Grimm, who had converted from a partisan of Rameau to a devotee of the new Italian opera (see Albert Jansen, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau als Musiker*, Berlin, 1884, p. 234).

<sup>29</sup> To cite one instance, in his *Préface* Rameau writes: "Il est vrai qu'il y a de certaines perfections qui dépendent du génie & du goût .. ." ("It is true that there are certain perfections which depend on genius and taste.") To be sure, he continues that the indispensable tool of genius is a perfect mastery of the art. "D'ailleurs cette parfaite connoissance sert à faire mettre en oeuvre le génie & le goût, qui sans elle deviendroient souvent des talens inutiles." ("Moreover, this perfect mastery serves to put to work genius and taste, which, without it, would often decline to useless talents.")

It is evident from the concluding sentence that Rameau distinguishes between genius and talent, but counter to some Romantic notions of later times he pronounces the opinion that genius and good taste without perfect mastery of the craft may sink down to the level of mere talent, and a useless one at that. Mastery of the art, however, is by no means synonymous with slavish obedience to the rules. This

without fault and a perfect music,"<sup>30</sup> and with this remark Rameau immediately demolishes the notion of the artist as a craftsman whose excellence can be measured by his success in following the rules of his craft. In speaking of melody he remarks: "It is well-nigh impossible to give rules concerning it, inasmuch as good taste has a greater part in it than anything else; thus we leave it to the happy geniuses to distinguish themselves in this genre on which the whole strength of sentiment depends."<sup>31</sup> As so often, the critics had not read what they criticized. For here and elsewhere, Rameau shows his profound awareness of the limitations of the "science of harmony": nowhere does imagination play a more decisive role than in melodic invention, nothing contributes more to the expressive qualities of a composition than melody—and thus Rameau leaves melodic gift and characteristic expression to "the happy geniuses" as branches of the art incapable of being taught by rules.

Indeed, Rameau defends the composer against the pedantic guardians of the rules who, he says, become deaf if you want to show them the good effect of freedom, license, and exception in a music composed apparently against the rules.<sup>32</sup> And he waxes so hot in his defense of

---

Rameau makes repeatedly clear; so in the chapter dealing with fugue and fugal style (Chap. XLIV, pp. 332-62; 358) in which he pleads the need for freedom for the work of genius: "Ce seroit donc trop borner le genie d'un Auteur, de le restreindre dans les premieres limites." ("It would confine the genius of an author too much to restrict him to the narrowest boundaries.") Nothing proves Rameau's deep insight into the nature of composition and the continuous interrelation between inspiration and technique more profoundly than his thoughts on that genre which has long seemed to be the embodiment of craftsmanship, the fugue: "La Fugue est un ornement dans la Musique, qui n'a pour principe que le bon goût; de sorte que les Regles les plus generales que nous venons d'en donner, ne suffisent pas encore pour y réussir parfaitement. Les differens sentimens & les differens evenemens que l'on peut exprimer en Musique, sémént à tout moment des nouveautez que l'on ne peut reduire en regles" (*ibid.*). ("The fugue is an ornament of music which has only one principle, good taste; the very general rules governing it that we just outlined do not suffice in themselves to insure perfect success in it. The various feelings and events that one can express in music constantly produce novelties that cannot be reduced to rules.")

For a perceptive analysis of Rameau's place in the theory of fugal composition see Alfred Mann, *The Study of Fugue*, New Brunswick, 1958, p. 50 ff.

<sup>30</sup> "Il y a bien de la difference d'une Musique sans faute à une Musique parfaite" (Livre II, Chap. XXI, p. 147).

<sup>31</sup> "La Melodie n'a pas moins de force dans les expressions que l'Harmonie; mais il est presque impossible de pouvoir en donner des Regles certaines, en ce que le bon goût y a plus de part que le reste; ainsi nous laisserons aux heureux genies le plaisir de se distinguer dans ce genre, dont dépend presque toute la force des sentimens" (Livre II, Chap. XX, p. 142).

