**Chapter 1:**

**An Invitation**

How can one explain music?

I do not think it is actually possible, in the full sense of the word. Granted, one can play music and “mediate” or “explain” it. Yet this is a nearly impossible task, not only because no experience, of whatever kind, can ever be completely translated in all of its depth; but also because when it comes to music in particular, there is no need, and no real possibility, to explain something that was created with the intention of filling the void when words lose their meaning.

Music is the mother of all abstract arts. Great men and women have spoken of its sublime virtue and significance – philosophers, thinkers, and people of letters. But what is music to us, the artists? More specifically, to us performing artists?

This book can be thought of as an invitation.

An invitation to get to know music, its depths, and no less important, its torch bearers – the musicians, the artists. An invitation into the collective soul and mind that binds musicians together as a community, regardless of religious, national, cultural, or geographical differences.

This book concerns itself with common ground – that which binds and connects, in all senses of the word, musicians amongst themselves, and musicians with their audience.

The language of music, as with other art forms (certainly the abstract arts), assumes its form where words end. Among other things, this book will identify the elements of this language. At times, these elements are approached somewhat academically, dryly, from a distance. Yet in essence, they represent the profound, the tempestuous, and the enigmatic, and are the driving force at the core of this great phenomenon, music. I have sought to articulate the true substance of these elements in a manner that is not only intimate and inviting but that would unveil their true significance – the evocative power of music, its *eros.* In other words, this is not an invitation to understand professional musical terminology in a scholarly, pedantic way, but to dive into music’s veiled mysteries. To fathom its very possibility.

Writing this book required me to “translate” my spiritual mother tongue –music, into my cultural mother tongue – Hebrew. Both are dear to me, but the gap between them is not easy to bridge.

I did everything in my power to fulfill this task, but mediating between the world of pure spirit, an instinctive, some would say primal world, and verbal expression is essentially the task of a translator, a mediator.

The book provides a kaleidoscopic glimpse of us musicians – of a certain body of knowledge, scholars would say, but I argue that it is a glimpse of the metaphysical world that has been inhabited by musicians from all corners of the globe for centuries. People who, despite their differences and endless intrigues, have a unique affinity to one another, because the arrangement and interpretation of sounds create an unparalleled kind of intimacy and understanding. Naturally, this understanding is translated for and conveyed to the listener.

The proximity of us musicians to our composers, our “sages,”[[1]](#footnote-1) ties us together, creating yet another common language. To draw on Jewish thought, this language extends over two terrains: the space between composer and musician (as between God and man), and among fellow musicians (between man and his fellows).

The power of this intimacy among artists, and musicians in particular, is especially difficult to put into words. Yet in this book I try to achieve a portrayal, however incomplete, of its manifold expressions among musicians, its meaning in the world of art, and its effect on listeners.

This book is by no means academic or strictly musicological. I wrote it as an orator, but first and foremost as a performer, a soprano singer and orchestral conductor. As part of my training as a conductor, I delved into musical theory, whose work often overlaps with that of musical theorists. These elements are crucial for the understanding of music and are therefore featured in this book.

I did my best, then, to bring my personal, specific voice to the table, as a soprano and conductor, and to strike a balance between the role of the academic, detached observer, and that of the performer who breathes life into the music. As such, I have sought to paint a fuller picture from the inside, from the field, so to speak.

As I’ve already hinted, religion is likely the concept closest to how we, the artists, understand our vocation. In this respect, I find it important to distinguish between art, creativity, entertainment, and culture. It seems these concepts do indeed have a lot in common, but it is important to distinguish between them. Among other things, this book seeks to shed light on the nature of art, and on music in particular.

For this reason, while the book’s subject matter is music, a substantial portion of it can be applied to other arts, for shared elements among the arts are a commonplace phenomenon.

I believe it is our duty to protect the honor of art as best as we can – its intricacy, its depth and its purity.

This book is based on a series of lectures of mine entitled “Don’t Forget the Classics,” as part of a radio program of the “Broadcast University”.[[2]](#footnote-2) It was written with the goal of “explaining,” but also to convey the essence of music and of musicians.

The urge to share led to an aspiration that the book be as intelligible, approachable, and communicative as possible. Therefore, the principle of balance between maintaining the respective body knowledge (music) and the desire to be easily understandable served as an important compass.

Concurrently, as a means of bridging the distance between me and my readers, I have shared (perhaps to a greater extent than is the custom) aspects from behind the scenes, the inner workings of the musical world, what drives and shapes it. These are usually hidden from the public eye, but their significance cannot be overestimated.

Likewise, I have considered the connection between musicians and artists and the fields pertaining to them (the influence is often mutual), such as psychology, sociology, philosophy, and politics.

I made the decision to treat the radio lecture series as fertile ground from which this book could grow to stand alone, as a separate entity. Therefore, listeners who followed the radio program will undoubtedly find similar content here, but in a more expanded, in-depth adaptation. I have also introduced new topics and perspectives that were not covered in the program, so that the reading experience could be complete in its own right.

The book as a whole is dedicated to music and art lovers everywhere (by no means only the most well-versed among them), and for this reason I have also devoted some passages to the role and significance of the audience.

I invite you down this path, which may, at times, seem untrodden and tortuous, even elusive, for it winds through the layered depths of music as an abstract form. But precisely for this reason, it is there that the mysterious, the sublime is hidden. This challenge, presented by music, reaps a reward that no money can buy. I would not deny anyone the right to pursue it.

Where sophistication, subtlety, multitudes, passion, and mystery are to be found, *eros* too can be found, as can artistic creation in all its glory.

On this note, I invite you, dear readers, to immerse yourselves in this book, which I have written partly from the mind, but mostly from the gut, from the heart.

**Chapter 2:**

**Apéritif**

*Don’t Forget the Classics* is a book about Western classical music.

It goes without saying that other cultures have also developed classical musical traditions that are impressive, multifaceted, and complex. There is classical Arabic music, classical Indian music, and many more. Unfortunately, the scope of this book is limited to Western art music. We shall discuss a number of questions regarding this musical tradition:

**What are classical music’s characteristics?**

**Who are classical musicians?**

**Is music something that can be “understood”?**

**Can there be humor in classical music?**

**When we consciously observe music, do we perhaps “tarnish” our experience?**

**Musicians: A Species unto Themselves**

But first, a little bit about us, the musicians:

Musicians can be divided into several sub-species, allowing, of course, for some overlap. Inevitably, some musicians alternate between roles. At the same time, a basic level of knowledge is essential for all of them. This knowledge concerns mostly repertoire (the musical canon), the history of music and its underlying doctrines, and musical theory. That said, musicians may be divided as follows:

**Performing musicians** – singers, instrumentalists, but also (!) conductors. All are musicians, that is, people who have honed their performance expertise for years and years and acquired a diverse set of technical (instrumental), musical and theoretical (aural) and artistic skills. This musicianship, for which they have been trained from a young age, is exhibited on stage.

The lion’s share of this knowledge is passed down through the generations, from teacher to student. Instrumentalists and singers can have a solo career or be part of an orchestra, a choir, or an ensemble. Often, a musical career involves a combination of all three, such as, for example, when an orchestra player occasionally takes part in an ensemble or performs as a soloist. But mostly, a “glamorous” solo career does not leave room for anything else, at least not on a regular basis.

**Composers** – this is rather straightforward. In our day and age, it is not imperative that they also be performing artists, but in most cases, they will have specialized in a particular instrument and often also perform.

**Musicologists[[3]](#footnote-3)** – music scholars who are part of the academic world. Musical research encompasses many fields, most prominently the following: the history of music, theoretical research (of music itself, as a language), and ethnomusicology – the documentation and research of music that does not fall under the category of Western classical music. Ethnomusicological research often also pertains to the cultural aspects of the music it examines. A substantial part of this discipline involves recording and field work. An example of an ethnomusicological study can be found in the recording and analysis of prayer customs in Tunisian Jewish communities. Beyond these, there are numerous fascinating research fields in musicology that correspond to the disciplines of psychology, philosophy, and sociology – such as psychoacoustics, music and ethics, and more recently, music and gender.

Composers and conductors have much in common with those often called “theorists.” As mentioned, some musicologists also research musical theory. To be clear, theoretical knowledge and analytical faculties are indispensable to any professional musician. But composers and conductors must acquire an especially high level of musical erudition as part of their training. This does not mean that they will necessarily have a better-developed musical ear than instrumentalists. But their line of work requires an extremely high level of aural skills.

Are there bassoonists who are also brilliant musical theorists? Absolutely! Are there pianists who are also composers? Absolutely! Are there composers who are also musicologists? Absolutely! Is it possible to build a successful, prolific career as a performing artist alongside an academic career as a musicologist? That’s a different question. But a successful performing artist will inevitably have a solid base of historical and analytical musicological knowledge.

Professional musicians everywhere – performing artists, composers and musicologists – share a common language and can discuss the musical canon to various extents. Every “sub-species” of musicians possesses a unique and valuable perspective.

Does a musician’s official role necessarily determine the extent and nature of his or her knowledge? In many cases, the answer is no. For example, a few of the most prominent theorists are to be found among performing artists. This is no coincidence, for theoretical analysis and research is ultimately meant to find its expression, at least in part, in the music itself – that is, in its performance.

**What’s on the Program?**

The book’s respective chapters can be read as free-standing sections. Nevertheless, chapter 4 (“The Performing Artist – Is There Even Such a Thing?!”), includes a terminological-methodological blueprint of sorts, which lays the foundation for the treatment of various material in subsequent chapters, most notably chapter 6 (“Comparing Vocal Performances”), chapter 7 (“Classical Music and Humor?!”), and chapter 8 (“One Chopin, Three Performers”). Appended to chapter 4 is a glossary reviewing the basic professional terminology introduced throughout the chapter, so that these can be found easily, at the reader’s convenience.

Throughout the book, we will discuss the art of performance. We will trace the freedoms and confines of the performing artist and compare different performances of the same piece in order to grapple with the polyvalence of the musical work; how it can be interpreted in many different ways and how individual artists can take it in different directions, each evoking a unique artistic-emotional experience.

In chapter 4 (“The Performing Artist – Is There Even Such a Thing?!”), we will also discuss the inner reality and essence of performing artists, exploring the characteristics and dispositions of this group. We will focus mostly on the school of performance whose goal it is to **serve** art. Of course, not at the cost of self-denial, but through a personal connection with the (musical) text. That is to say, through searching for the music within oneself and merging its essence with one’s own. Artists of this kind will not impose musical choices – whether as a show of skill or for any other reason – that do not spring from the piece itself. In other words, we will focus on artists who do not view the musical work as a platform for flaunting their own feathers, at least not at the expense of the piece itself or its nature and purpose. And so, we will learn how the human virtue of humility is immensely important for artists, in that it promotes artistic and professional integrity. And indeed, I should mention that I place great value on this virtue. We will examine how humility allows the artist to mediate between the composer and the audience.

In “Classical Music and Humor?!” (chapter 7), it will become clear that even classical music is no stranger to humor, sarcasm, and the best kind of self-deprecation. Many musical pieces work just as well even when the “punchline” is lost on the listener. Yet revealing these added layers of sophistication undoubtedly enriches the listening experience and renders the humorist endeavor as a whole worth-while. So, there is definitely a place for humor, and we will grant it proper consideration.

Is it even possible to acquire the tools necessary for listening to music consciously, sensitively and knowledgably? Absolutely. But it requires no small amount of time, investment, and patience. In this book, I hope to help you acquire the skills for this type of listening, to help you get closer to the inspired, ultimate experience.

In this respect, I would like to provide a glimpse into different dimensions of the musical world that offer a new sort of experience. What do I mean by a “new sort of experience”? Professor Dalia Cohen (may she rest in peace), a recipient of many awards including the prestigious Israel Prize and a great musician who, over the course of three or four generations influenced scholars, musicians, performers, theorists, composers, teachers and many others (and will undoubtedly continue to do so for generations to come), was a dear teacher and friend who argued that experience and contemplation are two complementary concepts – perhaps even opposites that complete one other.

**Experience** encompasses our reaction to music – or to any occurrence. It emerges spontaneously from within, without us controlling or directing it in any way. In other words, experience embodies the process initiated within us by mere exposure to a particular occurrence, in our case, to music.

**Observation**, on the other hand (a concept I will simplify for our intents and purposes), concerns our ability to look on from a distance and involve our cognitive faculties. An example would be our ability to analyze a particular piece or performance from different angles. When we “observe,” we make use of our analytical cognitive skills.

I might add that in my personal view, Prof. Cohen could very well have chosen different terminology and named this latter process “analysis” or “interpretation.” I believe her choice of the word “observation” is quite significant, for it implies respite, contemplation; it denotes the act of looking, but also comprehension and wisdom. And here I will add something rather astonishing: according to Prof. Cohen, observation is an experience in its own right. Both the spontaneous experience and the one born out of observation are joined together to create a new, well-rounded listening experience. This is why Prof. Cohen referred to them as complementary opposites. Each one empowers and enriches the other, resulting in the complete, ultimate experience of the listener. A substantial portion of this book concerns, directly or indirectly, the notion of observation. By delving into this concept, I seek to deepen and enhance the listening experience for the reader.

