

SIX

Opera, Concerts and Composers

The orchestra as Beethoven left it was capable of following and sustaining the intricate harmonic processes which he followed. Though the melodic contributions of the brass were necessarily still limited, clarinets were no longer occasional instruments. The weakness of the bass line had led Beethoven to support it with the double-bassoon, but double-bassoons were not widely known outside Vienna. With bassoons doubling cellos in *forte* and *fortissimo* passages, and with double bassoon doubling double-bass, the foundation bass tone was more or less secure although there was no brass instrument in the double-bass register and whenever string tone was inappropriate or provided the wrong colour, the low orchestral double-bass became desirable.

It was for this reason that the orchestra of the Paris *Opéra* added an ophicleide to its forces. The ophicleide was not a particularly agile instrument and its tone tended to blare, but it provided a firm foundation for wind tone. Berlioz, in his book *A Treatise on Modern Instrumentation*, published in 1842, wrote of ophicleide solos (very popular in the mid-nineteenth century), that they sounded like a bull which has gone into a drawing-room to play games.

The ophicleide was not the first instrument to attempt to act as a brass double-bass. In eighteenth-century France and England, a bass serpent—an instrument of very wide bore, made of wood bound in leather and making its notes through finger holes—had been used quite extensively. The huge Handel festivals in England, which began in London in 1784 with an orchestra of 152 strings, fifty-nine woodwind, thirty brass, organ and drums, had fifteen double-basses and one double-bassoon; this meant a rescoring of Handel's music which, when all the 520 performers were storming in heaven in one of the great choruses—"Unto us a Child is born", "Hallelujah" or "Worthy is the Lamb"—left the double-bass line sounding undernourished until the ophicleide was imported into England in the late 1820s.

German composers of large-scale works therefore tried to avoid

the necessity of any brass voice in the double-bass register, and (Berlioz) the great orchestral expert, included the ophicleide only among the four separated brass groups in the *Dies Irae* of his *Requiem* and in the massed brass of his *Symphonie Funèbre et Triomphale*. The ophicleide was ousted by the tuba, which established itself quite rapidly after its first appearance in 1845.

To some extent, the need for a brass double-bass equivalent was a matter of the size of an orchestra. Beethoven's later concerts were given with the largest orchestras he could muster, but there is no clear account of the balance prevailing within them. The Ninth Symphony asks for flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons, and as these divide into two parts, it is plain that he expected at least two of each. In the last movement, however, when they are playing *fortissimo* in their least penetrating middle register, with trombones marked *forte* and a choir marked *fortissimo*, it is plain that the dynamic level round the woodwind must be kept down if the handful of woodwind is going to affect the tone of the ensemble in any way. Similarly, we do not know how many strings Beethoven regarded as necessary, or whether he anticipated the use of quadruple woodwind.

The result is that after the Ninth Symphony the size of the orchestra could no longer be taken for granted. In 1781, the *Gewandhaus* Orchestra, in Leipzig, had four first and four second violins. In 1783 Haydn's orchestra, at Esterhaz, had six firsts and seven seconds while the Imperial Opera, in Vienna, had six of each. The orchestra which Salomon, in London, assembled for his subscription concerts with Haydn had from twelve to sixteen violins—six or eight to each part; each of these orchestras had double woodwind, two horns, two trumpets and drums. Exceptionally in Germany, the *Gewandhaus* Orchestra had three bassoons. In Vienna, there were four horns, and four horns were available in the Prague Opera. As the number of strings increased to match Beethoven's implicit demands, there was no move to add to the woodwind in order that the balance could be preserved in works by Haydn and Mozart. Wagner began to specify the number of strings (and incidentally of harps) which he regarded as necessary, regarding sixteen first and sixteen second violins as necessary both for tone and for balance with the rest of his orchestra, and the lower strings were built up in proportion to the violins, but the eighteenth-century principle that three or four first violins and three or four seconds could maintain a balance with double woodwinds seems to have been forgotten. No authority suggested that to balance thirty-two violins, it would be necessary to use treble or even quadruple woodwind.

The resulting confusion about proportions remains a problem. Until

the end of the nineteenth century, neither conductors nor audiences were much concerned to establish the balance preferred by composers of the Classic age, which Beethoven and his predecessors took for granted, so that it seemed natural, as gramophone records from before the Second World War show, to hear the symphonies of Haydn and Mozart with double woodwind playing against a full post-Wagnerian complement of strings. Under these circumstances, not only was the music's athletic ease of movement in danger of being lost through the luxurious thickness of string tone but the crisper, brighter colours of the woodwind, with its added spriteliness or poignancy, tended to be smothered by the weight of the strings.

At the same time, the size of concert halls built to accommodate very large audiences makes it impossible for orchestras balanced according to late eighteenth-century principles to achieve the effects of strength, power and forcefulness which the contemporaries of Haydn and Mozart noted in their music. Even the Beethoven symphonies played by an orchestra with strings augmented to Wagner's requirements leaves the woodwind proportionately weak in passages marked *forte* and louder. Wagner, whose doctrines gained something like Papal authority over most musicians before the end of the nineteenth century, automatically used valve horns and valve trumpets to enable them to follow the harmony implied in those silences forced on Beethoven's natural brass. Other conductors followed in his footsteps, and still do so, taking it for granted that Beethoven could never have wished for the fluctuations of intensity and dynamics forced on him by the instruments he used. In 1900, conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Mahler's naïve honesty led him to write a programme note in which he explained how he had, so to speak, completed Beethoven's wind parts and augmented the woodwind to achieve the proportions which Beethoven would have expected. "In Beethoven's day," his note explained, "the entire orchestra was smaller than a modern string section. If we fail to bring the rest of the orchestra into a proper numerical relation with the strings, we cannot possibly get the right effect."

