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# *On German Music*

By Richard Wagner

Translated by William Ashton Ellis



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## About this Title

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Translated by William Ashton Ellis

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## On German Music

THANKS to the exertions of a number of distinguished artists, who seem to have combined expressly for this purpose,—thanks to them and their good services, the highest products of German Music are no longer unknown to the Parisian public; they have been set before it in the worthiest fashion, and received by it with the greatest enthusiasm. (1) People have begun to demolish the barriers which, destined perhaps to eternally sever the nations themselves, yet should never separate their arts; one may even say that through their ready acknowledgment of foreign productions the French have distinguished themselves more than the Germans, who are generally more prone to fall beneath a foreign influence than is good for the preservation of a certain self-dependence. The difference is this:—the German, not possessing the faculty of initiating a Mode, adopts it without hesitation when it comes to him from abroad; in this weakness he forgets himself, and blindly sacrifices his native judgment to the foreign gauge. But this chiefly refers to the mass of the German public; for on the other side we see the German musician by profession, perhaps from very revolt against this universal weakness of the mass, too sharply cutting off himself therefrom, and becoming one-sided in his falsely patriotic zeal and unjust in his verdict on extraterritorial wares.—It is just the reverse with the French: the mass of the French public is perfectly contented with its national products, and does not feel the least desire to extend its taste; but the higher class of music-lovers is all the broader-minded in its recognition of foreign merit; it loves to shew enthusiasm for whatever comes to it of [85] beautiful and unknown from abroad. This is plainly proved by the reception so quickly accorded to German Instrumental-music. Whether the Frenchman *understands* German music for all that, is another question, and one whose answer must be doubtful. Of course it would be impossible to maintain that the enthusiasm called forth by the masterly execution of a Beethoven Symphony by the orchestra of the Conservatoire is an affected one; nevertheless it would suffice to learn the views, ideas and fancies roused in this or that enthusiast by the hearing of such a symphony, to perceive at once that the German genius has not as yet been thoroughly understood.—Let us therefore cast a more comprehensive glance upon Germany and the state of its music, to afford a clearer notion of how it should be taken.

Somebody once said: The Italian uses music for love, the Frenchman for society, but the German as science. Perhaps it would be better put: The Italian is a singer, the Frenchman a virtuoso, the German a—musician. The German has a right to be styled by the exclusive name "Musician," for of him one may say that he loves Music for herself,—not as a means of charming, of winning gold and admiration, but because he worships her as a divine and lovely art that, if he gives himself to her, becomes his one and all. The German is capable of writing music merely for himself and friend, uncaring if it will ever be executed for a public. The desire to shine by his creations but rarely seizes him, and he would be an exception if he even knew how to set about it? Before what public should he step?—His fatherland is cut up into a number of kingdoms, electoral principalities, duchies and free towns; he dwells, let us say, in a market-borough of some duchy; to shine in such a borough never occurs to him, for there isn't so much as a public there; if he is really ambitious, or compelled to support himself by his music,—he goes to the residential city of his duke; but in this little *Residenz* there are already many good musicians,—so it is terrible uphill work to get on; at last he makes his [86] way; his music pleases; but in the next-door duchy not a soul has ever heard of him,—how, then, is he to begin to make a name in Germany? He tries, but grows old in the attempt, and dies; he is buried, and no one names him any more. This is pretty well the lot of hundreds; what wonder that thousands don't even bestir themselves to adopt the career of Musician?