From time to time, I will make use of professional terminology. I promise, this is no cause for alarm. These terms carry manifold, complex meanings, which I will have to somewhat simplify for the purposes of the discussion. Nevertheless, I wish to demonstrate how musicians communicate, how they conduct professional discourse, how they analyze their artistic world. Even if some terms will not be immediately understood, nor lend themselves to a clear, straightforward explanation, I chose to use them so as to pay due respect to the vast body of theoretical knowledge that is at the foundation of the musical language; furthermore, they offer an added dimension wherewith my claims and interpretation can be understood. It bears repeating: this book is **by no means** **intended for professionals only**, and in essence covers aspects of the musical world that are accessible to all – to anyone with an active curiosity.

**Classical Music – Is it Really a Bubble?**

As mentioned above, classical music is a vast, abundant universe. Beyond the theoretical, professional, spiritual, and cultural knowledge it encapsulates, it is a world unto itself with its own inherent properties, interacting with the world around it, affecting it and responding to it. Some would say that it is no less than a civilization unto itself! We will try to examine certain aspects of this world from a sociologically inclined perspective. For example, conducting: in chapter 5 (“Conducting – Is it Really Necessary?”) we will discuss what a conductor is and why this profession is required at all. But beyond this, we will inquire whether conductors can, or should, continue as they always have? More generally, are conductors relevant in our day and age? What do they actually do? Why are there so few female conductors? A separate chapter will be devoted to the broader issue of gender: chapter 9 (“Music and Gender – Where Do We Go from Here?”)

In chapter 3 (“When Critics Miss the Mark”), I will use the opportunity to discuss the establishment of musical criticism within its broader context, beyond that of journalistic critics, who usually stand at the heart of these discussions. We will turn the tables a little, and look into a few interesting case studies where great critics missed the mark with respect to masterpieces.

Critics, conductors, the classical music canon, composers, musical humor, performing artists and their responsibilities, interpretations, and scope – all of these will be covered in the chapters to come.

**Chapter 3:**

**When the Critics Miss the Mark**

When a young artist becomes a favorite among the critics, this usually means he or she wins valuable support in one of the most exposed, tortuous, obstacle-ridden, and difficult areas in a musician’s career. However: what fate befalls an artist whose work attracts harsh criticism, indifference, oppression, or derision?

There are indeed educated critics who draw on a rich cultural and artistic wellspring and who have acquired professional knowledge and skill through years of hard work. Such critics are capable of producing a worthy, tasteful critique grounded in sound argumentation. In some countries, there are academic diplomas and degrees providing a professional seal of approval for the critic’s profession. Yet there are also critics who have no background in the arts and did not necessarily receive relevant artistic and professional training. The question arises, then, what is the critic’s role and what does it entail? What are our expectations from this profession and what skills are required in order to meet them? Is a critic an authority on professional matters? Does the critic essentially give voice to the audience? Does he or she do both?

The connection between the musical world (and the artistic world in general) and the institution of musical critique is strained and complicated, providing fertile ground for drama and intrigue. Throughout history, critics of all kinds had the power to throne and dethrone artists and masterpieces, birthing quite a few urban legends. One anecdote tells the tale of a critic who wrote a review of an event which, as it turned out, had been cancelled. Rumors abound concerning the vested interests, corruption, and intrigues infesting a field that can often seem “shady.”

It is important to note that not all critics assume their role “officially” as a profession. Teachers, family members, and others within the artist’s inner circle can have an immense, even fateful influence over the artist’s work.

How often have we heard stories of great singers whose teachers declared them unfit for the profession? Of parents who discouraged their children? Of composers, writers, and poets who were rejected by respectable publishers? There is no shortage of accounts of prodigies who failed to pass on to the next stage of a competition, or of brilliant minds, among them important composers, who were not admitted to leading academies but whose work left its mark on generations and well surpassed that of their peers (some of whom were hailed as rising stars but did not stand the test of time). These cases are so common, that an entire library can be dedicated to the topic.

On top of this, let us not forget the self-critique of the artists themselves and its far-reaching effect on their work. While self-critique can greatly discourage artists, it can also be incredibly constructive, diverting them from artistic pitfalls. A reasonable dose of self-critique is essential to any artist, but when it reaches certain degrees of negativity, it can become self-destructive and overwhelmingly disruptive. The other extreme is no self-critique at all; as a topic of investigation, both ends of the spectrum can fill volumes.

Critique, of whatever kind, has far-reaching implications. Beyond its contents, the manner in which it is articulated often exposes the true motivation behind it. This motivation is highly significant and can often shed light on the true meaning of critique, which often remains hidden. In this respect, critique exemplifies the relationship between “what” is being said and “how.” Substance and form, text and subtext.

In approaching the subject of critique, we must ask ourselves, is the critic’s point of departure constructive? Does the critic have the artist’s best interests at heart? Is the critique made with integrity, or is it meant to serve a “personal” vendetta? Does it serve a different objective altogether? Naturally, the situation can be more complex, accommodating different, sometimes contradictory elements.

“Objective” critique (inasmuch as it is possible to be objective in this field) can also be devastating if it is not well-intentioned, regardless of professional rigor. The other end of the spectrum – an overly “protective” review – can also harm the personal development of an artist.

In summary, the style, moderation or excess, context, and motivation of the critic all shape the nature and significance of his or her review.

The institution of critique is immensely complicated, as is any field pertaining to humans and run by humans, with all the implications that come with it. The interface between the institution of critique and music performance is perhaps the most complex of all, considering the vulnerability involved and the need for exposure (as will be discussed in chapter 4, “The Performing Artist – Is There Even Such a Thing?”). Words, as we know, have great power.

There are, of course, many critics whose reviews are professional, topical, and stand the test of time. But for now, we shall focus on the opposite case – incidents of critics who missed the mark, by a lot.

“**Nothing of a Symphonist”**

Through the ages, many musical masterpieces have been known to have been dismissed and derided by publishers, audiences, colleagues, family members, teachers, or critics. This phenomenon is not unique to music, of course, and is also present in other arts, such as dance, theater, cinema, and more. In Israeli culture, Ephraim Kishon fans surely recall his attitude towards the renowned critic Haim Gamzo, who won many an honorable mention in his writing, even leaving us the verb “to gamzo” (“ligmoz” in Hebrew).

It is a well-known fact that exceptionally innovative artists, whose unconventional work is ahead of its time, are often frowned upon by the establishment and by critics in particular.

The journey of an artist is not a simple one, and one can only hope that those who courageously endeavor to express their innermost feelings and longings will also possess the fortitude to face criticism, unpleasant as it may sometimes be. Often, this entails capabilities, even personality traits, that stand almost in direct contradiction to each other. Vulnerability and sensitivity to nuance is the lifeblood of the artist’s vocation; traits that I believe to be inborn, even if they can be honed. In contrast, the ability to remain indifferent and stand firm in the face of harsh criticism and, at least outwardly, be unaffected, is crucial to survival in the art world. “Thick skin” does not usually go together with “exposed nerves” that are sensitive and attuned to every stimulation. These traits, therefore, are almost incompatible.

For this reason, artists face grueling mental and professional challenges when dealing with critique. The combination of the two aforementioned traits (or the ability to accommodate them within the same psyche), is one of the biggest challenges in the life of an artist. Not to mention that sensitivity is an integral part of being an artist, while resilience in the face of criticism must be acquired and developed to counterbalance it, so as to be able to withstand inevitable blows down the road.

I will review two particularly fascinating examples of the reception of musical works, starting with the more famous of the two: Bizet’s (1838-1875) *Carmen*, which premiered in 1875. The opera tells the story of Carmen, a fiery, spirited gypsy who seduces and wins the heart of the soldier Don José. After he sacrificed everything to be with her, Carmen leaves Don José for the bull fighter Escamillo, a decision that ends in her tragic death. Carmen’s character symbolizes fickleness, nomadism, and lust, while Don José’s character represents antiquatedness, hierarchy and stability. *Carmen* came to be one of the most oft-performed operas of all time, beloved by audiences and the musical establishment alike. Léon Escudier, a music critic who carried considerable weight at the time, is known to have written the following in the journal L’Art Misical: “Dull and obscure… the ear grows weary of waiting for the cadence[[4]](#footnote-4) that never comes.”

It seems critics could not agree on the style of the opera, an ambiguity that angered and frustrated many of them. In fact, we know that the opera was the subject of harsh criticism even before its premiere, most notably at the casting stage, during which many rendered it “inappropriate.”

Bizet appears to have disappointed everyone involved – both those who expected a light, Offenbachian comedy, and those expecting a Wagnerian drama. The two styles corresponded to the two most popular European schools of opera at the time; the French (Offenbach) and the German (Wagner). Several critics argued the opera was “in between,” neither here nor there.

Yet one critique accused *Carmen* of “Wagnerism.” Indeed, there was reason to suspect some German stylistic influence in Bizet’s work. Being French, this meant Bizet had “contaminated” the national style. According to this critique, the German-inspired elements in Bizet’s work rendered it inaccessible to the French public of the 1870s, which did not take well to “foreign” culture. A recurrent claim was that too much emphasis was laid on the orchestra (supposedly a Wagnerian trait), which featured all too prominently in the score (by French standards).

Beyond the music itself, it seemed that the fiery, tempestuous romance depicted in *Carmen* was not quite tailored to the more “refined” tastes of the French. This too ostensibly had to do with Bizet’s German, that is, Wagnerian influence. Wagner’s operas are known for their bursting eroticism and for their representation of worldly, shrewd, and raw female sexuality. It is my belief, and one I share with many, that these elements offended critics’ sensibilities no less, and likely more, than the allegedly dense orchestration.

Importantly, this kind of critique substantially differs to those claiming that Bizet “lost both ways” by failing to follow a clear aesthetic regime, whether French or German. The recognition and characterization of musical styles have to do with musical prowess and do not concern “personal taste.” For this reason, the controversy surrounding *Carmen*’s compositional style begs the question of what professional criteria guided the critics’ judgment.

The criticism of *Carmen*’s Wagnerian influences was informed by cultural, and not merely aesthetic considerations. It did not just take issue with the music itself, that is, with its compositional craftsmanship and its relationship to the text, but rather concerned *Carmen*’s thematic content as an aesthetic and cultural phenomenon – moreover, its chances of winning over audiences and of meeting certain cultural and social standards. The opera was labeled immoral and accused of jeopardizing basic common values already at the first stages of its production.

Carmen is an unconventional heroine and a particularly fascinating character: a strong-willed, independent woman, most certainly for her time. An operatic heroine who, even at the harrowing scene of her murder, is not made out to be a victim of circumstance. She is shrewd, almost arrogant, to her very last breath. Something about her exudes mastery, pride, dominance. Not only that, she is acutely aware of her own sexuality and is not taken aback by it, on the contrary – her sexuality is an integral part of her identity. Carmen does not submit to the existing order, as opposed to many other operatic heroines (by way of comparison, one might argue that Carmen is the inverted image of the heroine of Giacomo Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*,[[5]](#footnote-5)whose storyline was written some years later, in 1898). Beyond a doubt, Carmen’s character challenged the conventions of its time, some would even say of our time. Carmen is bold, headstrong, determined, and dominant, traits conveyed not only in the character’s lines, but also in its musical representation. The opera as a whole and particularly the musical themes associated with Carmen’s character burst with desire, lust, and passion.

A survey of *Carmen*’s reviews yields that rare praise of the opera was entirely drowned out by an overwhelmingly hostile reception. *Carmen* was met with a cold shoulder, with a few rare exceptions. While the opera continued to be performed for some time, auditoriums were half empty. Presumably, the few who came were there for the scandal.

Interestingly, the audience too, like the critics, concerned itself with the social, scandalous elements of the opera rather than appraising its compositional and literary merit as a work of art. One could ask: was this implied by, even a direct result of the prevailing critical approach at the time? And another question, at which I’ve already hinted earlier: Is the critic responsible for developing the taste of the audience, for whose benefit reviews are ultimately written? Are critics able to divert the attention of the audience to particular elements in the piece, whether deliberately or inadvertently? Is it within their power to shape public opinion to such an extent that may influence the artists themselves, thus constituting an intervention (even if unintentional) in the artistic process? If so, let us take this question one step further and ask – does the critic’s sphere of influence extend to tectonic developments, such as the emergence or decline of entire artistic movements?

Bizet died three months after *Carmen*’s premiere, a mere few months before his 37th birthday. According to personal accounts, *Carmen*’s disastrous reception left him dejected and defeated. He died not knowing that his opera would become one the most popular and beloved works of all time, among artists and audiences alike.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The second example I chose for the nature and significance of critique is Gustav Mahler’s (1860-1911) first symphonic work, the symphonic poem in D major that later became known as his first symphony. Like *Carmen*, this work was not well received upon its premiere, even eliciting catcalls from the audience. A renowned critic, who also happened to be a close friend of Mahler’s, said the following: “You are a fine conductor Gustav, but you are nothing of a symphonist.”