The building up of the string orchestra not only imperilled the traditional orchestral balance but increased the necessity for completing the brass choir with a genuine double-bass instrument. The predominance of reed tone in the woodwind—only flute and piccolo do not produce their sounds through a vibrating reed—created a sufficient homogeneity of tone to allow the woodwind to function more than adequately as a separate choir, but the brass—trumpets, horns and trombones—remain obstinately individual. Not only did the choir lack a true bass, but the individuality of the brass section

tended to persuade composers to restrict the soprano of the brass choir, the trumpet for moments of climax and for special effects. The addition of the ophicleide added to the diverse qualities of sound among the brass; it did not blend easily with the rest of the voices of the section.

Beethoven's orchestra, a powerfully rhetorical ensemble unrivalled when oratory is the composer's business, proved to be universally popular and universally significant, but it was not the sound which his immediate successors wished to produce or attempted to achieve. Schubert, who was twenty-seven years younger than Beethoven and survived him for only about eighteen months—he was born in 1797 and died in 1828—never aimed at Beethoven's violent intensity, composing passages no less powerful but aiming always at a smoother texture and an extended lyrical appeal.

From his schooldays in the choir of St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna and at the Imperial Seminary, the most highly regarded secondary school in the capital, Schubert was familiar with the orchestra as a player and occasional conductor. His first six symphonies were played by the school orchestra or by an amateur ensemble which grew up round the Schubert family's private, domestic performances of chamber music. The *Sixth Symphony*, written when he was twenty, had apparently one performance in his lifetime—from his amateur orchestra. His operas and large-scale church music were written partly at least to establish himself in one of those areas of music where he could look for regular and profitable employment, and they all use the orchestra with great, usually unobtrusive skill. The Rossini mania which affected Vienna as it affected the rest of Europe in the years after the Napoleonic Wars, prompted the two *Overtures in the Italian Style*, works naturally gay, elegant and as athletic as anything by the composer who was their inspiration. Like the early symphonies, they are scored for an orchestra smaller than that of Beethoven's later symphonies.

Schubert's problem was to reconcile the powerful symphonic thought of such works as the 'Unfinished' Symphony and the 'Great' C major with a naturally and gloriously personal lyrical style. A Symphony in E minor and major, which is completely sketched but not completely orchestrated, was a step in this direction after early symphonies in which the beauty of the music does not attempt the marvellous organic growth and the sense of power which are overwhelming in the 'Unfinished' (Eighth) and 'Great' C major (Ninth) Symphonies. Schubert, whose symphonies involve not only the dominant and tonic as functional keys but often begin their recapitulations in the subdominant (so that a work in C major is

based on C major, G major and F major) evolves rather than forces his way to new tonalities. He could recognize relationships, and demonstrate them in music with an undisturbed flow of music. The power of his music is cumulative, not explosive.

The 'Unfinished' Symphony makes us free of Schubert's own private world of lyrical expressiveness, with, for example, the oboes of the opening calling us into fantasy over a restless string accompaniment, and the clarinet of the slow movement singing of a poignant inner happiness. Instrument and theme, in the second movement, seem to belong together, as indissolubly married as mutually devoted lovers. The C major Ninth is not a means of entry to a marvellous private world. It is huge both in length and in its eventfulness. The horn call of its opening is really a call to action—not to marching in step with the world but to a pilgrim's slower, more meditative progress through a colourful and diverse world. For a long time orchestral players were puzzled by it, for if its trombones are thematically, and not harmonically, motivated, violinists were shocked to find that for long periods their function is to beat out dance-like rhythms in unchanging harmonies; but the work is the link between the classic symphony of Beethoven and the freer, expressively orientated symphony of the Romantic composers and the monumental symphonies which Bruckner was to write after 1860.

Mendelssohn brought the final glories of Schubert's expanded symphonies to the world's attention, already an experienced conductor before he was appointed conductor of the *Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra* in 1834, when he was only twenty-five. Mendelssohn was a very successful conductor, universally admired for the elegance, grace and control which he gave to the works he conducted, and for the shapeliness with which he endowed them. But shapeliness and elegance are only secondary qualities of great epic works like the symphonies of Beethoven and of Schubert's C major, of which he gave the first performance and of which he conducted in London at a Philharmonic Concert, with a hostile orchestra which found the work boring and tuneless. As Mendelssohn, between about 1825 and 1840, could do no wrong in the eyes of audiences all over England and Germany, and as he was ready to find room in his programmes for any promising new works, his influence on audiences was profound. As a composer, he had neither the capacity nor the wish to write on an epic scale, and it is simply the course of musical history, the process of evolution which led from Beethoven to Wagner, and on to the symphonies of Bruckner and Mahler, that encourages us to undervalue his own orchestral music. The great qualities of Mendelssohn's music are rhythmic vitality, ease and grace of movement, elegance both of style and of state-