<sup>32</sup> "Si on leur demande des raisons, ils citent l'autorité des Regles, & si pour les convaincre du mauvais sens qu'ils donnent à ces Regles, ou des exceptions qu'elles

the composer's need for freedom from convention against the presumptions of the Beckmessers of the art that he cries out: "Here you see before you the evil genius of intrigue that has arisen in this age of ours to plague all men of ability. Try as you may to invent a delightful composition, it will be of no value according to them."<sup>33</sup>

Aside from genius, a composer, according to Rameau, also needs good taste. It is not quite certain, though, whether Rameau thinks of good taste as an additional requisite of the composer, or as an attribute of genius. Certain it is that with *le goût* another irrational element enters our discussion, one that cannot be measured, prescribed, or fixed in rules. Yet it is to some extent rational—and in that regard typically French—in that it resides in esthetic judgment rather than in emotion, a chief attribute of genius in German and Italian writings—and we must count Rousseau as Italian in his musical predilections as well as in his musical philosophy.

But emotion is not missing in Rameau's psychology of composition. Indeed, the irrational concept of empathy, the dramatic composer's ability to put himself in the place of his characters and re-create them in tones by the sheer force of sympathetic imagination, a concept dear to Rousseau and elaborated by E. T. A. Hoffmann, is already a part of Rameau's esthetics. At the end of Chapter 20, Book Two, on the propriety of harmony, he says: "For the rest, a good musician must surrender himself to all the characters that he wishes to depict, and, like a skillful comedian, put himself in the place of the speaker, imagine himself in the localities where the events to be represented occur, and take part in them as much as those most involved in them, be a good orator, at least within himself, feel when the voice should rise or fall more or less, so as to shape his melody, harmony, modulation, and motion accordingly."<sup>33a</sup>

That the term *génie* was not only part of the French musical vocabu-

---

peuvent souffrir, on les prie d'entendre, & de s'en remettre à l'effet que produit une Musique composée en apparence contre ces Regles, ils deviennent sourds" (Livre II, Chap. XVII, *De la licence*, p. 111).

<sup>33</sup> "Voilà en quoi consiste le genie de la cabale, qui s'est élevée contre tous les habiles gens de ce Siecle. Vous aurez beau trouver une Musique charmante, elle ne vaudra rien selon eux" (*ibid.*).

<sup>33a</sup> "Au reste, un bon Musicien doit se livrer à tous les caracteres qu'il veut dépeindre; & comme un habile Comedien, se mettre à la place de celuy qui parle; se croire être dans les lieux où se passent les differents évenemens qu'il veut représenter, & y prendre la même part que ceux que y sont les plus interessez; être bon déclamateur, au moins en soy-même; sentir quand la voix doit s'élever ou s'abaisser plus ou moins, pour y conformer sa Melodie, son Harmonie, sa Modulation & son mouvement" (Livre II, Chap. 20, *De la propriété des Accords*, p. 143).

lary before Rameau, but was clearly understood in Rameau's sense, may be seen from the *Traité de Musique*<sup>34</sup> by de la Voüe, published in Paris in 1656. After having dealt fully, in example and precept, with elementary theory, counterpoint, and fugue, the author concludes his treatise with these words: "The other artifices of music, such as recitatives, echoes, the variety of movements, the order of cadences, the beauty of the melodies, the mixture of modes, the natural expression of the words and passions, they depend on the genius and the invention of the composer."<sup>35</sup>

De la Voüe divides music into two spheres; one, teachable, deals mainly with counterpoint, the other, unteachable, comprises the realm of invention and feeling as revealed chiefly in dramatic music.