One can imagine how difficult this must have been for Mahler, whose identity as an artist – dare I say, as a person – was largely defined by his work as a composer. Mahler made several revisions to the score, added a descriptive program for the audience and temporarily gave it the title “Titan.” Did he do so in response to the critical reception of his work? I don’t know. I quote Michael Kennedy’s book on Mahler: “…its first Vienna performance on 19th November 1900 ended in pandemonium. What hurt Mahler most was that the Philharmonic Orchestra, ‘which is able to understand my work better than anyone else, deserted me at the end of the concert. The musicians positively rejoiced at the fiasco and averted their faces to hide the malice in their eyes.’”[[7]](#footnote-7) This, according to Kennedy. Mahler had conducted the Vienna Philharmonic for years, and, to greatly understate the case, was not always in its good graces.[[8]](#footnote-8) And here we see a new kind of critique with which the conductor or soloist must contend: the kind coming from the performers, in this case the orchestra and its members.

It is important to consider Mahler’s assertion that the orchestra was “able to understand my work better than anyone else”: Mahler is referring here to the intimacy formed between musicians, in this case, between the conductor and the members of the orchestra. Such intimacy holds great value in the life of an artist.

This shared understanding which Mahler speaks of is immensely important and can give us something of an idea of the artist’s emotional make-up and the connections forged between musicians. When Mahler wrote his first symphony, he first and foremost (as I understand it) shared his inner world with his orchestra, and only later with audiences and critics. This is how our world works. The partnership at the foundation of artistic creation is an intimate one. Performing musicians were the first to get a glimpse of Mahler’s work, which was essentially an expression of something deeply personal. This initial setup is experienced by the composer as an exposed vulnerability. Moreover, as musicians, the orchestra members speak the composer’s language – they have the means to understand it, as they feed on the same substance, so to speak. Therefore, the emotional vulnerability of an artist in face of performers is twofold: first, they are equal partners in the realization of his work – which is an intimate expression of him as a person – and must become “one” with it; second, they are the first to gain access to the piece, likening them to confidantes.

This situation exposes the composer at his or her most vulnerable in more ways than one – both in terms of the emotional-compositional content shared with the performers, and in terms of the long-awaited “feedback” they offer and the yearning for a sympathetic ear. It is a bitter kind of disappointment to realize, as a composer, that those trusted with the performance of your work, those best equipped to understand it, fail to do so. It would not be an overstatement to say that to some artists, being let down in this way is akin to betrayal.

For artists, music (or any other art) is often the very heart of life, if the two can at all be considered separately. That is to say, their art is the very essence of their existence and all other aspects of life form around it. When people share this life experience, it can give rise to the most intimate kind of kinship. Musical collaboration in particular is singular in a way which I think cannot be simulated in any other setting.

Unlike Bizet, who died shortly after *Carmen*’s premiere, Mahler lived and wrote for many years thereafter. To our great fortune, this experience did not dishearten him, and he went on to compose an immense and diverse repertoire of Lieder, chamber music, and of course, numerous symphonic works. The first symphony’s rough beginning did not prevent Mahler from writing another nine (although the last one, his tenth, was never completed), in addition to “The Song of the Earth,” a symphonic work by any standard (but not counted as a symphony) scored also for an alto (or baritone) and a tenor.

Mahler is without a doubt one of the most important and admired musicians in the history of music, both among audiences and among professional musicians, not least thanks to his symphonic compositions. Therefore, it can be said with confidence that the critic who rendered Mahler “nothing of a symphonist” has certainly been proven wrong. Not only that, Mahler’s work also stood the test of time.

Bizet’s *Carmen* and Mahler’s first symphony did not just persevere over a century after their conception, they are among the most oft-performed and -discussed works among performers, scholars, and audiences, and certainly rank among the most important achievements of these two composers, and in the musical canon at large. Each stands as an outstanding example of its genre, one an opera, the other a symphony.

Do these examples discredit the entire institution of critique? Is standing the test of time the only meaningful indication of a work’s quality? Perhaps, the role of the critic is not to assess the quality of a work of art, but to reflect the taste of the public and evaluate the work’s chances for success and for long-term survival? And speaking of the nature of the critic’s profession, is critique only telling of its object, or does it also reveal something about its author – his or her education, taste, views, and skills?

As for the composers – did Bizet and Mahler pay a price for being ahead of their time? No less important – are there any unacknowledged masterpieces buried under decades, or even centuries of rubble after having been rejected by a critic? Could the musical world even have lost great composers or performers who could not withstand the emotional impact of harsh, unjust, or unethical critique?

**Chapter 4:**

**The Performing Artist – Is There Even Such a Thing?!**

How much freedom, if any, does the performing artist have? If the notes and performance instructions are predetermined, the Zeitgeist and the composer’s personal style widely known – what individual choice, then, is left to the performer? And what renders him or her an “artist,” if at all? Could it just be a fantasy of ours, narcissist performers, to be considered artists? A fantasy entirely divorced from reality?

I will try my best to provide answers – but it is important to consider that just the act of raising these questions is meaningful in its own right. Reflecting on the performing artist’s role implies a critical approach that can help us appraise the performances we come across in greater depth. When questions get asked, opportunities abound. Granted, many a wise man has said, “For in much wisdom is much grief.” Nevertheless, such an inquiry could also bring with it much benefit by unveiling a realm of no small proportions that could then enrich and enhance our listening experience.

As we learned in the ‘Apéritif’ chapter, in addition to our spontaneous experience, over which we have (by and large) no control, we also contemplate the performance from afar when we listen to a musical piece, seeking to identify and gain insight into its different properties. As discussed by Prof. Dalia Cohen, the terms “observation” and “experience” are contrasting elements that complete each other, and whose marriage provides a fuller listening experience.

Let us delve more deeply into the idea of observation. First, at the risk of being repetitive, music is a language. Achieving proficiency in this language requires years of hard work. This process involves acquiring a wide variety of skills – technical, theoretical, cognitive, and emotional. It is difficult to differentiate between these skills as a whole and playing an instrument, for the two are closely interlinked. Along with the many pillars of knowledge amassed by classical musicians throughout their lives (this usually also implies a rich cultural legacy beyond pure musicianship, including literature, poetry, theater, history, and more), musicians must also be versed in different musical periods and styles. Professional musicians constantly debate, deliberate, and consider how best to adapt their performance to the period in which the piece was written, as well as to its particular compositional style. This musical proficiency as a whole – technical, periodical, cultural, and stylistic – conjoins with the performer’s personal taste. All of this comes together to produce an informed, meticulous performance – which is at the same time individualistic.

What, then, is meant by “personal taste”? What accounts for the performing artist’s individual expression? This is the crux of the matter. Beyond the layers of knowledge gradually accumulated throughout a proficient musician’s life, there are personal choices undertaken by the performer within the limits of what is considered “acceptable.”

For example: there are, indeed, instructions indicating the required volume in which different notes should be played. But when a composer writes *forte (f)*, how loud do they mean exactly? The instruction does not specify decibels. Another example has to do with pace, such as slowing down in a performance. What should the deceleration curve be? This too is not specified.

This range of choice, which may appear petty and trivial to an onlooker, is vital to our craft. As mentioned, artists are sensitive creatures, attuned to nuance. Sophisticated art is founded, among other things, upon such sensitivities. To resort to a cliché – “God is in the details.” The manifestation of these “details,” these sensitivities, affects the experience of the listener even without them ever being made aware of it, which is precisely why they are so important.

This range of choice, along with specific emotional and aesthetic attributes of the performer, is referred to in professional jargon as “interpretation.” Interpretation is a central concept in classical music (as in other performing arts) and could justify an entire book on its own.

For our intents and purposes, I will divide the realm of interpretive choice in professional performance, i.e. interpretation, into three types. These are either overt or covert. Some consist of parameters that are identifiable or measurable, while others… less so.

**The Overt: How, and How Much**

The first kind of choice concerns “how much”: objective measures that, compared to other parameters, are audibly identifiable. The ability to distinguish between them subtly and accurately can be acquired. In order to explain these measures, let us go back to two concepts I mentioned previously and expand on them: the first has to do with pace (not to be confused with rhythm), referred to as “**tempo**” in professional jargon – the speed in which the music is played. This overarching category encompasses many possibilities, as shown in the following examples: the first is a sudden change of pace, from slow to fast or vice versa – how big the difference between the two tempos? Another example, which I mentioned earlier, concerns the gradual change of pace, as signified by *accelerando* or *piu mosso*, which denote acceleration, or deceleration, as indicated by *ritardando* or *ritenuto*. The precise curve of this change can be critical to determining the quality and emotional effectiveness of a performance.

Beyond pertaining to speed, tempo also indicates the character and atmosphere of the piece or movement. Often, a musical passage can be played in a speed identical to that of another but will nevertheless sound markedly different. The atmosphere and character conveyed can also affect the sense of time. As performing musicians, we can play something at a slow tempo but in a sprightly, forward-moving manner so that it is hardly experienced as slow (by listeners and artists alike). On the other hand, we could perform the same piece at the same slow tempo, but somberly, thus completely changing how its pace is perceived. This is but one reason why a robot capable of “producing” or recreating meaningful art – a complex, decidedly human phenomenon – has yet to be invented.

Another parameter that is relatively easy to identify is **dynamics***,* or volume: how loudly or softly something is played, and, again, the gradation whereby the volume is increased (*crescendo*), or decreased (*diminuendo*), as well as the scale.

Even within the limitations of performance instructions, there is, then, a range of possibility. Here too, it is important to stress that dynamics are a vast field unto itself, extending far beyond decibels, which could fill an entire chapter. At this stage, suffice to say that dynamics also concern the specific character of the sound, its intensity and timbre.

A bit on **timbre:** Professional musicians are especially attuned to timbre. Often, we can hear a soft *piano* (*p*) sound with a very intense, “warm” timbre. On the other hand, we can hear a loud *forte* (*f*) that rings round and luminous, in a manner that may seem at odds with high decibels. Therefore, dynamics extend well beyond volume. Many musicians think in terms of timbre (for some, this translates into something visual, for others, it is associated with temperature, etc.). This enables them to communicate their interpretation and musical vision when collaborating with other musicians.

As a conductor, I often asked musicians to play a certain note more warmly, or darkly. Sometimes explicitly – “if possible, a warmer sound in bar X please…” – or indirectly, by employing technical measures that help achieve the required result. As an example, a certain section, such as the celli (plural of cello), may be requested to play a given note on a particular string (there is often more than one option), which would produce the required timbre without the conductor using related terminology.

Importantly, choices of dynamics and tempo in classical music are often manifested in subtle nuance. However, while these parameters are “objective” and measurable (to a point), it is important to stress that to a more sensitive ear, these nuances are far from marginal, amounting to one of the most significant, prominent components of a performance.

This is partly why listening to complex art music (Western classical in our case), requires a certain level of vigilance from the listener. Dedication. Skilled and attentive listening yields a particular atmosphere and energy, resulting in a singular experience (as in unique to a particular performance, at a particular time and place. The issue of monumentality will be discussed further on).

The other type of interpretive choice concerns the “how”: this includes issues such as articulation, texturing, balance, and many others that occupy professional musicians. Distinguishing between them requires a relatively high level of proficiency. Nevertheless, people who are not trained musicians and do not swim freely in music’s “territorial waters” can also be moved and captivated by these interpretive elements, however tacit. That is to say, these parameters are highly significant to the listening experience, even if they seem inconspicuous.

We will demonstrate this through the example of piano playing.

**Articulation –** this pertains to the wide range of possibilities at the pianist’s disposal with regard to how he or she depresses and releases the keys. This range extends from “striking” the key rather “harshly,” to “smearing” the sound smoothly. The manner in which notes are linked can also range between a soft transition (*legato*), to abruptly ending notes or clearly separating between them (staccato, marcato).

**Balance** – the pianist’s choice to bring out a certain note or notes within a chord[[9]](#footnote-9) or any other note aggregation, such as a cluster. Balance can also manifest itself in the pianist’s choice to bring out a specific line or phrase within a complex musical texture.

**Use of Pedals[[10]](#footnote-10) –** in most cases, how, and even when to use the pedals is a choice left to the performer.

Each of the parameters falling under either of the two categories I described – dynamics, tempo, balance, articulation, texturing, pedal, and more – is a universe unto itself, constantly discussed and dissected by professional musicians. Sometimes, these parameters introduce difficult dilemmas, of the kind that can even keep you up at night.