They rather choose a handicraft to earn their living, and give themselves with all the greater zest to music in their leisure hours; to refresh themselves, grow nobler by it, but not to shine. And do you suppose they make nothing but handicraft-music? No, no! Go and listen one winter-night in that little cabin: there sit a father and his three sons, at a small round table; two play the violin, a third the viola, the father the 'cello; what you hear so lovingly and deeply played, is a quartet composed by that little man who is beating time.—But he is the schoolmaster from the neighbouring hamlet, and the quartet he has composed is a lovely work of art and feeling. (2) —Again I say, go to that spot, and hear that author's [87] music played, and you will be dissolved to tears; for it will search your heart, and you will know what German Music is, will feel what is the German spirit. (3) Here was no question of giving this or that virtuoso the opportunity of earning a storm of applause by this or that brilliant passage; everything is pure and innocent, but, for that very reason, noble and sublime.—But set these glorious musicians before a full-dress audience in a crowded salon,—they are no longer the same men; their shame-faced bashfulness will not allow them raise their eyes; they will grow timid, and fear their inability to satisfy you. So they inquire by what devices other people please you, and for sheer lack of self-confidence they'll abandon their nature in shame, to pick up arts they only know by hearsay. Now they will make their fingers ache in practising gymnastics for you; those voices, which sang the lovely German *Lied* so touchingly, will make all haste to learn Italian colorature. But these passages and colorature refuse to suit them; you have heard them performed much better, and are bored by the bunglers.—And yet these bunglers are the truest artists, and in their hearts there glows a finer warmth than ever has been shed on you by those who hitherto have charmed you in your gilded salons. What then has ruined them?—They were too modest, and ashamed of their own true nature. This is the mournful chapter in the history of German Music. (4)

Alike the nature and the constitution of his fatherland have set the German artist iron bounds. Nature has denied him that flexibility of one chief organ which we find in the throats of the happy Italians;—political barriers obstruct him from higher publicity. The opera-composer [88] sees himself obliged to learn an advantageous treatment of Song from the Italians, yet to seek external stages for his works themselves, as he can find none in Germany on which to present himself before a nation. So far as concerns this latter point, you may take it that the composer who has produced his works at Berlin, stays unknown at Vienna or Munich for that very reason; only from abroad, can he succeed in attracting the whole of Germany. Their works are therefore like nothing more than provincial products; and if a whole great fatherland is too small for an artist, how much smaller must one of its provinces be! The exceptional genius may soar above these limitations, but for the most part only through the sacrifice of a certain native self-dependence. So that the truly characteristic of the German always remains provincial, in a sense, just as we have Prussian, Swabian, Austrian folk-songs, but nowhere a German national anthem.—

This want of centralisation, albeit the reason why no great national work of music will ever come to light, is nevertheless the cause of Music's having preserved through out so intimate and true a character among the Germans. Just because there is no great Court, for instance, to gather all that Germany possesses in the way of artistic forces, and thrust it in one joint direction toward the highest-attainable goal,—just for this reason we find that every Province has its artists who independently exert their dear-loved art. The result is a general extension of music to the most unlikely neighbourhoods, down to the humblest cots. It is surprising and astonishing, what musical forces one often finds combined in the most insignificant towns of Germany; and though there is an occasional dearth of singers for the Opera, you everywhere will find an orchestra that as a rule can play Symphonies quite admirably. In towns of 20,000 to 30,000 inhabitants you may count on not *one*, but two to three well-organised bands, (5) not reckoning the countless [89] amateurs who frequently are quite as good, if not still

better-educated musicians, than the professionals. And you must know what one means by a German bandsman: it is rare indeed for the most ordinary member of an orchestra not to be able to play another instrument besides the one for which he is engaged; you may take it as a rule that each is equally expert on at least three different instruments. But what is more,—he is commonly a composer too, and no mere empiric, but thoroughly versed in all the lore of harmony and counterpoint. Most of the members of an orchestra that plays a Beethovenian Symphony know it by heart, and their very consciousness of this gives rise to a certain presumption that often turns out badly for the performance; for it will sometimes tempt each unit in the band to pay less heed to the ensemble, than to his individual conception.