French, Italian, and German writers, however, had no monopoly on the idea of genius. We find it also in the writings of English men of letters and of music. It is only recently that a greater part of the musical essays of Roger North, prominent lawyer at the time of James II, was rescued from dust and oblivion. This man, born into a noble and art-loving family, heard and practiced music from early childhood on. His essays, written between 1695 and 1728 but never published in his own lifetime, reveal a great connoisseur and a surprisingly judicious and keen critic and esthetician of music. While he fully recognized the necessity of careful training in "all our gammuts, times, keys, mixtures, fuges," North insisted that "good musick must come from one by nature as well as art compleately made, who is arrived at a pitch to throw away the lumber of his rules and examples, and act upon the strength of his judgment, and knowledge of the subject matter itself, as if it had bin bred and born in him *ab origine*."<sup>36</sup> Anticipating Rousseau and later Romantic writers, Roger North saw music's finest jewel in melody, or as the English were wont to call it, "ayre," of the invention of which he said: "But as for securing an Ayre, if it must be above the indifferent, it is like securing witt in poetry, not to be done; and after all will be found to flow from a genius, and not without some accidents or rather felicitys of fancy, as well as sound judgment, to make it sublime."<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Traité de Musique pour bien et facilement apprendre à Chanter & Composer, tant pour les Voix que pour les Instruments . . .*

<sup>35</sup> "Les autres artifices de la Musique, comme les Recits, les Escos [*sic*], la variété des mouvements, l'ordre des Cadences, la beauté des Chants, le meslange des Modes, la naïve expression des paroles ou des passions, dépendent du génie & de l'invention du Compositeur."

<sup>36</sup> *Roger North on Music*, ed. by John Wilson, London, 1959, p. 145.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

North adds the element of judgment to the process of creation. In this he precedes another great connoisseur and original writer on music, Wagner's erstwhile admirer and later sworn antagonist, Friedrich Nietzsche—who, perhaps in opposition to Wagner's emphasis on inspiration, wrote these ironic words on "belief in inspiration":

The artists have a vested interest in our believing in the flash of revelation, the so-called inspiration, as if the idea of the work of art, of poetry, the fundamental idea of a philosophy shone down from heavens as a ray of grace. In reality, the imagination of the good artist or thinker produces continuously good, mediocre, and bad things, but his judgment, trained and sharpened to a fine point, rejects, selects, connects as one can see now from Beethoven's sketchbooks where he appears to have slowly developed the most beautiful melodies and to have selected them, as it were, from many diverse starts . . . All great artists and thinkers were great workers, indefatigable not only in inventing, but also in rejecting, sifting, transforming, ordering.<sup>38</sup>

It was a countryman of Roger North who spoke of music in a vein that would have delighted Rousseau, Schubart, and the whole host of Romantic writers. I refer to Thomas Mace and his work *Musick's Monument*, published in London in 1676. Mace was a clerk at Trinity College in Cambridge. His book dealt with all sorts of practical problems of church music, of lute construction and lute playing, and of the string consort. Although decidedly no more than a fine craftsman and mediocre composer, he entertained the most sublime ideas of music, its power and origin:

*Musick* speaks so transcendently, and Communicates Its Notions so Intelligibly to the Internal, Intellectual, and Incomprehensible Faculties of the Soul; so far beyond all *Language of Words*, that I confess, and most solemnly affirm, I have been more *Sensibly, Fervently, and Zealously Captivated*, and drawn into *Divine Raptures, and Contemplations*, by Those *Unexpressible Rhetorical, Uncontroulable Perswasions, and Instructions of Musicks Divine Language*, than ever yet I have been, by the best *Verbal Rhetorick*, that came from any Mans Mouth, either in *Pulpit*, or elsewhere.

Those Influences, which come along with It, may aptly be compar'd, to *Emanations, Communications, or Distillations*, of some *Sweet, and Heavenly Genius, or Spirit; Mystically, and Unapprehensibly* (yet *Effectually*) *Dispossessing the Soul, and Mind, of All Irregular Disturbing, and Unquiet Motions; and Stills,*

<sup>38</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Menschliches Allzumenschliches. Ein Buch für freie Geister. Nietzsches Werke, Erste Abtheilung, Band II*, ed. by Peter Gast, Leipzig, 1923, p. 163. It is remarkable that Nietzsche should have recognized so early the significance of Beethoven sketchbooks for our understanding of the creative process. Obviously, he had acquainted himself with Gustav Nottebohm's work on Beethoven's sketches, *Beethoveniana*, Leipzig, 1872. *Menschliches Allzumenschliches* was written in the years 1876-78 and published in 1878.

and *Fills It*, with *Quietness, Joy, and Peace; Absolute Tranquility*, and *Unexpressible Satisfaction*.