**The Covert: a Journey to the Sublime**

The third and final type of interpretive choice pertains to music’s more enigmatic aspects. Even experts struggle to name these precisely, or to even put their finger on them. They consist of many different elements, some conspicuous and some hidden to the naked eye – or ear, rather. The character, temperament, sensitivity, energy, education, cultural legacy, and of course personal taste of the performer, along with his or her emotional depth, are interwoven into the written notes. Beyond these there is also the question of how the performer’s soul connects to the language and inner world of the composer, through a deep familiarity with the piece. All of the above combine into a unique performance, one that will become engraved in our memories.

A fresh reading of the piece, an inquiry after its hidden meaning if you will, which has originality and allows us to see a familiar work of art in a new light, are what shapes a performance that emanates what we yearn for most – a kind of magic.

**An intimate triangle**

At this stage in our inquiry it would be beneficial to ponder the meaning of an “adequate performance,” as opposed to a “good” or “moving” performance.

A “correct” or “adequate” performance is one that respects tradition and the composer’s intentions, that is, the intention represented in the musical text and the conventional wisdom of the classical music tradition – together, of course, with skill and proficiency, as well as the other parameters I mentioned with reference to education and cultural breadth. This, as opposed to a performance oblivious to the spirit of the piece, the composer, or the period, and which does not live up to professional standards.

Before we can explain the experience of being moved, we must wait awhile and first turn to another aspect that will assist our understanding. I believe many underplay or altogether avoid discussing this aspect, namely the listener’s “role.” In addition to the enormous responsibility of the composer and performer, the audience or listener also holds the keys to a fuller experience.

The experience of the audience should be seen, like any artistic experience, as a form of active involvement. An audience is indispensable to any artistic event and necessarily has agency in their own ability to “experience.” For this reason, the listening experience comes with responsibility that can be broken down into several elements, some of which are under our control – such as knowledge, learning, artistic legacy, a commitment to further develop oneself, and more. But it also requires mental availability, openness, intellectual integrity, and not least – the emotional capacity to open up to another’s world (in our case, the performer and the composer). This mental state of availability and dedication is necessary in order to absorb the piece in all its wealth. In some respect, and to use a somewhat erotic metaphor borrowed from the Kabbalah, the listener can be seen as a “female” entity actively absorbing the “male” abundance flowing in from the performing entity (which, as mentioned, intermingles with the abundance of the composer), blending this rich offering with its own inner fountains (its personal longings – cognitive, intellectual, and emotional), to the effect of a complete, well-rounded listening experience (of course, “male” abundance is not necessarily endowed by a man. Within the configuration of *sefirot* in the Kabbalah, the concepts of “male” and “female” are far broader and deeper than their binary gender categorization).

In the chapter ‘Apéritif’ I mentioned the distinction between entertainment and art. As stated, the two share many properties and sometimes even overlap. But the difference between these two concepts lies, in part, with the active participation of the audience on the one hand, and the intent behind the piece on the other: entertainment (from the Old French *entretenir*, which means to maintain or hold together, i.e., hold one’s attention) is often meant as a distraction, a means of forgetting ourselves and our desires. The entertainer strives to entertain, the audience to be entertained. In contrast, art implies the animation of the soul’s innermost elements. Its subtle longings are often hidden from us, as if yearning to merge with the artist’s intent, and, by means of this union, to “face” that which is more covert, laden with meaning, profound, or less “approachable” within the soul.

Ultimately, the listening experience amounts to a form of intimacy between all three: the composer, the performer, and the listener. Within this triangle, the listener is a side in his or her own right. What sort of triangle is this? An isosceles triangle? Equilateral? While this can be debated, I do have no doubt as to its being a triangle. David Grossman’s *Be my Knife* depicts a parallel, so-called love triangle. Does art qualify as love? Are the two entirely separate categories? To my mind, absolutely not – which is why I chose to quote the following lovely line: “A triangle is a rather stable form, Miriam once told me. And satisfying. And even enriching. On the condition that all sides know that they are sides in a triangle, she added.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

**Patterns and the Stimulation in Breaking Them**

Another important topic is patterns and deviations. According to Prof. Dalia Cohen, excitement is often the product of diverging from a pattern to which we have grown accustomed. Departing from the norm stimulates us. A sudden change or non-concurrence – such as an unexpectedly high-pitched note (a big leap, an upward “melodic interval” in professional jargon), or alternatively a high-pitched note played softly (*p*) in an overall loud area (*f*) – considering that we associate high pitch with loudness ­­– such instances cause surprise, and hence stimulation. Diverging from the pattern, from our expectations, is what animates us. We are all “outsmarted” by our brains. The brain internalizes patterns and responds with stimulation when they are broken, while we are left none the wiser. We have no control over our internalization of patterns, and accordingly we have no control over our excitement when these are broken. A significant part of our knowledge is unconscious, and the thrill we experience is often a direct result of this unconscious knowledge. A divergence can occur in terms of pitch or volume, as mentioned, but also in other parameters.

Prof. Cohen’s important and fascinating study also illuminates the gap between the emotional responses of people from different cultures and demonstrates why some deviations thrill or move us while others go entirely unnoticed. There are two types of patterns: **natural patterns and internalized patterns.** Natural patterns are universal, which means deviating from them will provoke a reaction from any human being, irrespective of where they were born or the culture to which they belong. Such deviations, to use simple examples, fall under the category of sudden change. Thus, a sudden change in volume (dynamics), such as a sudden loudness or softness, deviates from a natural pattern and is effective across cultures.

In what, then, do we differ from one another? In our localized cultural norms. As these change from culture to culture and are acquired over the course of our childhood, Prof. Cohen classifies them as internalized patterns. Even when they are not actively learned, cultural affiliation from birth will suffice to have them internalized. These norms are embedded into our consciousness as children without us noticing. This is why deviations from an internalized pattern will move the listeners of a particular culture while having no effect over others.

Internalized patterns pertain mostly to keys and harmony (concepts on which I will not be able to elaborate given the limited scope of this book). Arabic music, for example, can make use of deviations that a Western ear will scarcely be able to discern. Even in the event that they manage to identify them, Western listeners will likely remain unaffected. A familiarity with the maqamat,[[12]](#footnote-12) the foundation of Arabic music, is needed in order to appreciate such deviations and be moved by them.[[13]](#footnote-13)

What do deviations have to do with musical performance? Performing artists are more attuned and sensitive to patterns and deviations and are able (as is expected of them) to choose how to best express them with the tools at their disposal, some of which are listed above. There are many different ways to highlight a deviation: to glorify it, bring it out, “build up” to it, minimize it in some cases, or, in the extreme, disregard it altogether. Musical intelligence is a term used by connoisseurs. It is in part “natural” (inborn) but undeniably matures throughout the performing artist’s personal development, and is, to my mind, inextricably linked to the issue at hand.

**The Emotional Impact of a Powerful Performance**

I promised to discuss what makes a performance moving to me, what makes it “powerful.” One could say that all the components discussed above contribute to the performer’s ability to “touch” us. Yet I find that there are two other criteria needed for a truly moving performance. The first has to do with the performer’s personality. For me, in order to be moved, the performer I am listening to must have an interesting, compelling, fiery, colorful, vibrant personality, with a broad and well-development emotional range. A person who I feel has enough inner wealth in order to bridge between his or her vivid inner world and the artistic material he or she is interpreting.

The second criterion is nerve. As a performer, but also as a listener, I have come to recognize that the performances to have left the most lasting impression on me all had quite a bit of nerve. The nerve on the part of the performer to summon their innermost resources for the sake of connecting with the emotional and mental depths of the piece: the daring to expose and bring to light those inner, most personal reserves of the performing artist. There is a certain emotional generosity, and bravery, in a person’s willingness to “share” what they have, their inner, most secret longings, and to thus expose themselves in the deepest possible sense. An event of this kind, taking place in front of an audience, requires a willingness to expose oneself emotionally to no small extent, a vulnerable situation to be in by all accounts. That is why this sort of dedication requires an exceptional amount of nerve and candor, initially of the performer internally, and ultimately in their choice to run the “risk” of opening up to the audience.

When a vibrant, overflowing personality in possession of the professional integrity and skill I specified earlier is willing to open up emotionally – a certain, precious kind of connection with both the composer and the listener can occur: a focused kind of “intent.”

In addition, I once heard a renowned performing artist say that a musician who does not believe in God cannot be a musician. Without presuming to know precisely what he meant, I take the liberty to speculate that he, as I, sees music-making as an act directly tied to God’s creation. The beauty and power of music are so sublime that even the utter atheists among us artists are moved to the core and cannot help but feel that God plays a role in this wonder. A role without which this reality would not be possible. Furthermore, I assume (and this could just be my personal interpretation) that this artist saw music-making as an act that without pure, focused intent, without becoming one with what lies “beyond,” is not true to its name and does not fulfill its purpose.

The act of performance, and not just composition, is an act of creation. Music-making is considered by many musicians as the work of God.

This suggests another perspective on the above-mentioned triangle: creative artist – performing artist – audience: the first side, the creative artist, contains the artistic-emotional content of the piece and the composer; the second side, the performing artist, contains the performer’s professional skill, his or her personality as a performing artist, the willingness to express it and to draw on it in order to communicate the spirit of the piece. When these two sides merge, their union is brought forth before the listener (audience), and the result is art in its most profound and powerful.

And yet… what makes a performance monumental? The way I see it, and notwithstanding the detailed discussion above, we have yet to crack the code. We have achieved an impressive understanding thus far, but it remains engulfed in impenetrable, magical mystery.

**Glossary**

**The following are key terms appearing throughout the chapter, for quick reference as the need arises.**

**Tempo –** the pace: the speed in which the music is being performed.

Beyond pertaining to speed, tempo also indicates the character and atmosphere of the piece or movement. Often, a musical passage can be played in a speed identical to that of another but will nevertheless sound markedly different. The atmosphere and character conveyed can also affect the sense of time. As performing musicians, we can play something at a slow tempo but in a sprightly, forward-moving manner, so that it is hardly experienced as slow (by listeners and artists alike). On the other hand, we could perform the same piece at the same slow tempo, but somberly, thus completely changing how its pace is perceived.

**Dynamics** – the volume, how loudly or softly something is played. The spectrum between the softest and the loudest possible sound falls under dynamics.

**Piano –** soft.

**Forte** – loud.

**Crescendo**– a gradual increase in volume.

**Diminuendo** – a gradual decrease in volume.

**Timbre** – professional musicians are especially attuned to timbre. Often, we can hear a soft *piano* (*p*) sound with a very intense, “warm” timbre. On the other hand, we can hear a loud *forte* (*f*) that rings round and luminous, in a manner that may seem at odds with high decibels. Therefore, dynamics extend well beyond volume. Many musicians think in terms of timbre (for some, this translates into something visual, for others, it is associated with temperature, etc.). This enables them to communicate their interpretation and musical vision when collaborating with other musicians.

**Articulation** – the manner in which a sound is produced, and in which sounds are linked to one another: the spectrum encompassing the ways in which a singer or instrumentalist can strike, pluck, or blow a note, from “attacking” it “harshly,” to “smearing” it smoothly.

**Balance** – the relation between simultaneously sounding notes. For example, the choice to bring out certain notes in a chord, or a specific musical line or phrase within a complex musical texture.

**The principle of deviating from patterns** – stimulation or emotion is often induced by diverging from an established pattern (of which we may or may not be aware). We are taken by surprise at sudden change, such as an unexpected high-pitched note during a soft passage. We have very little control over our internalization of patterns, and as a result, over our emotional response to deviations.

**Chapter 5:**

**Conducting – Is It Really Necessary?**

Who, or what is the conductor? Why is there need for conductors at all? What is the purpose of the stick (baton) held by the conductor? What is the meaning of the conductor’s strange movements?

The following chapter covers these and other questions, but first, a note: we have grown accustomed to female bank managers, pilots, leading politicians, academics, and more, but the field of conducting, and specifically orchestra conducting, is still largely male dominated. Of course, there are female conductors, but a scarce few. Within the most prestigious musical circles, there is only a handful.

In some countries, such as the US, Germany, and Scandinavian countries, this glass ceiling appears to be cracking. But it cannot be denied that the world of conducting remains difficult to penetrate for women. Why? To be the maestro means to manage, to lead the performance. Such positions are still considered male. The work of the conductor does not take place behind closed doors but publicly, for all to see, which complicates matters further. On top of that, the classical music world is in many ways founded upon the preservation of the past. For all these reasons, we have only recently begun to see the female equivalent of the maestro, the maestra. As is appropriate for a topic of such weight and significance, a separate chapter will be dedicated to gender in classical music (Chapter 9, “Music and Gender – Where Do We Go from Here?”). This chapter will focus on the nature of the conductor’s profession.

**Who are the Conductors?**

Conductors are performing artists. The majority of conductors have specialized in a particular instrument, many of them with considerable success. In addition to their training as instrumentalists, conductors have a vast knowledge of music theory (at least, we would hope), and the most professional among them can undoubtedly be regarded as theorists, if not in the academic sense (generally, advanced academic degrees in music and other arts, especially the performing arts, do not necessarily attest to the level of prowess, as explained in the chapter “Apéritif.” Moreover, the knowledge required of a performing musician is largely acquired outside the walls of the academy). Put differently, being a good conductor, a skilled, well-rounded, and intriguing member of the trade, requires, in addition to a background in performance, expansive theoretical knowledge and a wide-ranging musical, cultural, and artistic skillset. However, I would like to reiterate that advanced theoretical knowledge is a central tenet in the education of any professional musician.