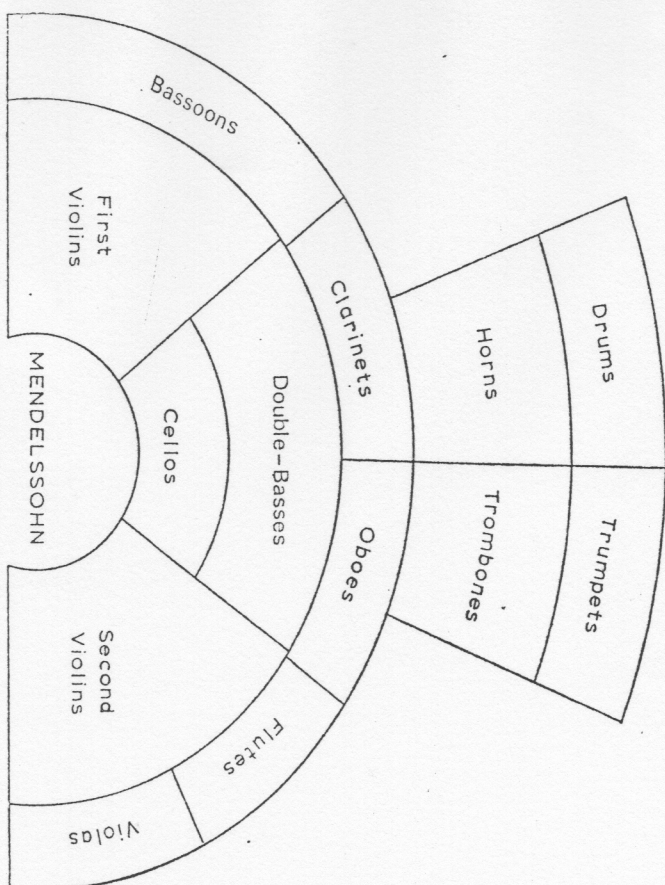
ment. Approaching the orchestra from a standpoint quite remote from that of Beethoven, once the magic of his personality had disappeared from concert platforms, his music was increasingly pushed aside while the consequences of Beethoven's music were worked out by later composers.

Whatever Mendelssohn did was done beautifully, with scrupulous effectiveness and polish. His use of the orchestra is utterly individual and appealing, and always in keeping with the purpose for which it is employed. Lightness and grace, freedom and swiftness of movement, are not the most prominent characteristics of the music composed in Central Europe in the Beethoven-obsessed nineteenth century, and these are the qualities always at his command, but exploited with such skill that it never seems that his orchestra is kept under restraint; such movements as the *Saltarello finale* of the 'Italian' Symphony sound, for all their limited dynamic range—for Mendelssohn never scores a work to make an overwhelming noise—sound like explosions of pure energy. Even in the oratorios, *St Paul* and *Elliah*, the *Lobgesang* (*Song of Praise*) which follows the pattern of Beethoven's Choral Symphony by creating three orchestral movements which lead to a choral finale with religious words, or in the symphony written for the 300th anniversary of the religious settlement in Germany, the 'Reformation' Symphony, Mendelssohn reaches a grandeur, serious and thoughtful rather than spiritually exalted, of his own thorough, spare, athletic orchestration which is never thick and never crowded in texture. The early *Midsummer Night's Dream* overture, in its fantastic lightness, is a composition rivalled for its speed, dexterity and use of the orchestra to produce an unearthly orchestra only by Berlioz's far more elaborate 'Queen Mab' Scherzo in his *Romeo and Juliet* Symphony. The originality of such movements as the slow movement of the 'Reformation' Symphony, with violins singing what the eighteenth century would probably have called an *arioso*—music too declamatory to be an aria, with an eloquent, pointed but restrained accompaniment in which the woodwind provide the essential colours—is again a use of the orchestra not only splendidly skilful and precisely calculated but as moving as it is original.

It was during Mendelssohn's years as conductor that the *Gewandhaus Orchestra* became fully professional. It has always been in the forefront of 'modern' music. From 1795 onwards it cultivated Beethoven's music, playing each new work as soon as it was obtainable, and though Wagner, as an adolescent, had unhappy memories of some of these performances—the Choral Symphony, which he heard in a muddled and ill-rehearsed performance when he was eighteen, remained in his mind as an example of what should never be allowed to happen—the most difficult and thoughtful music was

Concerto

accepted by an audience which, to the surprise of William Sterndale Bennett, the best English composer of the early nineteenth century, included not only the well-to-do and the prosperous (as audiences in England did) but also the boots of the hotel at which he was staying on his first visit to Leipzig, in 1836. When Mendelssohn had become conductor, two years before, and until the player had finished his university course, the timpanist was a theology student. After that, the orchestra became completely professional.



Mendelssohn: Leipzig Gewandhaus, 1835

Similar concert societies, most of them largely amateur, grew up in a large number of German towns, largely because of the great prestige given to symphony concerts by Beethoven's works, which joined those of Haydn and Mozart in providing a repertoire for orchestras all over Europe, but the development of professional orchestras was much slower. Regular concerts by the court orchestra, the descendants of the great Mannheim Orchestra, had been given in Munich since 1811. The Elector had inherited the Bavarian throne and taken most of his orchestra to Munich with him in 1779, but outside the court there was little musical activity; amateur

orchestral societies arose and withered away, because, to a large extent, of the accessibility of the court music. The professional concerts of the *Musikalische Akademie*, as the court orchestra called itself when it gave public concerts, was the idea of the senior members of the Court Orchestra itself, under the inspiration of their *Kapellmeister*, Joseph Winter. They gained the permission of the King, Maximilian I, to give subscription concerts in the *Redoutensaal* of the court on up to twelve evenings in the year when they were not required for other duties. The profits of the concerts were to be divided among the players who took part in them—an inducement to underpaid musicians to make a success of this new venture, which they did to such an extent that in 1825, after the concerts had left the *Redoutensaal* for the theatre, the Bavarian Government decided to build a concert hall, the Odeon, especially for the 'Academy' concerts. For a long time, none of the other centres of opera in Germany bothered to copy Munich's example.