I speak not by *Roar*, but by *Experience*, and what I have often found, and felt.<sup>39</sup>

Mace understood that composition needed a propitious time and cautioned those “who do attempt to Exercise *Their Fancies*, in such *Matters of Invention; That They observe Times, and Seasons, and never Force Themselves to any Thing, when they perceive an Indisposition; but wait for a Fitter, and more Hopeful Season; for what comes most Compleatly, comes most Familiarly, Naturally, and Easily, without Pumping for.*”<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, we find as early as in this 17th-century tract the notion that certain intimate events in an artist’s life may lead to the conception of a work of art. The composition in question is a “lesson” by Mace, a term that denotes simply a piece of music. And here is his story:

It is (*This very Winter*) just 40 Years since I made It; (and yet It is *New*, because All like It) and Then, when I was past being a *Suitor to my Best Beloved, Dearest, and Sweetest Living-Mistress; But not Married; yet Contriving the Best, and Readiest way towards it*: And Thus it was,

That very *Night*, in which I was *Thus Agitated in my Mind, concerning Her, (My Living Mistress;)* *She being in Yorkshire, (and My Self at Cambridge,)* *Close shut up in My Chamber, Still, and Quiet, about 10, or 11 a Clock at Night, Musing, and Writing Letters to Her; Her Mother, and some other Friends, in Summing up, and Determining the whole Matter, concerning Our Marriage: (You may conceive, I might have very Intent Thoughts, all that Time, and might meet with some Difficulties. (For as yet, I had not gain’d Her Mothers Consent.) So that in My Writings, I was sometimes put to My Studyings. At which Times, (My Lute lying upon My Table) I sometimes took It up, and Walk’d about My Chamber; Letting my Fancy Drive, which way It would, (for I studied nothing, at that Time, as to Musick) yet my Secret Genius, or Fancy, prompted my Fingers, (do what I could) into This very Humour; So that every Time I walk’d, and took up My Lute, (in the Interim, betwixt Writing, and Studying) This Ayre would needs offer It self unto Me, Continually; In so much that at the last, liking it Well, (and lest It should be Lost,) I took Paper, and set it down, taking no further Notice of It, at That Time; But afterwards, It pass’d abroad, for a very Pleasant, and Delightful Ayre, amongst All; yet I gave It no Name, till a long Time after, nor taking more Notice of It, (in any particular kind) than of any other My Composures, of That Nature.*

*But after I was Married, and had brought My Wife Home, to Cambridge; It so fell out, that one Rainy Morning I stay’d within; and in My Chamber, My Wife, and I, were all alone; She Intent upon Her Needle-Works, and I Playing upon my Lute, at the Table by Her; She sat very Still, and Quiet, Listening to All I Play’d, without a Word a Long Time, till at last, I hapned to Play This Lesson;*

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Mace, *Musick’s Monument*, Vol. I, facs. ed. by Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, 1958, p. 118.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

which, so soon as I had once Play'd, She Earnestly desired Me to Play It again; For, said She, That shall be Called, My Lesson.

From which Words, so spoken, with Emphasis, and Accent, It presently came into my Remembrance, the Time when, and the Occasion of Its being produced, and returned Her This Answer, viz. That It may very properly be call'd Your Lesson; For when I Compos'd It, You were wholly in My Fancy, and the Chief Object, and Ruler of My Thoughts; telling Her how, and when It was made: And Therefore, ever after, I Thus Call'd It, My Mistress; (And most of My Scholars since, call It, Mrs. Mace, to This Day.)<sup>41</sup>

In this lovely and quaint account Thomas Mace describes composition as an almost subconscious act guided by “secret genius or fancy.” To render this act doubly mystical he narrates how a composition made in thinking of a certain person is felt by that person to be addressed to her. Nothing contradicts the notion that the Baroque made not “the slightest fuss about a great artist’s genius” more thoroughly than this testimony, for Mace uses the term for the creative act whether the composer be great or small—and I doubt that he entertained illusions about his stature as a composer.