We therefore may justly contend that Music in Germany has spread to the lowest and most unlikely social strata, nay, perhaps has here its root; for higher, showier society in Germany must in this respect be termed a mere expansion of those humbler, narrower spheres. Maybe in these quiet unassuming families German Music finds herself at home; and here in fact, where she is not regarded as a means of display, but as a solace to the soul, Music *is* at home. Among these simple homely hearts, without a thought of entertaining a huge mixed audience, the art quite naturally divests herself of each coquettish outward trapping, and appears in all her native charm of purity and truth. Here not the ear alone asks satisfaction, but the heart, the soul demands refreshment; the German not merely wants to feel his music, but also to think it. Thus vanishes the craze to please the mere sensorium, and the longing for mental food steps in. It not being enough for the German to seize his music by the senses, he makes himself familiar with its inner organism, he studies music; he learns the laws of counterpoint, to gain a clearer consciousness of what it is that drew him so resistlessly in master-works; he goes to the toot of the art, and becomes in time a tone-poet [90] himself. This need descends from father to son, and its satisfaction thus becomes an essential part of bringing-up. All the difficulties on the scientific side of music the German learns as a child, parallel with his school-lessons, and as soon as he is at an age to think and feel for himself nothing is more natural than that he should include music in his thought and feeling, and, far from looking on its practice as an empty entertainment, religiously approach it as the holiest precinct in his life. He accordingly becomes a fanatic, and this devout and fervent *Schwärmerei*, with which he conceives and executes his music, is the chief characteristic of German Music.

Alike this bent and, perhaps, the lack of fine voices direct the German to instrumental music.—If we may take it as a general principle that every art has one particular genre that represents it at its purest and most independent, this certainly may be said to be the case with Music in its instrumental genre. In every other branch a second element combines that necessarily destroys the unity and self-dependence of the first, and yet, as we have experienced, can never raise itself to a level with it. Through what a mass of extras from the other arts must one not wade, in listening to an opera, to arrive at the real drift of the music itself! How the composer feels obliged to almost completely subordinate his art, here and there, and often to things beneath the dignity of any art. In those happy instances where the value of the services rendered by the auxiliary arts attains an equal height with the music itself, there arises indeed a quite new genre, whose classic rank and deep significance have been sufficiently acknowledged; but it must always stay inferior to the genre of higher instrumental music, as at least the independence of the art itself is sacrificed, whereas in instrumental music the latter gains its highest scope, its most complete development.—Here, in the realm of Instrumental music, the artist, free of every foreign and confining influence, is brought the most directly within reach of Art's ideal; here, where he has to employ the [91] means the most peculiar to his art, he positively is bound to stay within its province.

What wonder if the earnest, deep and visionary German inclines to this particular genre of music more fondly than to any other? Here, where he can yield himself entirely to his dream-like fancies, where the individuality of a definite and bounded passion lays no chains

on his imagination, where he can lose himself unhampered in the kingdom of the clouds,—here he feels free and in his native country. To realise the masterpieces of this genre of art it needs no glittering frame, no dear-paid foreign singers, no pomp of stage-accessories; a pianoforte, a violin, suffice to call awake the most enrapturing imaginations; everybody is master of one or other of these instruments, and in the smallest place there are enough to even form an orchestra capable of reproducing the mightiest and most titanic creations. And is it possible, with the most lavish aid of all the other arts, to erect a sublimer and more sumptuous building than a simple orchestra can rear from one of Beethoven's symphonies? Most surely not! The richest outward pomp can never realise what a performance of one of those master-works sets actually before us.