Vienna, of course, had frequent concerts but, until 1818, no regular concert organization and no regular concerts by a professional orchestra until the middle of the century. Composers like Mozart and Beethoven could rent a theatre, with its orchestra, for concerts at which they brought their new works to the widest possible public. Similar concerts were organized for the benefit of singers and instrumentalists, but a regular concert series was not given until 1782, when Phillip Martin, at first with the collaboration of Mozart, began to give concerts in the *Pavillon of the Augarten*, a royal park, which the Emperor permitted them to use. Mozart financed subscription concerts of his own, but it seems to be impossible to gain any real information about the orchestra which played either for Mozart or for Martin; probably both were mainly amateur ensembles with professional 'stiffening' to play the less popular instruments—trumpets, drums, bassoons and possibly horns. The presence of a pool of freelance professional musicians in Vienna made such an arrangement possible.

The *Tonkünstlersocietät*, an organization of professional musicians who elected their own new members from musicians who seem to have reached sufficient eminence, gave two or three concerts each year, usually for charity. The society itself chose the soloists, and an invitation to take part in any programme was regarded as a high honour. Such spasmodic events, however notable they were in themselves, did not amount to the regular diet of music provided by any lesser but accomplished orchestra in which a conspectus of available work can be presented, but in 1813 the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* began its activities; 'Philharmonic Society' would be an acceptable translation of the name, which

literally means "Society of the Friends of Music". The *Gesellschaft* consisted of members some of whom were notable professional musicians but most of whom were eminent amateurs from the upper classes, or the well-to-do business men and bureaucrats. Men like Beethoven's patron and friend Prince Lobkowsky became members because, for one reason or other—most often the difficulty of maintaining their own orchestras because of the rise in prices and inflation at the end of the Napoleonic Wars—they found it easier to support a widely based body than to maintain musicians of their own. The *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* gave regular concerts with an orchestra made up of amateur and professional musicians, directed by members of its organizing committee, and it became responsible for important performances and commissions, and for the foundation in 1817 of the Vienna Conservatoire.

Regular professional concerts did not become a feature of Viennese musical life until 1842, when members of the Opera Orchestra decided that the popularity of their regular Pension Fund Concert (their only appearance in the year outside the theatre's orchestra pit), warranted an attempt to give regular concerts at times when they were not occupied in the theatre. Concerts were given sporadically but more frequently until 1860, when the orchestra gained permission to give regular concerts on Sunday mornings as the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. In this guise it was a self-governing body of musicians which elected its own conductor and undertook all the organization of its concerts, including publicity and the sale of tickets.

Up till this time, the concert orchestras with the highest reputation were those of the *Philharmonic Society* in London, founded in 1813, and the orchestra of the *Société des Concerts du Conservatoire*, in Paris, founded in 1828. Both were at least partly the result of the enormous international prestige of Beethoven's music. In London, regular concerts by professional orchestras lapsed after the two series of concerts promoted by Johann Peter Salomon, who had invited Haydn to London as composer and director of two series of concerts (1791-3 and 1793-5). Salomon gave concerts in 1796 with the collaboration of notable singers, and was responsible for a performance of Haydn's *The Creation* in 1800. The success of his collaboration with Haydn had wiped out a slightly older organization, the Professional Concerts, with which he had originally been associated and which had been organized by a group of professional musicians, so that for some years London, where concert music was already an old tradition, had found only occasional concerts available and no professional orchestra in regular existence to play them.

The absence of any such orchestra led to the formation of the

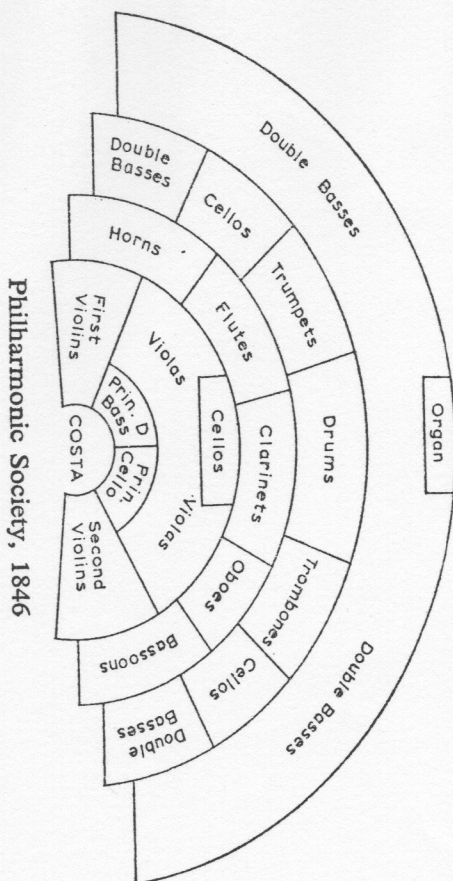
Philharmonic Society (which became the "Royal Philharmonic Society" when it reached its centenary). This was the creation of thirty professional musicians working in London. As well as English musicians—the composer Henry Bishop, William Horsely, most notable for his part-songs and glees, William Shield, who wrote enjoyable ballad operas and theatre music, and the younger Samuel Webbe, another composer of effective glees, Sir George Smart, organist and church music composer who had known Beethoven in Vienna, as had the pianist Charles Neale, who claimed to be Beethoven's only English pupil—there were a number of foreign musicians working in England—Salomon, Clementi the pianist-composer who had been set to play in a pianist duel with Mozart, J. B. Cramer and one of the Moralt family, who had been notable musicians since the great days of the Mannheim Orchestra. The society began its life with a great enthusiasm for Beethoven's music, which had a prominent place in its programmes from the start.