However, it becomes clear that the term genius as used by musicians suffered changes similar to those that the concept underwent in the philosophical writings of the age. In French philosophy Diderot (1713-1784) is credited with changing the concept of genius from the traditional *avoir du génie* to the novel *être un génie*; he is seen as the first thinker to conceive of “‘the genius’ as a type of person.”<sup>42</sup> Unquestionably, Rousseau (1712-1778)—an old friend of Diderot’s, who was his comrade in arms in the fight against Rameau, and with whom he collaborated on the *Encyclopédie*—conceived of genius in terms of a personality of an extraordinary emotional and intellectual constitution, with the accent on the former. Being himself the rare case of a genuine, untutored genius given to passionate outbursts of tears and emotions, he was not in need of much “influence” to arrive at his notions, although they were, of course, “in the air.”<sup>43</sup>

For Rameau “genius” is distinctly more than talent, but it remains a concept entirely within the domain of the mind; it has nothing to do with a particular psychological constitution. Yet, Rameau’s concept of

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122-23.

<sup>42</sup> Herbert Dieckmann, *Diderot’s Conception of Genius*, in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, II, 2, April 1941, pp. 151-82; 152.

<sup>43</sup> Curiously, in his admirable article Dieckmann does not deal at all with Rousseau, although there were few of Diderot’s friends who would have constituted a better living model for his representation of “the genius” than Rousseau—quite aside from the latter’s literary contribution to the 18th-century image of the genius.



genius is by no means that of a cerebral wonder, for it comprises the elements of esthetic sensibility (*le goût*) and of sentiment and the expression thereof.

Thomas Mace uses the term in the Roman sense of a power residing within a person; Mace speaks of his "genius or fancy" almost as poets were wont to speak of their "muse." But Mace in no wise focusses on the concept of genius in differentiation from that of talent. Inasmuch as he perceives that "fancy" needs proper times and seasons, that it can neither be forced nor regulated, his conception of the composer in whom genius resides certainly exceeds the notion of a craftsman. Moreover, Mace concedes an occasional connection, although no identity, with the composer's inner experience.

Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), German by birth, Italian by choice, a polyhistor of prodigious productivity, raises the issue of the national genius in music in a passage of great interest. In his two huge tomes, entitled *Musurgia Universalis*,<sup>44</sup> dealing with the "universe of music," the Jesuit Padre reports about an experiment to find out whether there is such a thing as a national vein when it comes to the musical expression of passion—this anticipates a line of thought followed a century later by Rousseau.

In order to study *musica pathetica*—here is the predecessor of Rousseau's *genre Pathétique*—Kircher selected:

certain topics of the Sacred Scriptures appropriate to certain affects, particularly such as dealt with love, grief, joy, indignation, wrath, plaint, and lamentation, intense melancholy, presumption, arrogance, despair, and finally wonder. This done, I thought I should select eight or more of the most outstanding composers of the whole world, men conspicuous through their judgment and talent, and moreover celebrated for their musical knowledge. Thus I sent letters out to all parts of the world requesting each one of them to compose something on the above-mentioned topics corresponding to the said affects as examples of *musica sympathica*<sup>45</sup> [which term he uses as synonymous with *musica pathetica*].

Kircher goes on to say:

Since the composers selected were the most experienced in the musical world, since they were drawn from diverse nations, in particular from Italy, Germany,

<sup>44</sup> Rome, 1650, I, 580-81.