Instrumental music is consequently the exclusive property of the German,—it is his life, his own creation! And just that modest, bashful shyness, which constitutes a leading feature in the German character, may be a weighty reason for the thriving of this genre. It is this shamefacedness that prevents the German from parading his art, that inner halidom of his. With innate tact he feels that such a showing-off would be a desecration of his art, for it is so pure and heavenly of origin that it easily becomes defaced by worldly pomps. The German cannot impart his musical transports to the mass, but only to the most familiar circle of his friends. In that circle, however, he gives himself free rein. There he lets flow the tears of joy or grief unhindered, and therefore it is here that he becomes an artist in the fullest [92] meaning of the word. If this circle is scant, it is a piano and a pair of stringed instruments that are played on;—one gives a sonata, a trio or a quartet, or sings the German four-part song. If this familiar circle widens, the number of instruments waxes too, and one undertakes a symphony.—This justifies us in assuming that Instrumental-music has issued from the heart of German family-life; that it is an art which can neither be understood nor estimated by the mass of a crowded audience, but solely by the home-like circle of the few. A pure and noble *Schwärmerei* is needed, to find in it that ecstasy it sheds on none but the initiate; and this can only be the true musician, not the mass of an entertainment-craving public of the salon. For everything the latter takes and greets as piquant, brilliant episodes, is therewith quite misunderstood, and what sprang from the inmost kernel of the noblest art is consequently classed with tricks of empty coquetry.

We will now attempt to shew how all of German music is founded on the selfsame basis.

The reason has already been given above, why the Vocal genre is far less native to the Germans than that of Instrumental music. It is not to be denied that Vocal music has also taken a quite special direction of its own, with the Germans, which likewise had its starting-point in the people's needs and nature. Yet the grandest and most important genre of vocal music, the Dramatic, has never attained a height and independent evolution on a par with that of Instrumental music. The glory of German vocal music appeared in the Church; the Opera was abandoned to the Italians. Even Catholic church-music is not at home in Germany, but exclusively Protestant. Again we find the reason in the simplicity of German habits, which were far less suited to the priestly splendour of Catholicism than to the unpretentious ritual of the Protestant cult. The pomp of Catholic Divine Service was borrowed by courts and princes from abroad, and all German Catholic church-composers have been imitators, more or less, of the Italians. In the older Protestant churches, however, in place of all [93] parade there sufficed the simple Chorale, sung by the whole congregation and accompanied on the organ. This chant, whose noble dignity and unembellished purity can only have sprung from simple and sincerely pious hearts, should and must be regarded as an exclusively German possession. In truth its very structure bears the impress of all German art; in its short and popular melodies, many of which shew a striking likeness to other secular but always inoffensive folk-songs, one finds expressed the nation's liking for the *Lied*. The rich and forceful harmonies upon the other hand, to which the Germans set their choral melodies,

evinced the deep artistic feeling of the nation. Now this Chorale, in and for itself one of the worthiest events in the history of Art, must be viewed as the foundation of all Protestant church-music; on it the Artist built, and reared the most imposing fabrics. The first expansion of the Chorale we have to recognise in the *Motet*. These compositions had the same church-songs, as the Chorale, for their basis; they were rendered by voices alone, without accompaniment by the organ. The grandest compositions in this genre are those of *Sebastian Bach*, who must also be regarded as the greatest Protestant church-composer in general.

The Motets of this master, which filled a similar office in the ritual to that of the Chorale (saving that, in consequence of their great artistic difficulty, they were not delivered by the congregation, but by a special choir), are unquestionably the most perfect things we possess in independent vocal-music. Beside the richest application of a profoundly thoughtful art they shew a simple, forcible and often most poetic reading of the text in a truly Protestant sense. Moreover the perfection of their outward forms is so high and self-delimited, that nothing else in art excels it. But we find this genre still further magnified and widened in the great Passions and Oratorios. The Passion-music, almost exclusively the work of great Sebastian Bach, is founded on the Saviour's sufferings as told by the Evangelists; the text is set to music, word by word; but between the divisions of the [94] tale are woven verses from the Church's hymns appropriate to the special subject, and at the most important passages the Chorale itself is sung by the whole assembled parish. Thus the performance of such a Passion-music became a great religious ceremony, in which artists and congregation bore an equal share. What wealth, what fulness of art, what power, radiance, and yet unostentatious purity, breathe from these unique master-works! In them is embodied the whole essence, whole spirit of the German nation; a claim the more justified, as I believe I have proved that these majestic art-creations, too, were products of the heart and habits of the German people.