Though they depended on the subscriptions of wealthy patrons, its own committee of musicians was responsible for the entire organization. Its orchestra was that of the Opera, so that Philharmonic Concerts were originally given on Monday evenings, which were traditionally opera-free. The conductors were the leader of the orchestra and a committee member sitting with the score at a redundant piano; these duties were shared by the various members of the committee in turn. Choral and orchestral music was played, but no solo work was heard until 1819, when a Beethoven piano concerto was played. Vocal solos were not admitted until later, when failing finances made it convenient to accept the services of the great heroines and heroines of the opera, to fill the hall. Apart from the music of Beethoven, whose Ninth Symphony the Society commissioned and which the composer dedicated both to it and to the King of Prussia, it formed friendly relations with Spohr, from whom it commissioned the Second, Sixth and Eighth Symphonies, joined in the general idolization of Mendelssohn and commissioned his Trumpet Overture as well as giving the first performance in England of the C minor and Italian Symphonies, the *Melusine* and *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* overtures.

Originally the Society was financially as well as artistically successful, so that it could afford to commission works from international celebrities, Spohr as well as Mendelssohn and Cherubini, and to encourage English music; new works submitted to the Society were tried out in the hearing of the committee with a view to their public performance, but unfortunately none of those received was judged worthy of inclusion in any of the Society's programmes. By 1842, however, the Society found itself short of money and had to abandon the policy of commissioning new works

has music 2201 + 50
gives - cançoes para Trés

and trying out uncommissioned ones. To try to rebuild its fortunes, in 1845 for the first time it appointed a permanent conductor, Sir Henry Bishop, who resigned almost immediately because of ill-health and was succeeded by the Italian-born conductor of the opera, Michael Costa, who conducted the Society's concerts for eight years.



The standard of performance in these years was not high. In 1825, the first performance in London of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, conducted by a reluctant George Smart, seems to have been disastrous. Costa, a strict disciplinarian though a limited interpreter of orchestral music, was the first musician to preside with real authority over the orchestra since the visits of Spohr and Mendelssohn. The orchestra was not only inefficiently led; it was, too, at the mercy of the 'deputy system'. The engagement of the musicians was not for a season at a time but simply for each individual concert, so that membership of the orchestra meant work for little financial reward; players faced with a clash of engagements therefore chose the more profitable of them and merely sent a deputy to the other; the deputy might attend only the concert after the original player had been present at rehearsals. The deputy system continued to bedevil London music until 1904.

The orchestra of the *Société des Concerts du Conservatoire*, created in Paris in 1828, had the advantage of the hall of the Conservatoire for its concerts, was partially supported by the government through its association with the Conservatoire, and had a thorough, determined conductor, François Habeneck, who was more than anyone else the creator of the orchestra. Habeneck was

determined to give performances of the Beethoven symphonies which would be worthy of the music and refused to put works into his programmes until the orchestra had grown to understand them through extended rehearsals. Wagner, living in poverty in Paris from 1839 to 1842, was overwhelmed by the Beethoven performances which he heard from Habeneck and the Conservatoire Orchestra, as was Berlioz, who knew Habeneck personally and regarded the great conductor as one of his persecutors in the Parisian musical establishment.

The speciality of the Conservatoire Orchestra was the time it found for really exhaustive rehearsal which enabled every player to undertake his part with complete familiarity with the music and a clear sense of how to overcome the problems it presented. Few of the German orchestras, even those of the great theatres and musical centres, had learned to approach the scores with equal scrupulousness or could afford the time in which to apply it. After the death of Beethoven, there was no immediate continuation of the supply of great orchestral works except those of Mendelssohn and Schubert. Few continental organizations were ready to commission works in the style and on the scale of the London Philharmonic Society's commissions to Spohr and Mendelssohn, and later in the century to Dvořák, though the major German festivals attempted to find new large-scale choral and orchestral works to be their centrepiece. Thus, a composer devoting several months to the composition of an orchestral work—and the size of the post-Beethoven orchestra means that the mere task of writing out an orchestral score absorbs a long time—could hardly expect to earn any money from it even if he were lucky enough to secure a performance of it; a commission secures the composer some money to live on; publication secured him some return for his efforts, but few countries admitted the composer's right to a fee for performances until the end of the century. On the other hand, the composer of an opera which won the attention of a theatre management (and operas were in much greater demand though not all succeeded) could expect a reasonable fee from any major opera house, and in Paris a continuing royalty on performances; the continuing royalty was an idea gradually applied throughout Europe; the composer could then bargain for performances in other theatres so long as he kept the essential material—the score which set out the work and its musical organization for the conductor, and the orchestral parts—in his own hands to be hired by any theatre which contemplated a production of his work.

For these reasons, rather than for any presumed lack of inspiration or ambition, the most ambitious work was still composed for the opera house. A composer like Weber, who was born in 1786

and depended for his earnings on concert tours as a virtuoso pianist—until 1813, travelled, as virtuosi naturally did, with a stock of concert works which he would play, usually unrehearsed, with the orchestras, amateur or professional, of the towns on whatever route he had planned. A concert musician naturally travelled with his stock-in-trade, and established his reputation as a composer by doing so. Weber's stock-in-trade naturally included not only the *Konzertstück* for piano and orchestra but also the *Clarinet Concertos* and *Concertino* written for his friend the clarinetist Heinrich Bärmann, who shared several tours with him. As soon as he had won a resident position—*Kapellmeister* of the Prague Opera in 1813—Weber set out to fulfil his destiny as composer of German operas in his new revolutionary nationalist style.