**Can Any Good Musician Conduct?**

Ideally, conductors should be highly skilled musicians, for beyond their own individual development, they are trusted with the direction of an entire musical establishment. In other words, in addition to the musical skill it entails, conducting essentially amounts to a form of leadership. Whether a small ensemble, a choir, or an orchestra, the conductor is responsible for the quality and development of the musical body under his or her direction. Performing musicians (instrumentalists or singers) are, of course, themselves professional musicians and are therefore not necessarily any less skilled, experienced, or professional than the conductor (in some cases, even more so). Yet every large organization needs someone with a strategic outlook who takes on the responsibility of navigating the ship (in our case, by way of musical interpretation) along with the decision-making this entails. The decisions required within a large organization – and an orchestra sometimes consists of dozens of members – cannot, usually, be made jointly by the sum of its parts. This is the job of the conductor.

**How Does the Conductor Work?**

Assembling a performance begins with the conductor’s first reading of the piece in solitude, hearing and interpreting it in his or her “mind’s ear.” It continues in the rehearsal room and ends on stage (or in the pit) with a performance led by the conductor in front of an audience, in real time.

The conductor has a score (musical text) including all the different instruments’ parts. The instrumentalists, however, do not usually see parts other than their own in their sheet music. This may be a mere technicality, but it symbolizes, in a way, that the conductor is the one holding the keys to navigating the performance.

It is important to stress that instrumentalists can be intimately acquainted with the piece as a whole, and often, their own ideas and interpretation can be just as insightful as the conductor’s. Nevertheless, in the context of working with an orchestra, the conductor determines the interpretation and nature of the performance. Among other things, this requires a very deep familiarity with the score – that is, to be aware, every single moment, of who is playing what and what requires the most attention (in purely professional, musical terms, but also in terms of the conductor’s own interpretation) within the overall, complex structure of an orchestral work.

**How Does the Conductor Approach the Score?**

In the first stage of preparing a performance, the conductor reads the score in its entirety (itself an immensely complicated task) with the aid of a piano and/or his or her inner ear. After developing a distinct interpretation, the conductor sets out to materialize it with the help of performing musicians – whether of an orchestra or a choir. Over the years, the leadership style of conductors has diversified. Different conductors are open to input from orchestra or choir members to varying degrees, with some conductors (a rare few) even renouncing any authority whatsoever with the argument that they in fact “invite” the musicians to play rather than instruct them on how to do so. Officially, however, the responsibility for the interpretation of the piece rests with the conductor, for better and for worse.

**Behind Closed Doors – What Happens in Rehearsals**

During rehearsals, the conductor’s job includes “making things clear,” that is: subtleties in the composer’s intention, and no less importantly, “structuring” the score according to his or her interpretation and understanding, musical education, and taste. As mentioned, a musician is supposed to base his or her interpretation on a deep understanding of the musical style and period in which a piece was written, as well as other aspects pertaining to music as a language. Skill, knowledge, insight, depth, and good taste – these are the foundations of any conductor’s interpretation. In this respect, conductors are no different than any other performing musician, whether a pianist, violinist, singer, etc.

In certain musical institutions, and particularly with regard to certain repertoires, a leading instrumentalist or group of instrumentalists can fulfill the function of conductor. This approach is becoming more and more common, especially in small chamber orchestras.

**On the History of Conducting**

In certain periods, the custom was to knock with a rod on the floor in order to signify the required tempo (beat). This rod appears to have been rather heavy. An anecdote from the 17th century tells of an important composer, Jean-Baptiste Lully, who accidently hurt his foot while using a conductor’s rod. The infection caused by this incident, it is said, even led to his death. As an aside, this story is often used to poke fun at conductors…

Around the 18th century, and increasingly during the 19th, which saw the considerable expansion of the orchestra (and the rod, as it happened, was not only noisy, but also dangerous), the conducting profession emerged as we know it today. During this time, it was usually the composer or a lead instrumentalist who was trusted with leading the performance. Yet in the 19th century, a paradigm shift in how this role was defined resulted in the concept of the conductor as an entity “in its own right,” set apart from other musical identities (such as composer or instrumentalist). Key figures in this respect are Gustav Mahler and Richard Wagner, both of whom tended to their image as interpreting conductors, irrespective of their careers as composers or performers. The famous composer Berlioz also wrote on the topic in his article 'Le Chef D'Orchestre: Théorie de son art.‘

**Is the Role of Conductor Similar to That of Arranger?**

An arranger is responsible for the reorganization of a piece (or song, for that matter). As such, they must maintain the original work’s musical integrity, while exercising certain liberties regarding the work’s spirit and style.

The conductor’s profession does not include arrangement. Per definition, a conductor is not required to train as an arranger or composer, considering the specialization of the conducting profession. Nevertheless, there are conductors who are also arrangers and composers, just as there are pianists, singers, or other instrumentalists who are also theorists or composers. That is to say, classical musicians often alternate between two or more roles. Sometimes one is more prominent than the other, sometimes not. In music that is considered “popular,” however, arrangements are often an inherent and natural part of the conductor’s job.

**Are Conductors Like Directors?**

As mentioned, core issues in the work of a conductor belong to the interpretive realm, such as aesthetic and stylistic choices (as with any performing musician). Over the years, I found that the comparison between conductors and choreographers or directors is useful to explain the conductor’s role. Yet unlike directors and choreographers, conductors often flourish on stage and are performers in every sense of the word. As we know, the conductor’s job is not confined to rehearsals but extends to the performance itself. Directors or choreographs are trusted with the reading and interpretation of a given work and responsible for the rehearsal process and directing the performing ensemble, just like conductors, but they do not perform on stage as part of their job description. Of course, a choreographer can also be a dancer, but this is not an inseparable part of his or her job. Conductors, on the other hand, are performing artists, and going on stage is an inherent part of their profession. The conductor is essential during a performance, both in order to intimate in real time what was decided in the rehearsal process, but also to “get the train back on track” in the alarming event of a derailment. But the conductor’s presence is not only needed in case of emergency. He or she is there in order to continue to provide interpretive guidance, or to put it more loftily – to give the orchestra inspiration.

**How Much Freedom Does the Conductor Have on Stage?**

Spontaneity can indeed play a crucial role in a performance. Previously, we described the art of performance, its complexity, and to what extent it is the product of a specific time and place. Being human, our emotional-mental state is naturally subject to change. Moreover, we are greatly affected by the spirit of the work itself. In fact, as professional musicians, we are expected to “become one” with it.

Unlike other arts, such as, for example, improvisation (which too can be subjected to certain “rules”), the art of interpretation in Western classical music relies on pre-determined choices. Nevertheless, it still allows for some spontaneity, especially on the level of nuance – that is, minor changes. As established, a performance is shaped, to varying degrees, by many different parameters, including mostly interpretation and expertise, but also the mental-emotional state of the performer at a given time. For this reason, it is very difficult, nigh impossible, to perfectly reenact a particular performance.

**Is the Reenactment of a Performance an Artistic Act?**

A good way to approach this topic is through the question of recording. Numerous great artists have been known for their refusal to record, especially at the beginning of their career. They argued that the artistic act cannot be recreated in a different setting, or even captured in a recording, because its physical and spiritual components cannot be converted and stored in a different form, such as a phonograph record. The physical experience of an artistic event requires the full presence of everyone involved, body and soul. Not to mention the sound of a live performance, which, they argue, has no equivalent, whatever the quality of the technology.

A prominent example of the aversion to recording technology is maestro Sergiu Celibidache, one of the great conductors of the 20th century, and perhaps of all time, and, in my view, one of the greats due to his predominantly philosophical approach, which significantly influenced his work.

**On This Philosophical Note, We Might Ask: What Constitutes an Artistic Act?**

At certain points in history, and as part of the prevailing culture, art was meant to glorify God. Art revolved around God and aspired to achieve an earthly representation of the divine, thus beckoning humankind to approach it. In contrast, other periods in history placed humankind and humanity at the heart of the cultural endeavor (such as the humanistic movement that emerged in the Renaissance), with humans serving as the artist’s main subject. Throughout history, these two competing trends alternated in some or other reactionary way.

An important question, I find, is, what is the divine? What is human? Is the divine akin to perfection? Or rather, is humanity? What is beauty? The perfect “heavenly” spheres, or the somewhat “flawed,” “earthly” realm? To what aesthetic and artistic value does art aspire to give expression?

In order to answer this question, I shall ask, what is “perfection” – is it an unattainable sublimity beyond the spectrum of humanity? I would like to propose an antithesis and suggest that perfection is to be found in the present, in our somewhat flawed worldliness.

Is the assumption that perfection is confined to divine spheres necessarily true? Or is it precisely everything that is human, incomplete, flawed, that embodies “perfection”? If we adopt the premise that perfection is a divine terrain and what we should ultimately strive for, then can our yearning for such art, devoid of humanity, ever deliver solace for the human condition? Or does art perhaps have “human” aspects, and are they what enables such a meaningful connection to it?

What is, then, the “human” element in art? It is the transient, responsive, changeable, vulnerable and supposedly imperfect element. Is it an integral part of art, per definition, or something from which art wishes to distance itself? Or is it perhaps the imperfectly human that is the true expression of perfection? Could it be an essential embodiment of art – a solace and a grace created by humans to alleviate their suffering, to be moved, to feel, to better understand themselves and find consolation? Or perhaps, these two ideals, the sublime and the humanly flawed, can coexist. Perhaps there is no contradiction after all. This is a weighty philosophical-artistic matter that deserves consideration.

But to simplify such a loaded, amorphous, and complex subject – and if we venture to be more down to earth and go by the assumption that art is, after all, a human act (whether we like it or not, and even if we believe that God directs human actions) – to go back to the topic of conductors as interpreters and performers, it is plain to see that the higher the command of the material, that is, of the repertoire, and the higher the level of professional and artistic trust between the conductor and the other performing musicians, the greater the ability to be attuned to nuance and to adjust to different variables, such as the specific energy of the audience in the auditorium, the momentary mood of the conductor and musicians, and so forth. These variables are the product of our being human, subject to circumstance, both externally (time and space) and internally (mentally and emotionally). Art, then, is a human endeavor, and humankind, is, well, human (although some conductors would beg to differ…). Therefore, in ways that are beyond our control, the artistic act is versatile and inconstant, and due to these “human” limitations, the artistic process can never be truly reproduced.

**Can a Conductor Entirely Deviate from What Was Decided in Rehearsals?**

I would say this possibility is not unheard of, but nevertheless a rare exception. Here it is necessary to qualify that in many cases, and especially in opera houses, it is entirely acceptable to “land” the conductor into a concert with no prior preparation with the orchestra. This usually happens with ongoing productions, in which the musicians are highly familiar with the repertoire and well-practiced. What is the role of the conductor in this type of situation? Does he or she have the time and resources to realize their own interpretation, or are they there mostly to “keep things on track”? Can the conductor partially implement an interpretation? This is an intriguing question. Is this at all expected of them? Another question altogether, with no clear answer.

**Do Instrumentalists Need a Conductor During a Concert? Can a Conductor Detract from Their Performance?**

Absolutely, in both cases. As mentioned, the conductor is a performer in every sense, and this does not just manifest itself vis-à-vis the audience, but also vis-à-vis the performing musicians (for better and for worse). A performer in more ways than one, if you wish.

An interesting topic in this respect is the relationship between the conductor and the orchestra or choir. I am inclined to draw parallels between the conductor-orchestra relationship and other human relationships, including romantic ones. As with every relationship, compatibility is key. Love at first sight between a conductor and an orchestra can often live up to its initial promise and enjoy wonderful prospects. On the other hand, as in life, the honeymoon can turn out to be short-lived. To my eyes, a “good match” between a conductor and an orchestra or choir is founded, among other things, on a relatively equal footing professionally between both partners, and on their ability to nurture each other’s development, both as a team and as separate entities (is this not the ultimate wish of many a modern couple?). Furthermore, chemistry – an elusive element that defies description – goes a long way, and may even be crucial, as with any human interaction.

As to the mutual nourishment between orchestra and conductor, it is duly noted that it is in some conductors’ interest (though not all) to absorb and further hone their craft, among other means by interacting with the musicians they conduct.

**What Types of Leadership are to be Found in Conducting?**

A conductor, like any other leader, can choose between different leadership styles. One could argue that there are as many conducting methods as there are types of leaders. Some even draw parallels between the evolution of conducting over the past century and the changes in regime undergone by the Western world, from dictatorship to various forms of democracy.