Church-music therefore owed alike its origin and consummation to the people's need. A like need has never summoned up Dramatic music, with the Germans. Since its earliest rise in Italy the Opera had assumed so sensuous and ornate a character, that in this guise it could not possibly excite a need of its enjoyment in the earnest, steady-going German. Opera, with its pomps of spectacle and ballet, so very soon fell into the disrepute of a mere luxurious pastime for the Courts, that in former times, as a matter of fact, it was kept up and patronised by them alone. Naturally also, as these Courts, and especially the German ones, were so completely severed from the people, their pleasures could never become at like time those of the Folk. Hence in Germany we find the Opera practised as an altogether foreign art-genre down almost to the end of the past century. Every court had its Italian company, to sing the operas of Italian composers; for at that time no one dreamt of Opera being sung in any but the Italian language and by Italians. The German composer who aspired to write an opera, must learn the Italian tongue and mode of singing, and could hope to be applauded only when he had completely denationalised himself as artist. Nevertheless it was frequently *Germans*, who took first rank in this genre as well; for the universal tendency of which the German genius is capable made it easy to the German artist to naturalise himself on a foreign field. [95] We see how quickly the Germans feel their way into whatever the national idiosyncrasy of their neighbours has brought to birth, and thereby win themselves a fresh firm stand-point whence to let their innate genius spread creative wings long leagues beyond the cramping bounds of Nationality. The German genius would almost seem predestined to seek out among its neighbours what is not native to its motherland, to lift this from its narrow confines, and thus make something Universal for the world. Naturally, however, this can only be achieved by him who is not satisfied to ape a foreign nationality, but keeps his German birthright pure and undefiled; and that birthright is Purity of feeling and Chasteness of invention. Where this dowry is retained, the German may do the grandest work in any tongue and every nation, beneath all quarters of the sky.

Thus we see a German raising the Italian school of Opera to the most complete ideal at last, and bringing it, thus widened and ennobled to universality, to his own countrymen. That German, that greatest and divinest genius, was *Mozart*. In the story of the breeding, education, and life of this unique German, one may read the history of all German Art, of every German artist. His father was a musician; so he too was brought up to music, apparently with the mere idea of turning him into an honest professional who could earn his bread by what he had learnt. In tenderest childhood he was set to learn the very hardest scientific branches of his art; he naturally became their perfect master as soon as boy; a pliant, childlike mind and intensely delicate senses allowed him at like time to seize the inmost secrets of his art; but the most prodigious genius raised him high above all masters of all arts and every century. Poor all his life to the verge of penury, despising pomp and advantageous offers, even in these outward traits he bears the perfect likeness of his nation. Modest to shamefacedness, unselfish to the point of self-oblivion, he works the greatest miracles and leaves posterity the most unmeasured riches, without [96] knowing that he did aught save yield to his creative impulse. A more affecting and inspiring figure no history of art has yet to shew.

Mozart fulfilled in its highest power all that I have said that the universality of the German genius is capable of. He made the foreign art his own, to raise it to a universal. His operas, too, were written in the Italian tongue, because it was then the only one admissible for song. But he snatched himself so entirely from all the foibles of the Italian manner, ennobled its good qualities to such a pitch, so intimately welded them with his inborn German thoroughness and strength, that at last he made a thing completely new and never pre-existing. This new creation was the fairest, most ideal flower of Dramatic music, and from that time one may date the naturalisation of Opera in Germany. Thenceforward national theatres were opened, and men wrote operas in the German tongue.