The most successful composer of the period which coincided with the last decade of Beethoven's life was Rossini. Wherever concerts were available, Beethoven's music triumphed over performances which, more often than not, must have been little better than travesties of his intentions. Perhaps because of the long miseries of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, and perhaps because, after 1815, a rigid censorship in German-speaking Europe discouraged any approach to serious composition which might reflect unenthusiastically on the society of the day was discouraged, Rossini's operas, brilliantly written for fine singers and usually far from any current controversy in their subject matter, captured all the world's important opera houses. His music, and his personality, made a deep impression wherever he went, particularly in Vienna, London and Paris, where Italian music, unwelcome at the Paris Opéra, had its own home in the *Théâtre Italien*, and where he was commissioned to write in the French style for the Opéra, officially the *Académie Royale de Musique*, tailoring his powers to suit idiosyncratic French taste.

Rossini's greatest gifts were an almost infallible sense of theatrical effect and an unfailing gift for expressive, elegant vocal melody with a reserve of power rarely called into action but released at times in grandly impressive choral writing. To his Italian contemporaries he was a genius seduced and corrupted by the temptations of the orchestra; even the French novelist Stendhal, a great admirer eager not to admit a single critical word into his biography of the great composer, felt that from *Tancredi*, first produced in 1813, onwards, Rossini had paid too much attention to the orchestra. Beautiful melodies, which could have been given to singers, were squandered on instruments, and orchestral accompaniments became too full of independent invention, and too detailed, to allow the audience to concentrate exclusively on the vocal line. Schubert, growing up in Vienna during the period of Rossini mania,

wrote his two Overtures in the Italian style in 1817 under the intoxicating influence of the Italian master.

There seems to have been little in the Roman, Milanese, and Venetian orchestras for which the early operas were written to inspire Rossini. But *Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra*, written in 1815 for the first-rate orchestra of the San Carlo Opera, in Naples he abandoned the custom of setting most of the recitative in the secco style, for voice and harpsichord only; recitatives with orchestral accompaniment were determined to point every stroke of drama with appropriate colour. The new importance of the orchestra was only one of Rossini's unorthodoxies which collectively scandalized the conservatives in their Italian audience, who tolerated his unorthodoxies because the operas still gave superb melodies to superbly trained singers and took control of the stage with indefatigable vitality. Revising two Italian works, *Maometto II* (1820) and *Mose in Egitto* (1818) for the Paris Opéra, where they became *Le Siège de Corinthe* and *Moïse*, he added to the power of their choruses and elaborated their orchestration because the orchestra of the Opéra was better equipped and better in style than any orchestra with which he had previously worked. The opening of the Overture of *William Tell* (which for many years was one of the most popular and inescapable of operatic overtures) presents, even apart from the suave beauty of its opening for four-part divided cellos, a remarkable combination of eloquence, fluent lightness, proportion, grace and atmospheric appropriateness. Rossini's effects are never disproportionate to the fluency and energy of his music. They never become more than incidental to the music's real expressive purpose.

To look at a Rossini score, with its light accompaniment and effective simplicity of orchestration, is to find the criticism of his over-elaborate orchestration almost ridiculous; what irritated Italian contemporaries among his critics was probably the colour brought into his accompaniments by his obvious pleasure in woodwind tone. When Rossini and Wagner met in Paris in 1860, the long-retired Rossini, who had composed no major work since *William Tell* in 1829, said that he had learned more from studying the scores of Haydn and Mozart than from all the lessons he had ever received. One of the most valuable lessons that the masters taught him was how to use the orchestra, particularly the distinctive colours of the woodwind, to contribute to the effect of music designed for voices without displacing the voices of their supremacy, applying the lessons of Mozart and Haydn to *bel canto* opera. Among the composers of Rossini's lifetime, only Schubert never claimed to despise, or spent time in despising, or affecting to deplore, the easy effectiveness of his music; but even Weber, who

could see nothing in Rossini's music but a cynical exploitation of easy effects, found himself placing and accompanying important woodwind passages in the style Rossini had developed.

Weber's orchestra, however, like Weber's melodies, still sounds original and entirely characteristic. Weber, although he was a fine concert pianist, was also fascinated by the timbres of the woodwind instruments, writing concertos for clarinet and for bassoon, two Clarinet Concertinos, and Variations for Bassoon and Orchestra as well as a Concertino for Horn. Possibly the maturity of the clarinet in Weber's youth, together with his meeting with Heinrich Bärmann, who used an improved instrument more flexible than earlier clarinets, influenced his writing for the instrument.

But it is the opera which most effectively roused Weber's imagination. There is always an eager, ardent enthusiasm about his orchestral works. Accompanying figures have an impetuosity of their own, and his overtures always reach their climax in a fine violin melody of great energy and excitement. He was a master of atmosphere, and *Der Freischütz*, an opera which grows out of German folk tales and the vivid imaginative qualities of the new German Romanticism of the early nineteenth century, exists in an atmosphere of forests, mountains and rocky chasms in which the forces of a somewhat pantomime-style good and evil exist. These are things which permeate the German Romantic imagination. But Weber was conscious, too, of nature and its sounds, as an immediate delight rather than as a symbol; breezes and the rustling of leaves, forest noises picked up by quiet brass and woodwind as well as the eerie demons and black magic of the Wolf's Glen, where the hero trades with the devil for magic bullets, still sound as new as they did at the first performance in 1821, and if behind the originality is a certain lovable naivety, the naivety was there as a branch of the originality—the result of taking folk tales with artistic seriousness—in 1821.