Conductors, too, range (or ranged, rather) between dictatorship and democracy. Some conductors derive their authority merely from their elevated position (quite literally) on the podium (the small platform elevating the conductor so that they can be seen from afar), but these are becoming ever scarcer. While in the past musicians have shown willingness to endure aggressive, even humiliating behavior on the conductor’s part, this is no longer considered legitimate and has become a rare, anachronistic exception.

A recording of a rehearsal with one of the greatest conductors of all time, Arturo Toscanini (likened to a half-God among us musicians), with an important and excellent orchestra, serves as a troubling testament to this kind of tyrannizing behavior, which would be unthinkable today. In the recording, Toscanini adopts a harsh, some would say violent tone, reviling at the orchestra: “Do you even know what an *Andante* is?!”[[14]](#footnote-14) It appears that the great conductor is losing his senses when the orchestra fails to play Verdi as he understands and desires, ultimately resulting in him yelling uncontrollably. The word “stupid” and its derivatives ring throughout the room, and at some point (I whole-heartedly qualify this claim, but that is what it sounds like) a thump, perhaps the landing of a hurled object (not, God forbid, on a person) can be heard. Some would argue that this situation was rendered all the more sensitive due to the fact that this particular conductor, a brave man who had courageously fought against tyranny and fascism, was behaving rather like a “tyrant” himself, in his own professional field (notwithstanding, of course, a world of difference between the two). Indeed, there is no denying that it is a frightful scene. And the result? As one would expect with Toscanini – marvelous.

This raises the question of the price paid by instrumentalists, and often by other professionals in the field, such as managers, producers, and so forth, in the form of the artist’s entitlement to tyrannize them. However great this artist may be, is such tyranny justified, all in the name of artistic value? Does it perhaps also derive from mere status and the demands associated with it? One could further ask, how a controlling, borderline abusive approach, yields such good results. It seems these questions would be best pursued in extra-musical disciplines, such as psychology and sociology. Suffice to say that certain norms that were prevalent in the past are no longer considered legitimate nowadays. However, a certain pugnacity is often not only excused by musicians, but even perceived as a mark of authority, professionalism, and charisma. Traces of this approach can still be found, not only in the musical world, but also in theater, cinema, dance, and other arts.

The question of paying a “price” repeatedly posed itself across different periods, under changing norms and practices. In my view, the equation between hardship and artistic merit, the height of which came in the form of the romantic image of the “suffering artist” in the 19th century, is gradually disintegrating. Suffering is considered today as a destructive force to be avoided, hardly a transcendental romantic experience. The necessity of a price, then, is no longer a given, and it is no longer self-evident, as it once was, that art justifies every sacrifice.

On the other extreme, a conductor might take the opposite approach and try to facilitate cooperation by means of excessive friendliness, even flattery.

Between these two diametrical opposites there is a broad and dynamic range. As argued, the relationship between orchestra and conductor is likened to any other interpersonal relationship and comes in as many different forms.

**The Politics Behind Conductor Nominations**

The politics behind the nomination of conductors is exciting, complicated, and fascinating. Often, there is a close, some would say obvious link between the capacity to fundraise and make connections – which can facilitate international tours, collaborations, and more – and the considerations behind the nomination of conductors and musical directors. This is a legitimate concern, considering that these establishments cannot survive on fame and prestige alone, but must also ensure their financial survival.

Sometimes, the dream of a personality fulfilling all of these criteria comes true. Indeed, there are “big names” in the field who combine a great artistic presence with formidable practical skills. But is it imperative that every great artist have the required political know-how? Of course not. Moreover, for many artists, the skills of diplomacy and connection-making are virtually unattainable (in a manner that corresponds to the artist’s “nature” as described in chapter 3, “When Critics Miss the Mark,” and in chapter 4, “The Performing Artist – Is There Even Such a Thing?!”).

Different factors, such as historical developments, structural social and political changes, as well as the finances of musical establishments, shape decision-making processes in the musical world, including nominations. But does this influence extend to artistic matters? To artistic merit?

**Why is There Need for a Stick?**

When discussing conductors, one cannot omit the issue of the stick, the baton. The baton assists the conductor by signaling his or her movements more clearly from afar. Some view the baton as an optical extension of the arm. Some conductors prefer to forego the baton altogether. In addition, certain repertoires and orchestral structures require baton-free hands. In choir conducting, for example, it is the norm to conduct without a baton, for there is no need for it.

Ultimately, the baton is a communication aid that conveys a significant portion of the conductor’s intentions to instrumentalists and singers. A few examples: marking the important entrance of an instrument or voice in order to signify their “prominence” at a given moment; marking the tempo, at the outset but also when it changes; indicating dynamics, also with regard to balance – what should stand out, what should be played more softly; articulation (the harshness or sharpness of a note and how it should be linked to the subsequent note), and more. The baton is also used to indicate the spirit and character of the music. Methods and techniques for using the baton vary, with many different schools and approaches.

There are different kinds of batons, and conductors can choose what best suits them physically. The conductor’s hand movements reflect both technical and interpretive aspects of score reading. The baton and the hands embody a physical language that represents these elements. A means to an end.

During rehearsals conductors tend to also talk, explain, and demonstrate their wishes. Overall, however, the physical language of conducting, with or without a baton, is largely responsible for mediating between conductor and orchestra.

This language is a natural form of communication for instrumentalists and singers. However, it changes significantly from conductor to conductor, according to temperament and personality. Some conductors are more physically expressive, making excessive use of mimicry, while others are more reserved. This is a personal inclination that develops alongside the professional experience and skill of the conductor, and no less importantly – is closely linked to their personality.

**Chapter 6:**

**Comparing Performances in Classical Music**

Let us open with a “tenor joke,” a prominent genre in musical humor that is, in fact, relevant to all singers (classical at least). The tenor tells his friend: “Enough about me. Now tell me how *you*feel about my voice!”

Back to the matter at hand: how can the same piece vary so greatly between performances, inducing such diverging experiences in the listener? What makes a performance stylistic and appropriate? More specifically, what criteria must we apply to vocal works, which concern yet another art form – the art of text, and in our case, poetry?

To better understand this issue let us compare different performances of the same piece, focusing on the vocal genre of the Lied. For this purpose, I chose the Lied *Ich Liebe Dich* (op. 5 no. 3)*,* by Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg (1843-1907).

First, a few words on the Lied as a musical genre. Directly translated from German, “Lied” means “song” (in the plural, “Lieder”). Yet the concept of Lied refers more broadly to a genre of classical music, which in English, as well as other languages, is also commonly referred to as “art song.” This genre joins together two art forms, music and text, elevating both to new heights. The Lied is associated with German culture and reached its zenith in the romantic period of the 19th century. However, examples of this genre can also be found much earlier, and among such composers as Haydn (1732-1809) and Mozart (1756-1791), who are associated with the classical period of the 18th century.

The Lied is typically scored for piano and voice, with some Lieder written for piano and two voices; for a chamber ensemble such as piano, voice, and oboe; or voice and French horn, etc. There are even Lieder scored for an entire orchestra (such as Richard Strauss’s “Four Last Songs,” for example). Finally, a number of prominent composers have written entire song cycles, such as Schumann (“Dichterliebe,” set to Heine’s text) and Schubert (“Winterreise,” set to Müller’s text). The Lied on which we focus here is also part of a cycle, in which it appears third.

The Lied is associated with the rise of salon culture in 19th century Europe, one of whose most prominent features was the famous Schubertiade. In these salons, friends would meet, converse, exchange ideas, and play music. The salons predominantly featured men and women of letters, intellectuals, philosophers, and, of course, artists, who, during this period, formed part of the cultural and intellectual elite. The Lied is considered a “clean” genre (devoid of extra-musical and -textual elements, as opposed to, for example, opera, which is as theatrical as it is musical, though this has been hotly debated…). For this reason, it was considered the height of intellectual art, which exhibited both music and text at their most evolved.

Both art forms – music and text – which share a long, tortuous love-hate relationship, receive equal representation in this genre, nourishing and feeding into each other. Notably, most of the texts featured in Lieder are secular. Thus, this genre is distinct from church music. Important Lied composers include: Schubert, Schumann, and later Brahms, Mahler, Wolf, Richard Strauss, and many others. Authors whose texts feature in Lieder include: Heine, Müller, Rückert, Goethe, and more. The Lied is intimately related to German art and culture, yet has also gained prominence in other cultures, such as in Russia, England, and France (where it is called “Mélodie”).

The Lied is a genre of chamber music, meaning that all the musicians involved play an equally important role in its performance. As opposed to other genres, where the piano serves merely as accompaniment, in the Lied the pianist and the singer are equal partners. Alongside the singer, the pianist is also responsible for the Lied’s artistic content. While the piano cannot utter the text, it forms an integral part of the song’s spirit and character, and no less importantly, its structural development.

This attests to the symbiotic connection in Lieder between music and text, which are interwoven to the point of being inextricable from each other. I am not aware of many other genres that aspire to such a delicate blend of two separate art forms. When pianists and singers rehearse Lieder together, the artistic decisions are made together, as a joint effort (at least, one would hope). It could be argued that the interpretation of the Lied, like that of any chamber piece, is the product of the artistic effort and brainstorming of all involved. This artistic effort is in many ways the natural continuation of the meticulous construction of the Lied itself, which joins together the subtle, refined treatment of both art forms. On a personal note I might add, that the Lied is, to me, one of the finest cultural achievements known to man.

As mentioned, the Lied we will focus on in this chapter is Edvard Grieg’s “Ich Liebe Dich” (“I love you”). The original text is by Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, translated to German by Franz Friedrich von Holstein.

This is Holstein’s text:

Du mein Gedanke, du mein Sein und Werden! / Du meines Herzens erste Seligkeit! / Ich liebe dich wie nichts auf dieser Erden, / Ich liebe dich in Zeit und Ewigkeit! /

Ich denke dein, kann stets nur deiner denken, / Nur deinem Glück ist dieses Herz geweiht, / Wie Gott auch mag des Lebens Schicksal lenken, / Ich liebe dich in Zeit und Ewigkeit!

Here is the English translation[[15]](#footnote-15):

Thou art my thoughts, my present and my future / Thou art heart’s supreme, its only joy / I love thee more than any earthly creature / I love thee now and for eternity! / One thought of thee all other thought drives from me / Pledged to thy good alone this heart shall be / For whatever fate God’s will may doom me / I love thee now and for eternity!

Musically, Grieg is attentive to the basic structure of the song, composing it in two verses. Grieg builds up a certain tension towards the end of each verse, culminating in the last line, identical in both verses: “I love thee now and for eternity!” (“Ich liebe dich in Zeit und Ewigkeit!”).

This line is expanded by Grieg by way of deconstruction, breaking down the text into sub-components:

I love thee, dear,

I love, thee, dear,

I love thee now and for eternity!

The tension peaks on the word “love” (“liebe”) in its third, final appearance in the reassembled text, coinciding with the highest note in the Lied. This structural progression unfolds organically with a crescendo, a gradual increase in volume culminating on the high note with the word “love.” This, then, is the undeniable climax of the song, according to Grieg’s treatment of the text.

Interestingly, Grieg did not copy the notation a second time for the second verse, so it is up to the performers to decide whether to perform it in the same way. In addition, as shown in the manuscript, Grieg instructs the performers to accelerate at one point, with the words “I love thee,” and to decelerate at another, with “for eternity,” following the peak on the word “love.”

**Elegant Soprano**

The first performance we shall examine is by the great soprano Elizabeth Schwarzkopf and the pianist Geoffrey Parsons.[[16]](#footnote-16) I recommend listening to this rendition of the Lied, which lasts 3:01 minutes (usually, an empty second is added at the end of the recording; in other electronic media it may last 3:00). Naturally, our discussion of the performance will not be exhaustive, but we shall highlight a number of important elements.

Schwarzkopf’s rendition is elegant, free of mannerisms, and deeply respectful of the text. It seems that many interpretive decisions were made not only with Grieg’s beautiful composition in mind, but with due consideration to the lyrics. The text at hand could have easily been rendered kitsch – mannerist, melodramatic. But Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, true to 20th century German musical tradition, chooses a more intimate, low-key interpretation, almost whispering the song’s words of endearment. Musically, Schwarzkopf follows Grieg’s instructions to a fault. How does she approach the problem of Grieg’s lack of instructions for the second verse? She builds a greater crescendo (a gradual increase in volume) in the second verse (compared to the first) and lingers longer on the climax itself. Following the culmination of this build-up with the words “I love you,” she “calms” the small storm she conjured by means of a decrease in volume with the words “now and for eternity.” She lingers on the word “und” (and) with a *fermata* (sustain) and “closes” the Lied with the same calm atmosphere with which it opened – as dictated by Grieg in the score. Her choice to differentiate between the verses rather than perform them identically is in fact expected of an educated musician, for in this manner the text is imbued with more meaning, showcasing the Lied at its best. Schwarzkopf does this with refinement, constraint, and good taste. If there is an ultimate tutorage in moderation and elegance, it is this performance.