While this great epoch was in preparation, however, while Mozart and his forerunners were developing this novel genre from Italian music itself, from the other side there was evolving a popular Stage-music, through whose conjunction with the former at last arose true German Opera. This was the genre of German *Singspiel*, which, distant from the glare of Courts, sprang up in the people's midst and from its heart and customs. This German *Singspiel*, or *Operetta*, bears an unmistakable likeness to the older French *opéra comique*. The subjects for its texts were taken from the people's life, and mostly sketched the customs of the lower classes. They were generally of comic type, full of blunt and natural wit. The pre-eminent home of this genre was Vienna. In general it is in this Kaiser-city, that the greatest stamp of nationality has always been preserved; the gay and simple mind of its inhabitants has always been best pleased with what made straight for its mother-wit and buoyant fancy. In Vienna, where all the folk-plays had their origin, the popular *Singspiel* also thrived the best. The composer, indeed, would mostly restrict himself to *Lieder* and *Ariettas*; [97] however, one met among them many a characteristic piece of music, for instance in the excellent "*Dorfbarbier*," that was quite capable, if expanded, of making the genre more important in time, had it not been doomed to die out through absorption into the grander class of opera. This notwithstanding, it had already reached a certain independent height; and one sees with astonishment that at the very time when Mozart's Italian operas were being translated into German, and set before the whole public of his fatherland immediately after their first appearance, that *Operetta* also took an ever ampler form, appealing to the liveliest fancy of the Germans by an adaptation of folk-sagas and fairy-tales.—Then came the most decisive stroke of all: Mozart himself took up this popular line of German *Operetta*, and on it based the first grand German opera: *die Zauberflöte*. The German can never sufficiently estimate the value of this work's appearance. Until then a German Opera had as good as not existed; with this work it was created. The compiler of the text-book, a speculating Viennese Director, meant to turn out nothing further than a right grand *operetta*. Thereby the work was

guaranteed a most popular exterior; a fantastic fable was the groundwork, supernatural apparitions and a good dose of comic element were to serve as garnish. But what did Mozart build on this preposterous foundation? What godlike magic breathes throughout this work, from the most popular ballad to the sublimest hymn! What many-sidedness, what marvellous variety! The quintessence of every noblest bloom of art seems here to blend in one unequalled flower. What unforced, and withal what noble popularity in every melody, from the simplest to the most majestic!—In fact, here genius almost took too giant-like a stride, for at the same time as it founded German Opera it reared its highest masterpiece, impossible to be excelled, nay, whose very genre could not be carried farther. True, we now see German Opera come to life, but going backwards, or sickly into mannerism, to the full as quickly as it raised itself to its most perfect height.— [98] The directest imitators of Mozart, in this sense, were undoubtedly *Winter* and *Weigl*. Both joined the popular line of German Opera in the honestest fashion, and the latter in his "Schweizerfamilie," the former in his "unterbrochener Opferfest," proved how well the German opera-composer could gauge the measure of his task. Nevertheless the broader popular tendency of Mozart already loses itself in the petty, with these his copiers, and seems to say that German Opera was never to take a *national* range. The popular stamp of rhythms and melismata stiffens to a meaningless rote of borrowed flourishes and phrases, and above all, the indifferentism with which these composers approached their choice of subjects betrays how little they were fitted to give to German Opera a higher standing.

Yet we see the popular musical drama once more revive. At the time when Beethoven's all-puissant genius set open in his instrumental music the realm of daringest romance, a beam of light from out this magic sphere spread also over German Opera. It was *Weber* who breathed a fair warm life again into stage-music. In his most popular of works, the "Freischütz," he touched once more the people's heart. The German fairy-tale, the eerie saga, here brought the poet and composer into immediate touch with German folk-life; the soulful, simple German Lied was the foundation, so that the whole was like a long-drawn moving Ballad, attired in noblest dress of breeziest romanticism, and singing the German nation's fondest fantasies at their most characteristic. And indeed both Mozart's Magic Flute and Weber's Freischütz have proved with no uncertain voice that in this sphere German Musical Drama (*opéra*) is at home, but beyond it lie stern barriers. Even Weber had to learn this, when he tried to lift German Opera above those bounds; for all its beauty of details, his "Euryanthe" must be termed a failure. Here, where Weber meant to paint the strife of great and mighty passions in a higher sphere, his strength forsook him; his heart sank before the vastness of his task, he sought by toilsome painting-in of single features to make up for a [99] whole that could only be drawn with bold and vigorous strokes; thus he lost his unconstraint and became ineffective. (6) 'Twas as if Weber knew that he here had sacrificed his own chaste nature; in his Oberon he returned with the sad sweet smile of death to the Muse of his former innocence.