Weber had a fine ear for unusual sonorities; the opening phrases of Agatha's song *Leise, leise, fromme Weise* in *Der Freischütz* are accompanied by violins in four parts with a viola providing the bass. A clarinet in A provides the bass to a lyrical cello melody in the *Oberon* overture; the clarinet part lies very low in the instrument's register, and between it and the melody are the violas, doubling the melody a third below; this inversion of the orchestra makes use of the melancholy of the clarinet's low register while exploiting the plangency of the cellos and providing an accompaniment with the same tonal qualities as the melody. The storm in the forest suggested in the *Der Freischütz* overture is conveyed largely by trombone chords in the bass, *tremolando* strings and long lyrical phrases for the clarinets, with the dynamics of each part

separately marked for clarity of effect: a long-held E flat on the bass trombone lies beneath an E flat chord distributed through the string *tremolando*; the trombone remains quiet while the strings play a *crescendo* which reaches a *forte* marking a mere semiquaver after a *fortissimo* entry by the horns, which immediately lose the power to play *forte* as the strings move from their restrained to a climax and a solo clarinet enters *fortissimo* and remains at that level while the strings continue at not much more than a whisper. It is not only Weber's, precisely graded dynamics, of course, that are novel. The dynamic levels had to be differentiated in this way because there is nothing in earlier music which could stand as a precedent for a conductor working on this passage, and such directions are the only possible guidance to the composer's effect as he aims to find a means of transforming natural sound into music. He is not trying to evoke natural sound by musical means, or to represent it in some traditional musical way. He is, so to speak, trying to achieve the effect of trees and wind if they played musical instruments, to take his music direct from them.

Weber died in 1826, a year before Beethoven, having found not only new subject matter and a new style for opera but also having brought nature into music while other composers had only dealt with human responses to nature. Seven years after his death his friend Giacomo Meyerbeer, a composer who had been a youthful associate of Weber's at Darmstadt and whose career had up to that time been a series of promising starts, as an orchestral composer, and as an adoring disciple of Rossini, produced his opera *Robert le Diable* in Paris. He had previously produced the most successful of his Rossinian works, *Il Crociato in Egitto*, at the Théâtre Italien, but *Robert le Diable* was in French style and produced at the Opéra itself.

French opera, the idiosyncratic form which stemmed from Lully, Rameau and the operas by which Gluck reformed and gave dramatic vitality to the Italian opera of the late eighteenth century, had grown into a monumentally impressive style through the work of Spontini, an Italian composer born in 1774 who, after an initial success in his homeland, had arrived in Paris in 1803 and composed for the Théâtre Italien. He became a favourite of the Empress Josephine and composed a cantata to celebrate her husband's victory at Austerlitz in 1806, by which time, his masterpiece *La Vestale* was in rehearsal for the Opéra, where, despite opposition on both musical and unmusical, political and nationalistic grounds, it was a success. It subordinated personal emotions to a drama of social causes, demanded the maximum of impressiveness from a great chorus and large orchestra but still provided singers with music which would display their vocal qualities. In 1810, *La*

Vestale provided Paris audiences with the loudest music they had so far heard, so that Parisian wits told the story of the patient whose doctor had advised him to attend *La Vestale* to see what effect it might have upon his sadly impaired hearing. Doctor and patient went together to the performance and at the end of the first act the rapturous patient applauded vociferously. "It's wonderful, Doctor," he said to his companion, "I heard every note!" "What's that? What's that?" asked the doctor. "I can't hear a word you say—I've gone deaf."

Spontini continued to compose in Paris for the Théâtre Italien and for the Opéra until, in 1819, he accepted the appointment of conductor at the Berlin Opera, and most of the remainder of his life—he died in 1851—was spent in Germany as composer and conductor, developing the style of *La Vestale*, the work which gave France its nineteenth-century operatic model for what became known as 'Grand Opera'.

Meyerbeer learnt the grand style from Spontini, and *Robert le Diable* follows in the footsteps of *Le Vestale*. Rossini's *William Tell* and Auber's *La Muette de Portici* (which Victorian England knew as *Masaniello*). These were operas in which public causes were dramatized and personal relationships were subsumed in them. Such works were designed to appeal to the new Paris audience, drawn from the successful bourgeoisie, a post-revolutionary generation who demanded elaborate spectacle, pageantry and processions, coronations, royal weddings and natural or man-made catastrophes on the largest scale. Their tastes were catered for by commercial managements to whom the Opéra was leased by the government and who ran it for their own profit. The most elaborate stage designs and décor, a fine orchestra, a huge and well-trained choir and an attractive *corps-de-ballet* were all essential; the *Dumb Girl of Portici* brings the final curtain of Auber's work down by leaping into Vesuvius whilst the volcano erupts, and whoever followed that work had, if possible, to find something at least equally remarkable in event and stage picture to rival that conclusion. The composer had also to remember that the ballet should be part of Act II, so that balletomanes and the fashionable young men could watch the dancing or the girls after dinner, without having to endure an unbalistic Act I.

Meyerbeer, as soon as *Robert le Diable* was seen, dominated French opera and found himself the leader of modern operatic taste. His rise was due to several things: for a start, he could compose what the public wanted with complete sincerity; his taste corresponded with that of his audience, and he was a skilful musician who, if his invention was limited, could always find convincing music for the great show pieces which the audience required. He

was influenced, too, by the Opéra itself, and by the facilities it put into his hands. Its orchestra contained about eighty players (there were seventy-eight in 1803 and eighty-five in 1847), among whom were players of instruments not normally found in other orchestras such as the ophicleide and the cornet (the modern brass instrument, not the Renaissance cornet); the percussion section invariably contained bass drum, triangle and cymbals; it maintained four horns, three trombones and four bassoons; the number of violas was proportionate to the size of the violin and cello sections. Since the days of Lully, French taste had demanded woodwind tone more penetrating, and more aggressive, than had pleased other countries, and the extra bassoons were needed to balance the stronger treble woodwinds, and it made it possible for composers to write for bassoons in two or more parts. Valve trumpets were only slowly accepted into French orchestras, so that the cornet was imported because it was a fully melodic instrument for more than an octave below the pitch at which the trumpet was capable of completely melodic playing without any gaps in its harmonic series. With the upper-register brass so strengthened, the necessity of co-opting the ophicleide from the military band became obvious.