<sup>45</sup> "ex Sacra Scriptura singulis affectibus apta quaedam themata, quae praecipuos amoris, doloris, laetitiae, indignationis & irae, planctus & lamentationis, tristitiae vehementis, praesumptionis, arrogantiae, desperationis, denique admirationis affectus in se contineret, selegi. Hoc peracto, octo, vel plures praestantissimos totius Orbis, is musurgos, homines iudicio, & ingenio conspicuos, harmonica praeterea scientia maxime insignes seligendos duxi, diversis per Orbis partes literis transmissis instanter rogando, ut singuli super eadem memorata themata dictis affectibus Competentia quaedam componerent sympathicae musicae paradigma."

England, France [the order is noteworthy] and since each of them was asked to write his compositions on the same eight topics expressing the chief affects of the soul, I felt certain that I should soon know to what affects the genius of each [nation] would incline; first the composers, and then the listeners, and whether there was agreement or disagreement, and of what sort, in the manner in which the various nations expressed passions.<sup>46</sup>

Unfortunately, we do not know the outcome of Kircher's experiment. The compositions he requested did not arrive in time and he did not wish to delay the publication of his work.<sup>47</sup> But it is evident from another passage that he had formed pretty clear ideas as to the musical propensities of the various European nations, which he attributed to national temperament, history, and habit, and to the climate.<sup>48</sup> And again he speaks of national genius in a manner that combines talent and temperament, natural inclination and psychological constitution, condensing these elements into a national artistic personality.<sup>49</sup> In speaking of a single composer's gift, Kircher uses mostly the term *ingenium*. He defends the

<sup>46</sup> "cum enim Compositores electi essent totius Musicae consultissimi, ijque ex diversis nationibus, Italia, Germania, Anglia, Gallia praecipui, singulique supra octo eadem praecipuos animi affectus exprimentia themata compositiones suas perficere rogarentur; statim cogniturum me credebam, ad quales affectus uniuscuiusque Genius, primò ipsos Compositores, deinde verò ipsos Auditores inclinaret; utrum diversae Nationes in pathematum expressione convenirent, vel discreparent, & in quo illa discrepantia consisteret."

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 581.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 543: "The Germans, born under a frigid sky, acquire a grave, solid, and industrious character to which the style of their music, serious, phlegmatic, temperate, and polyphonic, corresponds. The French, more mobile, and of a gay and vivacious disposition, love music of that same character; this is why they cultivate a style preeminently apt for dancing (see their gaillards, passamezzi, and courants). The Spanish have a pompous style of an affected gravity. The Italians, however, born under a benign sky, have the most perfect and well-tempered style, and, being truly born for music, know how to use every style aptly and with fine discrimination."

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*: "Qui quidem diversarum nationum diversus in musica stylus non aliunde provenit, nisi vel à genio, & inclinatione naturali, vel à consuetudine longo usu introducta, tandem in naturam degenerante." And now follows the description of national styles summarized above.

Kircher refers in passing to the musical style of the English: "habent & Angli nescio quid peregrinum" (and the English have something indefinably strange). This statement is more than amusing, it expresses Kircher's recognition of the individuality of English music and its character that strikes him as so peculiar that he finds it hard to assimilate. It is almost as if Addison, two generations later, was getting back at Kircher, when he said in *The Spectator*, 18 (March 21, 1711): "If the Italians have a Genius for Musick above the English, the English have a Genius for other performances of a much higher Nature, and capable of giving the Mind a much nobler Entertainment . . ." (quoted by John Hollander, *The Untuning of the Sky, Ideas of Music in English Poetry, 1500-1700*, Princeton, 1961, p. 383).

gifted composer's right to break the rule against parallel fifths, for example, in these words: "I say their use is legitimate for a musician who has achieved perfection in his art, as long as he absorbs them with such ingenuity that they cannot bare their hard sound, and also if text and subject matter and the fancy of genius demand it."<sup>50</sup> But a clear conception of genius is not evident in Kircher's work, although it seems to lie below the surface of his writing.