It is worthwhile to consider Parsons’ playing. A favorite pianist of mine, Parsons is exceptionally attentive and attuned to Schwarzkopf’s singing. When Schwarzkopf does not sing (in the opening, the ending, between the verses and phrases), Parsons carries the full weight of the performance, musically and artistically. The piano as if tells its own story, an inextricable part of the Lied’s artistic content.

**Dramatic Tenor**

A completely different approach to this piece emerges from the performance of the renowned tenor José Carreras. In the Catalan version, the Lied lasts 3:27 minutes (the performance itself 3:26), and, of course, I recommend listening to it.[[17]](#footnote-17)

In this rendition, everything is grander, more dramatic, more operatic and extravagant. How do these qualities translate to identifiable interpretive decisions? Carreras takes considerable rhythmic liberty, making abrupt tempo changes. He accelerates and decelerates, creating rhythmic “waves.” The professional term for this is *rubato*. Schwarzkopf also makes use of *rubato*, but much more subtly.

Carreras’ rendition is rife with *fermatas* (sustaining a note), far beyond what was specified – or intended – by the composer. In fact, already the opening phrase is performed in an erratic tempo, the very antithesis to Schwarzkopf’s reserved, low-key entrance.

Carreras, too, follows Grieg’s performance instructions, but everything is done on a larger scale. Carreras prefers to linger with a *fermata* on high notes, especially when these showcase his vocal virtuosity. His performance encompasses a wider dynamic range (from soft to loud) in comparison to Schwarzkopf’s.

Another distinct element in Carreras’ performance is its musical climaxes. Carreras builds up several interim climaxes in both verses, within each phrase. Schwarzkopf, in contrast, outlined two clear peaks – a more modest one in the first verse, and a more pronounced one in the end. Carreras’ rendition peaks many times, with varying force. One might argue that it has no clear climax.

Unlike Schwarzkopf, who ends on a calm, intimate note, Carreras delivers a strong, even grandiose ending. The overall result is more dramatic and flamboyant. Carreras’ operatic approach underscores the significance of the performer’s “treatment” of the material, demonstrating how great the variance between different renditions of the same piece can be.

One might argue that Carreras’ rendition transports us to operatic realms, separate and distinct from the more intimate domain of the Lied. Audibly (in a version available on different electronic media), Carreras performs this Lied following enthusiastic applause. When I first heard it, I assumed I was listening to an encore at the end of a concert. Why is this relevant? Because as an encore, a piece is often performed differently than as part of a program. The encore has its own rules and is often expected to enthuse. The second performance of a Lied by the same singer (even in the same concert, if the Lied is performed as an encore), can sound completely different, depending on its placement within the program.

It is worth mentioning that the field of classical performance is tortuous, sensitive, and complex, irrespective of the placement of a piece within a concert program. A performance is also affected by external factors, such as temperature and humidity, as well as the performer’s mental and physical state, and even the fitting of their outfit.

As these issues concern matters of the heart, particularly the willingness of performers to expose themselves emotionally in front of an audience, it is important to note that performers, and especially singers, are exceptionally sensitive. The singer’s instrument is his or her body. This places a heavy load on the singer’s shoulders, as their performance is at the mercy of objective external factors, as well as their own physical and vocal condition and their emotional state.

We opened this chapter with a comparison between Lieder performances. As mentioned, the Lied places the responsibility for interpretation on all performers involved. These must agree on certain interpretive decisions, accounting, of course, for a degree of wrangling and bickering.

Thus, when comparing performances, we essentially discuss the decisions, interpretation, methods, and personality of the performers. These aspects also open up new horizons for us to appreciate the music itself – the sum of its possibilities and artistic content (textual, musical, structural, and more), as well as the manifold layers, interpretations, and dilemmas encapsulated within it.

As a performer, I have often performed the same piece at different points in time and changed my interpretation somewhat. Inevitably, different life stages expose different layers even in the most familiar pieces. Naturally, knowledge, analytical faculties, and the cognitive aspects of musical prowess contribute to the ability to deepen and expand musical possibilities.

Delving through the hidden layers of music is akin to solving an elusive mystery – and this, in my view, is one of the reasons why art music is so elevating. It is an endless journey. In such an abstract and complex art as classical music, there are endlessly diverse ways to experience and interpret the same piece. Performance has immense power. It is able to shine light on a composition and bring it to life. An appropriate rendition will highlight a piece and bring out the best in it, imbuing it with the emotional-musical content it merits. Moreover, a good performance can enhance a relatively simple piece, in a sheer act of grace. The contrary is, of course, also possible.

The composition of a piece holds many secrets and possibilities, but, as we have seen, so does its performance.

**Chapter 7:**

**Classical Music and Humor?!**

There are many different ways of combining music and humor: there is humor **in music**, which is manifested in the music itself. Such humor is often referred to as a “musical joke.” There is also humor about music, or extra-musical humor, such as a humoristic text set to music. When the text itself is funny, satirical, or sarcastic, the hope is to set it to music appropriately and in good taste, in a manner that is true to the humoristic content and may even augment it, interact with it, or compliment it by various compositional means.

**Tortoises, Pianists, and Other Animals**

We shall first look into humor in music. For this purpose, I chose to discuss Camille Saint-Saëns’ (1835-1921) suite, *The Carnival of the Animals* (1886).

A note on the piece itself: it was composed by Saint-Saëns both as a humoristic exercise and as an homage to the musical scene of his time. The *Carnival* consists of fourteen movements, each depicting a different animal, such as an elephant, tortoises, and a swan, but also rather more unusual animals, such as pianists and fossils, which we will expand on further later on. Despite the straightforward titles, the movements themselves are multilayered. The piece is rife with mischievous, humoristic gestures at some or other famous contemporary work. “Fossils,” for example, alludes to some of that period’s greatest hits, including a work of Saint-Saëns’ own. In this manner, Saint-Saëns does not only poke fun at other composers, but also at himself. This wins him the (in my view, very desirable) title of a self-humorous composer and artist. A trait to be cherished! However, Saint-Saëns requested that the piece not be performed publicly. Apparently, he feared this would tarnish his reputation as a serious composer, and perhaps also that it would be taken as disrespectful towards his colleagues.

Indeed, it is reported that *The Carnival of the Animals* was performed initially only at intimate settings, among close friends, such as, among others, Liszt (whose compositional style is also fondly parodied in the piece) – but that it was performed publicly, as Saint-Saëns requested, only after his death. The piece is scored for a chamber ensemble but is often performed by a full-scale orchestra. Today, it is considered one of Saint-Saëns’ most famous and popular works. A ballet was even choreographed to one of the movements, “The Swan.” Though it will not be discussed here at length, “The Swan,” due to its romantic lyricism, is a favorite among audiences generally and among dance-lovers in particular. For the same reason, it is also a favorite of mine.

We will discuss three movements out of the entire fourteen. I recommend listening to the suite in its entirety, and in particular to the three movements discussed here, as performed by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Andrea Licata and with pianists Vivian Troon and Roderick Elms. This performance lasts 21:40 minutes (or 21:39 in some electronic media). Any rendition of this piece will do, but for the “Pianists” movement I especially recommend this one.

We shall first discuss the fourth movement, “Tortoises” (timed at 3:22 in the recommended rendition), which is based on Offenbach’s famous “Can-Can” from his 1858 operetta *Orpheus in the Underworld* (*Orphée aux enfers*).

The famous, fast-paced and vivacious “Can-Can” (to which I also recommend listening, if only for context), is rearranged by Saint-Saëns to an extreme. The main theme is easily recognizable, but assumes an entirely different character with a new, dragging tempo and some noticeably dissonant moments. There are also far-reaching changes in the orchestration (for example, the theme is not only introduced at an extremely slow tempo, but also at a low register, led by the double basses), as well as changes in the harmony. Unfortunately, I will not be able to explain the concept of harmony in detail within the confines of this book, but suffice to say that these changes, especially the tempo and range, are very audible.

We will now continue to the 11th movement, “Pianists” (timed at 13:52 in the recommended rendition). This movement depicts pianists as a kind of animal, which already goes a long way as far as humor is concerned… Beyond that, it pays homage to scales and passages that are the bread and butter of every pianist since childhood, whether for developing dexterity or for warming up. Some of these are an obvious quotation of the etudes of Carl Czerny (the author denies and familial ties) – a famous composer who was a student of Beethoven’s and whose etudes still form a central part of any aspiring pianist’s practice routine. To us pianists, such exercises are typically a rather tedious memory, to put it mildly. Anyone who studied piano playing seriously, if only for a short while, cannot but recognize themselves in this movement and burst out laughing. The mistakes, it should be noted, or what comes across as mistakes, both rhythmically and melodically, are entirely deliberate, with some editions of the score even explicitly instructing the pianists to play with the awkwardness and clumsiness of a beginner. Some performances (such as the one I recommended) make a conscious effort to highlight this sense of inadequacy. The joke, then, is on pianists, and the performing artist as such, if you wish.

Finally, we will discuss is the 12th movement, dedicated to an animal no less peculiar than pianists – fossils (timed at 15:15 in the recommended rendition). This movement quotes sensationally popular pieces of the time, among them French folk songs (including *Ah! vous dirai-je, Maman*, better known as *Twinkle twinkle little star*),[[18]](#footnote-18) an aria from Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville* (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), and most audaciously, Saint-Saëns’ own *Danse Macabre*, which had even been written in the same key, G minor. Moreover, he scores the dance for xylophone, producing a sound reminiscent of bones chattering, evoking the image of dancing skeletons. In my view, this playful wink at himself is the height of Saint-Saëns’ marvelous self-humor, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

Why did Saint-Saëns call this movement “Fossils”? Was this directed at the composers themselves? Was it rather an allusion to musical works that had become raging hits, only to end up stagnated, fossilized versions of themselves? Or did this refer to the taste of the audience, who dared not venture far from the catchy and the familiar? For a piece becomes a “hit” not only due its composition but also thanks to the willingness of the masses to grant it this title (of course, a sophisticated, excellent piece can be a “hit”; this title says nothing of a piece’s actual quality).

In any event, it is hard to overlook the sophisticated critique implied here, veiled in humor and sarcasm, including at Saint-Saëns’ own expense.[[19]](#footnote-19) In order to fully appreciate “Fossils,” I recommend listening to the referenced repertoire – Rossini’s aria “Una voce poco fa” from *The Barber of Seville* as performed by Cecilia Bartoli, as well as Saint-Saëns’ *Danse Macabre.*

What is Saint-Saëns actually saying when he quotes these pieces? Is it merely an inside joke among musicians or something more? Is it a simplistic homage to other works, or does it also relate to them more complexly?

In other words, is the humor here an end or a means? Or perhaps both?

*The Carnival of the Animals*, which is often performed for children audiences, is also an undeniable delight for adults, regardless of whether its deeper layers are made accessible to the listener. The piece’s different aspects, its humor and sarcasm, allusion to the musical canon, self-sarcasm and even critique – all of these enable a richly emotional and intellectual experience that, some would argue, makes for a more rewarding listening experience.

In previous chapters we mentioned the importance of layers for high art. *The Carnival of the Animals* is a perfect example. It is a piece that speaks to unprofessional audiences, even children, but which is revealed, upon closer inspection, as far more whimsical and pregnant with meaning than we imagined. The *Carnival* is remarkably multifaceted, containing numerous homages and allusions and interplaying with a wide array of materials, perhaps even amounting to a statement on how these resonate with audiences and the cultural milieu of the time.

Saint-Saëns pokes fun at performing artists and composers. At musicians and audiences. As I see it, he challenges the self-importance of both, perhaps bursting a certain bubble. But he does not do so in a hostile manner, on the contrary – he does so in good spirits and with a friendly demeanor (also towards himself).

As an observer, he shows his amusement at everyone, himself included. He does this with much grace, paying homage to the works of his colleagues, including his own. It seems no-one is spared, not even the audience. Saint-Saëns’ fanciful, flirtatious wink, is equally aimed at all three sides of the afore-mentioned musical triangle (composer – performing artist – audience).

**Chapter 8:**

**One Chopin – Three Pianos**

“If I belong to a tradition it is a tradition that makes the masterpiece tell the performer what he should do and not the performer telling the piece what it should be like, or the composer what he ought to have composed.” This statement is attributed to the great pianist Alfred Brendel.

When comparing performances, the interpretive choices I discussed in chapter 4 (“The Performing Artist – Is There Even Such a Thing?!”) are important parameters that constitute the blueprint of an individual performance. Some of these choices pertain to objective, measurable parameters such as dynamics and tempo, which can be identified with relative ease and offer an obvious point of comparison. What to play, and when, is determined by the score. But how, and how much, is less clear. The art of performance, as we established, takes place largely within this range.

The piece we will discuss is Frédéric Chopin’s (1810-1849) C minor prelude, op. 28 no. 20. We will compare the performances of Arthur Rubinstein (1887-1982), Grigory Sokolov (b. 1950), and Alfred Cortot (1877-1962). I recommend listening to their renditions of the prelude, available at various electronic media, with consideration to the timings referenced here (each pianist recorded more than one version of this piece; therefore, the duration of the performance is an important indication for our purposes).