Meyerbeer was consciously an orchestrator in a way that no earlier composer had been. His music dealt in sensationalism and therefore in sensational effects; it matches the startling events on the stage, and communicates the atmosphere of the plot even when it does not so vividly create character. Everything he does in *Robert le Diable* and the operas which follow it is designed to create excitement, so that an event like the Massacre of St Bartholomew's Eve, the final excitement of *Les Huguenots*, becomes something close in nature to a Hollywood historical epic, a brilliant surface which excludes the fanaticism and psychological violence which makes it possible, and excludes, too, the compassion which it should arouse in any composer and an audience; it is music calculated to shock and amaze.

Meyerbeer's mastery of effect in the orchestra as well as on the stage had a lasting effect throughout the nineteenth century; the great cymbal clashes off the beat of each bar in the 'triumph' scene of Verdi's *Aida*, produced fifty years after Meyerbeer had left Paris audiences intoxicated with excitement, are an old Meyerbeerian effect which Verdi might have borrowed from any of Meyerbeer's French opera. Meyerbeer invented the effect of interpolating fortissimo brass dissonances into quiet, lyrical textures without preparing the dissonances so that they evolve naturally from the course of the music.

Meyerbeer was as fascinated by the bassoon as Weber had been by the clarinet. In *Robert le Diable*, the ghosts of debauched nuns

provide a ballet for which the word 'spooky' is perhaps more appropriate than 'série' would be, and they rise from their tombs to a broken, halting triplet rhythm played by bassoons in two parts. In *Le Prophète* Meyerbeer's last opera for Paris, three Anabaptist ministers (the libretto deals with the persecution of the Anabaptists) preach in unison, their voices doubled by the bassoon. He was as completely a master of orchestral effect, so that Berlioz's *Treatise of Modern Instrumentation*, notes with enthusiasm his employment of what can be called musical effects; Berlioz explained the effectiveness of the use of a single bell, tuned to F in the bass clef, its tone extended as it loses power by holding its single crochet through complete triple-time beats, while the brass—horns, three trombones and ophicleide—play unison Cs three octaves deep. Meyerbeer, too, realized the effectiveness of *piuissimo* gong strokes under dissonant brass chord marked *piuissimo* or triple *piano*. Meyerbeer is one of Berlioz's most frequently quoted authorities for remarkable dramatic effects in the orchestra.

His mastery, however, is not simply a matter of finding sound effects to heighten moments of tension and add *frissons* to sinister or spooky action. When tunes of broad, pompous dignity are needed in a register where trumpets are not at their most effective, he employs cornets in a manner that never tempts them to sound vulgar. In the love duet in the second act of *Les Huguenots*, he extracts all the possible poignancy from the situation by setting cor anglais and clarinets to whisper broken phrases to each other, the clarinets divided beneath the lower-pitched instrument so that the cor anglais becomes the more penetrating voice. The ill-fated lover, Raoul, who is to be slaughtered in the massacre, sings a beautiful Romance in Act I, accompanied by the archaic, seven-stringed viola d'amour; its tone quality immediately shows us that Raoul is a man apart, an idealist and lover with a mind and character above the common run of people.

The style and the effects that Meyerbeer developed, the huge sensational scenes of ritual, procession and calamity, remained to be used by almost every nineteenth-century composer of opera. To call him a specialist orchestrator is to point out what Berlioz meant when, to point out the areas of their compass in which instruments are at the most effective, and to show what effects they can make in other areas, he found himself frequently citing the example of Meyerbeer.

SEVEN

The Art of Orchestration

Berlioz was born in 1803, the year of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony. His home was the small town of La Côte St André, not far from Grenoble. From his father, a doctor, he learnt Latin and developed a passion for classical literature. Dr Berlioz noticed his son's instinctive passion for music, arranged for the boy to have piano lessons—he hardly profited from them—and provided him with a flute and a guitar, which young Hector managed more effectively. Harmony he learned from old text books, and by the time he was fifteen he had begun to compose; apart from a few songs with piano accompaniment he wrote chamber music, usually for flute and instruments with assorted tone colours. Sent to Paris to study medicine, he spent all the money and time he could afford at the Opéra or at concerts, neglecting his medical studies for the study of scores, notably those of Gluck, whose operas fascinated him by their combination of intense emotion and classical restraint. Gluck's orchestra, its eloquent, unhysterical woodwind and its almost statuesque poise, moved him intensely. Forced by circumstances to earn money as a music critic, Berlioz wrote reviews and essays in superb prose, intense in expression, witty, sardonic, imaginative, emotional but brilliantly lucid and economical; more than any other writer he expressed the mind of the Romantic musician. Music must be an expression of passionate emotions in all their immediacy; traditional rules and conventions must never be allowed to prevent the composer from expressing the truth of his own feelings; if the rules came into conflict with the demands of expression, it was the rules which must be abandoned.

For all the limitations of his skill as a performer, Berlioz became the first, and perhaps the supreme, master of the orchestra as a body capable of the widest imaginable range of tone colours and of a dynamic range which from the barest whisper to the almost unbearably powerful. In a group of ceremonial works—the *Requiem*, the *Symphonic Funèbre et Triomphale* and the *Te Deum*, he made unprecedented demands for performers, but these were works designed for special occasions in special auditoria, the