The distinction between genius and craftsman emerges with full clarity in the thought of the classical scholar and musical theorist Giovanni Battista Doni (1594-1647), Florentine by birth, secretary to Cardinal Barberini in Rome, and later recalled to Florence by Ferdinand II de' Medici as professor of eloquence. As the first theoretician of opera, Doni posed for the first time the question of what particular gifts an opera composer should possess. In his writings we find the classical formulation of a contrast that henceforth dominated musical thinking: it is the contrast between counterpoint as a craft and dramatic music as the creation of genius. Referring to the latter, Doni says:

It is this kind of music that deservedly is held to be the most difficult of all, and which requires more a strong natural disposition [*buona vena naturale*], because here counterpoint takes a place of lesser importance than in the other genres; and counterpoint requires art and exercise rather than natural inclination, since it consists of many rules and observations and is based on practice acquired by long use. But in dramatic music he who is wanting in natural disposition should not even try to undertake it. Never will he achieve perfection, even though he may arrive at mediocrity through long study and knowledge acquired thereby, things equally needed by those singularly privileged by Nature. The composer of dramatic music, therefore, must be very inventive and versatile, he must have a quick mind and a strong imagination: qualities that he has in common with the poet, wherefore it is said *Poetae nascuntur, Oratores fiunt*, poets are born, orators are made. Thus we may compare to orators those composers who ordinarily take the *cantus firmus* or subject from others and, weaving over it an artful counterpoint, draw various melodic lines from it, which often have something dry or labored, in that they lack a certain grace and naturalness, which is the true spice of melody. This is what today's musicians have noted in Soriano, who, while most experienced in counterpoint, never had talent to write beautiful and graceful melodies, wherefore he devoted himself to the writing of canons and similar laborious compositions.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 624: "Licitum itaque esse dico, Musico iam in arte sua perfecto, eas ponere, dummodò eas eo ingenio absorbeat, ut vigorem [I believe this to be a misprint for *rigorem*] suum demonstrare non possint; quoque si verba, & materia, lusisque ingenij id postulet." My translation of *ingenium* as *ingenuity* in one context, *genius* in another indicates my belief that the term was used by Kircher, as by many before him, with a considerable degree of flexibility. Obviously, a clear concept of genius must rest on something more solid than the use of the term *ingenium* or even that of *genius*.

This same thing happens in poetry to those who, being unable to compose things of wit and imagination, give themselves to the composition of anagrams, acrostics, and similar tricks acquiring thereby rather the name of rhymesters than that of poets, just as those should be called contrapuntists rather than musicians. Gesualdo, Prince of Venosa, on the other hand, who was truly born for music, and with a gift for musical expression, and who could clothe with his musical gifts any poetic subject, never attended, as far as one knows, to canons and similar labored exercises. Such should be, then, the genius of the good composer, particularly for that genre of musical compositions which should bring to life all inner affects of the soul with vivid expression.<sup>51</sup>

Doni could not have chosen apter personifications for his concepts of craftsman and genius than Soriano,<sup>52</sup> Palestrina's disciple, famous for his 110 canons over a Marian hymn, and Gesualdo, princely composer who, for the sake of truth of sentiment, broke every rule in the book.