*Spohr* also sought to make himself a master of the German stage, but never could arrive at Weber's popularity; his music lacked too much of that dramatic life which should radiate from the scene. To be sure, the products of this master must be called completely German, for they speak in deep and piercing accents to the inner heart. They entirely lack, however, that blithe and naïve element so characteristic of Weber, without which the colour of dramatic music grows too monotonous and loses all effect.

The last and most important follower of these two we recognise in *Marschner*; he touched the selfsame chords that Weber struck, and thereby swiftly gained a certain popularity. But with all his innate force, this composer was powerless to keep erect that German Opera so brilliantly revived by his predecessor, when the products of the newer French school began to make such strides in the enthusiastic welcome of the German nation. In effect, the newer French dramatic music dealt such a crushing blow at German popular Opera, that the latter

may now be said to have wholly ceased to exist. Yet some further mention must be made of this last period, as it has exerted a most powerful influence on Germany, and it really seems as though the German after all would rise to be its master too. (7)

We can but date the commencement of this period from the advent of *Rossini*; for, with that brilliant audacity [100] which alone could compass such a thing, he tore down all the remnants of the old Italian school, already withered to a meagre skeleton of empty forms. His lustful-jovial song went floating round the world, and its advantages—of freshness, ease and luxury of form—were given consistence by the French. Among them the Rossinian line gained character and a worthier look, through national stability; on their own feet, and sympathising with the nation, their masters now turned out the finest work that any folk's art-history can shew. Their works incorporated all the merits and character of their nation. The delicious chivalry of ancient France breathed out from *Boieldieu's* glorious *Jean de Paris*; the vivacity, the spirit, wit, the grace of the French re-blossomed in that genre exclusively their own, the *opéra comique*. But its highest point was reached by French dramatic music in *Auber's* unsurpassable "Muet de Portice" [*Masaniello*],—a national-work such as no nation has more than one at most to boast of. That storm of energy, that sea of emotions and passions, painted in the most glowing tints, drenched with the most original melodies, compact of grace and vehemence, of charm and heroism,—is not all this the true embodiment of latter-day French history? Could this astounding art-work have been fashioned by another than a Frenchman? There is no other word for it,—with this work the modern French school had reached its apex, and with it the hegemony of the civilised world. (8)

Small wonder, if the impressionable and impartial German did not delay to recognise the excellence of these products of his neighbours with unassumed enthusiasm. For the German, in general, can be juster than many another nation. Moreover these foreign imports met a genuine need; for it is not to be denied that the grander genre of Dramatic music does not flourish in Germany of itself; and apparently for the same reason that the higher type of German, play has never reached [101] its fullest bloom. On the other hand it is more possible for the German, than for anyone else, on foreign soil to bring a national artistic epoch to its highest pitch and universal acceptance. (9)

As regards Dramatic music, then, we may take it that the Germans and the French at present have but one; though their works be first produced in *one* land, this is more a local than a vital difference. In any case the fact that these two nations now are stretching hands to one another, and lending forces each to each, is a preparation for one of the greatest artistic epochs. May this propitious union ne'er be loosed, for it is impossible to conceive two nations whose fraternity could bring forth grander and more fruitful results for Art, than the German and the French, since the genius of each of these two nations is fully competent to supply whatever may be lacking in the one or other.

## Notes

### Note 1 on page 5

Under the title of "De la Musique Allemande" this article originally appeared in the *Gazette Musicale* of July 12 and 26, 1840, forming Richard Wagner's earliest contribution to that journal.—Tr.