In another passage<sup>53</sup> Doni comments on the dilemma in which "mod-

<sup>51</sup> See the posthumous edition of Doni's writings: *Io. Baptistae Doni Patrici Florentini Lyra Barberina . . .* ed. by A. F. Gori and I. B. Passeri, Florence, 1763, II, 129-30, Chap. XLV: *Delle qualità naturali, e artificiali, che si richiedono nel Compositore di queste Musiche sceniche*. "Questa sorte di Musiche meritamente si tiene per la più difficile di tutte, e che più ricerchi buona vena naturale; perocchè quì ci ha minor luogo, che nell'altre la forza del Contrapunto, il quale piuttosto richiede arte, ed esercizio, che naturale inclinazione, consistendo in molte regole, ed osservazioni, e nella pratica, che col lungo uso si acquista. Ma in questa parte chi non ci averà disposizione dalla natura, non occorrerà che ci si metta; perchè mai gli riuscirà di fare cosa perfetta, ancorchè possa arrivare a qualche mediocrità col lungo studio, e dottrina, la quale è necessaria ancora in quelli, che sono stati dalla natura singolarmente privilegiati. Vuole dunque essere il Compositore di questa sorte molto inventivo, e d'ingegno svegliato, e versatile, e di gagliarda imaginativa: qualità, che gli sono comuni col Poeta, onde si dice, che *Poetae nascuntur, Oratores fiunt*. Possiamo dunque agli Oratori agguagliare quella sorte di Compositori, che per ordinario pigliano il soggetto da altri, e intessendovi sopra un artificioso Contrapunto, ne formano varie melodie, che per lo più sogliono avere del secco, o stentato, mandandogli certa grazia, e naturalezza, che è il proprio loro condimento. Il che hanno notato gli odierni Musici nel Soriano, il quale comechè fosse peritissimo nel Contrapunto, non ebbe però mai talento a fare belle arie, e leggiadre; onde si diede a comporre Canoni, e simili concenti laboriosi: come succede a quelli, che nella Poesia non potendo fare Componimenti d'invenzione, e di testa, si danno agli Anagrammi, Acrostichidi, e simili galanterie, acquistando più presto il nome di versificatori, che di Poeti, come quelli si devono più tosto chiamare Contrapuntisti, che Musici. Il Principe di Venosa per il contrario (che era nato propriamente per la Musica, e con l'espressione del canto, poteva vestire a suo talento qualsivoglia concetto) non attese mai, che si sappia, a Canoni, e simili Componimenti laboriosi. Tale dunque bisognerebbe, che fosse il genio del buon compositore; massime per questa sorte di Musiche, che devono dimostrare con viva espressione tutti i più interni affetti dell'animo."

<sup>52</sup> Francesco Soriano (1549-1620) wrote the *Canoni, et Oblighi di cento, et dieci sorte, sopra l'Ave Maris Stella, da 3 a 8 v.*, Rome, 1610.

<sup>53</sup> *Op. cit.*, II, 128: "uno crederà, che non sia lecito di partirsi dalle regole lasciateci da quelli, che prima ne scrissero, e un altro sarà più ardito a seguirle

ern” composers find themselves with regard to tradition: “One will think it was not permissible to depart from the rules left behind by the predecessors, another will be more daring and follow these modern composers like the Prince of Venosa, indeed, he will spontaneously invent new things.” And now Doni adds another pair of composers, no less characteristic, when he continues: “This is why Monteverdi seeks more the dissonances, whereas Peri hardly departs from the conventional rules.”

And again: “One must commend Monteverdi’s judgment who, leaving behind those superstitious rules, knew very well how to vary with the diversity of cadences the beginning of his *Arianna*.”<sup>54</sup>

Of course, the stylistic separation between counterpoint and expressive music goes back to Monteverdi’s famous distinction between the old and the new style or, as he phrased it, the *prima* and *seconda prattica* of the beginning of the 17th century. But Monteverdi had not yet said — perhaps he implied it — that it took less genius to write in the old style. He merely postulated greater liberty for the *seconda prattica*, the new expressive style of music.

Nevertheless, the connection between the concept of genius and that of an expressive style of music is so close — we have found it in the 19th, 18th, and 17th centuries — that we can now almost postulate the idea of genius to have originated at the same time when the idea of musical expression came into being. And this is indeed the case.

*(To be concluded)*

---

questi moderni Diaphonisti, come è stato il Principe di Venosa, anzi inventerà da se cose nuove . . . Di qui è, che il Monteverdi cerca più le dissonanze, e il Peri poco si diparte dalle regole comuni.”

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65: “è da commendare il giudizio del Monteverde, il quale, lasciando da banda queste superstiziose regole, seppe molto bene variare con la diversità di cadenze il principio della sua *Arianna* . . .”