### Note 2 on page 6

To many a foreigner the above little picture may appear exaggerated; it is therefore particularly apropos that we read in a sketch of August Manns (*Musical Times*, March 1898) the following:

"August Friedrich Manns was born at Stolzenburg, a village near Stettin, in North Germany, March 12, 1825. His father was a glass-blower, with a pound a week and ten children, of whom August was the fifth. When the father returned from his day's work he would take down his fiddle from the wall and make music to his children. . . . At the age of six August was sent to the village school, where the day's work always commenced with a hymn sung from a figure-notation upon the ancient 'movable doh' system. In course of time the father's fiddle was augmented by another, a violoncello, and a horn, played by August's elder brothers, and later on by an old F flute, played by the future conductor of the Crystal Palace orchestra. . . . At the age of ten, August temporarily took the place of one of his brothers at the factory. . . . At the age of twelve he was sent to a school, kept by his uncle, at Torgelow, a neighbouring village. Here he became a musical pupil of Herr Tramp, the village musician. Up to this time the boy had been self-taught, and Tramp soon put him into the pathway of acquiring the proper fingering of both the flute and clarinet; but his chief instrument was the violin. As he had no means of buying an instruction book, he copied out the greater part of Rode, Kreutzer, and Baillot's book on the violin."

As this quotation deals with the very decad in which Wagner was writing, it is of peculiar interest in the present connection. A few lines farther in the *Musical Times* article, we read how at fifteen young Manns was apprenticed to Urban, the town-musician of Elbing, whose boys "were taught every instrument in the orchestra," and how "in his third year Manns played first violin in the string-band and first clarinet in the wind band of Urban's Town-band," which confirms a general statement of Wagner's a few pages ahead.—Tr.

### Note 3 on page 6

"One sees that the author was young, and not yet acquainted with our elegant modern music-Germany.—The Editor" (i.e. R. Wagner in 1871).

### Note 4 on page 6

"It would seem that in our days this grief and shame have been happily overcome.—Ed." (i.e. R. W. in 1871).

### Note 5 on page 6

"This was the actual experience of our friend at *Wurzburg* in his time, where, besides a full orchestra at the theatre, the bands of a musical society and a seminary gave alternate performances.—Ed." (R. W. in '71).

### Note 6 on page 11

"Methinks my friend would have learnt in time to express himself more guardedly on this

point.—Ed." (i.e. R. Wagner).

[Note 7 on page 12](#)

Evidently referring to Meyerbeer; for the master does not appear to have realised at this epoch that the composer of the *Huguenots* was not a German, but a Jew.—Tr.

[Note 8 on page 12](#)

"Mephistopheles: 'You already speak quite like a Frenchman!'—Ed." (R. W.).

[Note 9 on page 12](#)

A longish passage appeared in the French, between this sentence and the succeeding paragraph, as follows: "Haendel et Gluck l'ont prouvé surabondamment, et de nos jours un autre Allemand, Meyerbeer, nous en offre un nouvel exemple.—Arrivé au point d'une perfection complète et absolue, le système français n'avait plus en effet d'autres progrès à espérer, que de se voir généralement adopté et de se perpétuer au même degré de splendeur; mais c'était aussi la tâche la plus difficile à accomplir. Or, pour qu'un allemand en ait tenté l'épreuve et obtenu la gloire, il fallait sans contredit qu'il fût doué de cette bonne foi désintéressée, qui prévaut tellement chez ses compatriotes, qu'ils n'ont pas hésité à sacrifier leur propre scène lyrique pour admettre et cultiver un genre étranger, plus riche d'avenir et qui s'adresse plus directement aux sympathies universelles. En serait-il autrement quand la raison aurait anéanti la barrière des préjugés qui séparent les différents peuples, et quand tous les habitants du globe seraient d'accord pour ne plus parler qu'une seule et même langue?"—Tr.