The comparison laid out in this chapter considers the interpretive parameters detailed earlier. However, it is important to clarify that the discussion here cannot hope to encompass the distinctions between the performances in their entirety, nor to fully capture the singularity of each rendition.

First, a word on the prelude’s structure. The prelude contains two musical phrases: the first phrase appears once, the second twice. The first, isolated phrase, is written with a *fortissimo* (*ff*)and meant to be played very loudly. The second phrase is written with a *piano* (*p*) and meant to be played softly. In its second appearance it is scored as even softer (*pp*) and ends with a finishing chord (that did not appear the first time).[[20]](#footnote-20)

The prelude’s instructed tempo is *Largo*, indicating a very slow pace.

We shall begin with a comparison between Rubinstein and Sokolov, so I recommend listening to their respective renditions consecutively.

**Duration** – Rubinstein’s performance lasts 1:34 minutes (or 1:35, as sometimes an empty second is added).[[21]](#footnote-21) Sokolov’s performance, on the other hand, follows an entirely different tempo and lasts 2:00 minutes (or 2:01)[[22]](#footnote-22) – roughly 1.3 times longer than Rubinstein’s. Sokolov, then, chose to play the prelude at a significantly slower pace.

In addition to the slower tempo, which in itself drives the performance in an entirely different direction, Sokolov’s rendition of the prelude is more solemn and dramatic. Let us examine what musical means are employed by Sokolov in order to convey this character.

**Dynamics** – Sokolov plays the first phrase far more bombastically and heavily than Rubinstein. He also notably deviates from an established pattern – and from the score in this case – when he inserts a small *diminuendo* (gradual decrease in volume) at the end of the phrase (00:21) in the midst of what is scored as a *crescendo*, only to return to the *fortissimo* (00:23) dominating the phrase and then resume the instructed *crescendo*. Another deviation is introduced in the transition between the first and the second phrase (00:32), this time in full accordance with the score, with the sudden drop to a *piano* (*p*). This rupture between the first and second phrase is dramatic and unexpected in Sokolov’s rendition of the piece. This, in contrast to Rubinstein’s treatment of this stark transition (instructed by the composer), which will be discussed shortly. These interpretive choices are a potent example of the afore-mentioned principle of **deviating from patterns.**

Towards the end of the prelude, when the second phrase returns a second time (1:07), Sokolov imparts a sense of diminishment, manifested in the deceleration of the tempo and a sharp downturn in the dynamics. The phrase is heard as if from afar. The piece seems to wither away, there is a sense of departure as with a ship disappearing beyond the horizon.

**Timbre** – whereas Sokolov uses dynamics to illustrate the stark difference between the first and the second phrase, Rubinstein employs a different means, relying primarily on timbre in order to characterize the difference, playing the second phrase more tenderly (00:26).

Rubinstein’s tempo deviations are far more subtle (when the second phrase returns a second time, he resumes the original tempo after slightly decelerating). Moreover, while Rubinstein too incorporates changes in the dynamics (from loud to soft and vice versa), his dynamic range is significantly smaller compared with Sokolov’s. To Rubinstein, dynamics imply timbre more than decibels, as part of a broader understanding of dynamics as explained in the chapter about the performing artist.

**The ending** – Sokolov plays the last notes of the prelude (approximately 1:41) with a *crescendo*, adding a slight acceleration at the very end (by cutting the penultimate chord a bit short). Rubinstein, on the other hand, begins this dynamic intensification (*crescendo*) somewhat earlier, making for a more gradual development. Rubinstein’s finishing chord (1:26), the destination of this *crescendo*, is played slightly more softly than the notes leading up to it, thus closing the prelude with a sense of distance and resignation. Sokolov, in contrast, ends more resolutely, playing the finishing chord as the height of a rather hastier *crescendo*.

Sokolov’s finishing chord gives a sense of “closed circle,” as it returns to the gravity that opened the piece. Even if as listeners we are not consciously aware of it, this musical homecoming resonates on some level, giving a sense of closure.

It follows that Sokolov’s interpretation of the same prelude is more dramatic than Rubinstein’s. To sum up the comparison between them, we might say they each make different choices in order to convey Chopin’s spirit according to their own interpretation.

As shown, abrupt changes and sudden deviations, especially in terms of tempo and dynamics, are the means employed for conjuring the “Sokolovian” storm. In contrast, Rubinstein’s more subtle, restrained choices give his performance a more inward facing, level-headed character.

We shall now compare both performances to that of Cortot, which lasts 1:23 (or 1:24) minutes.[[23]](#footnote-23) This performance was recorded in 1926, and though very similar to the one recorded in 1933, I recommend it more.

Cortot chooses a relatively fast tempo, similarly to Rubinstein. In contrast to the score and to the other two performances, the transition between the first and the second phrase does not introduce drastic changes in dynamics and tempo (0:24). The second phrase is played with a different timbre, but here too the change is subtler. There is an almost imperceptible diminishment at the end of the first appearance of the second phrase (approximately 00:50).

A very slight deceleration is felt toward the end of the prelude (beginning on 1:06 very gradually and picking up on 1:10), which ends with an unexpectedly loud chord with no prior preparation (1:18). This is another compelling example of deviating from a pattern, manifested in Cortot’s educated choice as a performer.

Cortot’s rendition is undoubtedly the most reserved of the three. Dynamics and tempo, the main parameters for comparison in this chapter, are treated by Cortot with moderation, often almost by way of implication. The dynamic range is considerably smaller than in Sokolov’s, and even Rubinstein’s performances. The most noticeable difference is felt between the two appearances of the second phrase, which introduce a significant decrease in volume. However, Cortot plays the first and second phrase with very little change, in defiance of the score and in contrast to the other two performances. The finishing chord is unexpectedly loud, with no prior preparation, bringing the prelude to a somewhat dramatic end.

In the previous chapter, we discussed how tempo is a broad term encompassing many different elements. Here we have two excellent examples of virtuosos (Rubinstein and Cortot) who convey the solemnity indicated in the score without, in actuality, playing very slowly. The effect of these performances on the listener is proof that tempo implies much more sophistication and complexity than mere speed. A given tempo can be achieved by conveying a certain character and atmosphere, rather than simply adopting a slow pace.

Some would say that the sum of Cortot’s interpretive choices indicates that he “made do” with the notes, that is, the score, placing it center stage. It seems that to Cortot, the notes themselves contain the drama, the prelude’s spiritual and artistic statement. As the performer and conveyor of the musical text, Cortot appears to view his role as that of a “mediator” who must keep his interference to a minimum.

In other words, Cortot’s interpretation is minimalistic, regarding the drama as the sole product of the score. Cortot lets the material speak for itself: there is something straightforward about his performance. It is important to stress that this observation in no way passes judgment (although I hardly shy away from doing so). To many, this straightforwardness is what lends elegance to the piece and elevates it. In my view, all three renditions of the piece are fine artistic performances of the first order, if very different from one another. Three entirely different interpretations, three entirely different ways of bringing Chopin’s music to life. Each unique and worthy in its own way.

To conclude, we saw that performance instructions serve as fertile ground for many different interpretations, and that in addition to the score, classical musicians rely on the accumulated knowledge of generations, including an understanding of the piece’s individual style and the period in which it was composed – both necessary for a meaningful, “worthy” rendition.

Each of the three pianists discussed remained true to the spirit of the piece largely by adhering to the written score. Notably, however, during the period in which Chopin lived (the 19th century, known as the romantic period in classical music), it was generally the custom to allow the performer considerable discretion.

We saw that within certain limitations, there is substantial interpretive freedom. We discovered that the same piece can vary greatly between performances, and that interpretation goes a long way.

The following table highlights the main points of comparison but should not be considered as representing the comparison in its entirety.

**Chopin – C Minor Prelude, op. 28 no. 20, Different Interpretations**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Cortot** | Not very slow, the most reserved of the three | Only a slight change of timbre | The most significant change in this performance: a decrease in volume | Loud, unexpected, a deviation coming after a slight deceleration but no preparatory *crescendo*. |
| **Sokolov** | Slow, tempestuous, dramatic | Noticeable decrease in volume, from very loud to very soft | Significant change in terms of both dynamics and tempo, a dying out | Loud, the direct culmination of a *crescendo*, a sense of homecoming to the opening mood of the prelude |
| **Rubinstein** | Not very slow, elegant, level-headed | Mostly a change in timbre | No significant change, subtle changes in dynamics. In the beginning of the second appearance of the second phrase the original tempo is resumed after a deceleration | Played with relative moderation after a gradual *crescendo,* giving a sense of completion and level-headedness. |
|  | **Tempo and character** | **Transition between first and second phrase** | **Differences between first and second appearance of the second phrase** | **Finishing chord** |

**Chapter 9:**

**Music and Gender – where Do We Go from Here?**

“Music will perhaps become [your brother’s] profession, while for *you* it can and must only be an ornament, never the root of your being and doing… and your very joy at the praise he earns proves that you might, in his place, have merited equal approval. Remain true to these sentiments and to this line of conduct; they are feminine, and only what is truly feminine is an ornament to your sex.”

Who said this and to whom? In what context?

Music, like other bodies of knowledge, is affected by the social-political climate, interacting with it in different settings. Naturally, the issue of gender has also been manifested in classical music throughout most of its history. Nowadays, women are an inseparable part of music-making. Their participation in most musical fields is a given. But was this always the case? Does this apply to all musical professions, across the board? What are the most notable trends in the music world with regard to gender?

In order to focus our discussion, I chose a few notable developments in the history of classical music that capture the respective Zeitgeists from a gendered point of view in three different periods, from the Baroque, through the Classical and Romantic periods, to our own day and age. This will enable us to identify long-term historical trends. The discussion will mostly adopt this perspective. Unfortunately, the scope of the book does not allow us to address the entire spectrum of gender-related cultural-historical developments.

**Castration in the Name of Aesthetics**

The subject of gender usually brings women to mind. I am happy to defy expectations and open the discussion with a different, less taken approach: we will begin with the phenomenon of Castrati singers, who were especially popular in the Baroque and Classical periods, meaning the 17th and 18th centuries. In order to prevent their voice from changing to the deeper, lower register voice of a grown man, Castrati singers were castrated as children. The castration was meant to preserve their high-pitched voice, which had a unique timbre that served as a substitute for women’s voices. According to contemporary accounts, the Castrati’s voices were akin to what we would likely imagine today as the “voice of an angel.” It is assumed that the combination between the high, pre-adolescent register of a child and the physique of a grown man (which implied mostly, but not only an impressive lung capacity) created a unique voice quality that amounted to an aesthetic in and of itself and was, as a result, in high demand. The aesthetic ideals of the Baroque (particularly with regard to the “angelic” quality of the voice) – combined with the fact that women were precluded from performing and that the Castrati were called upon to fill this void – resulted in their immense popularity (the famous film *Farinelli* depicts this historical phenomenon). The reverence of Castrati stars, which sometimes amounted to mass hysteria, can be likened to the admiration felt today towards Hollywood stars or pop icons.

From a gendered perspective, this historical practice is twice an injustice: first in the exclusion of women from a vibrant musical scene, and second in the act of castration, which is, by today’s standards, a terrible form of child abuse whose damage also extended well into the future of the Castrati as men. While many Castrati achieved lasting fame and became cultural icons, from our contemporary perspective we can’t but wonder in astonishment at the grave price they were required to pay, without their consent or any input whatsoever on their part, and at a very young age. Was the act of castration worth the fame, along with the life it entailed beyond their vocation as singers? Was the sacrifice of what is thought of today as nothing short of an existential need a reasonable price to pay for artistic fulfillment at best – and at worst, the mere possibility of being a “celebrity”?

**“A Woman Must Not Desire to Compose”**

Fast-forward to the romantic period in the 19th century: women grace the stage as singers, some (particularly the unmarried among them) even have careers as performers. One of the most celebrated and magnificent careers was that of the child piano prodigy Clara Wieck (to be Schumann). Clara was Schumann’s student. She was also a piano virtuosa and composer, and a successful musician in her own right long before the two were wed. The couple’s marriage diary (a common romantic practice at the time, pursued, among others, also by the Mendelssohn’s) illustrates a traditional division of labor: Clara was responsible for raising the children (of which there were eight! The family also suffered tragedy and loss with respect to some of them), for some of the income (as a celebrated concert pianist), for bookkeeping and paperwork, and no less important – she was the spouse of a man who, as it happened, suffered from a mental illness. Robert Schumann, on his part, dedicated his time and effort to composing, a rewarding vocation by all accounts.

“Clara has written a number of small pieces that show a musical and tender invention that she has never attained before,” wrote Schumann on February 17, 1843, “But to have children and a husband who is always living in the realms of imagination do not go together with composing.” Clara, on the other hand, wrote, “Composing gives me great pleasure… there is nothing that surpasses the joy of creation…”

As made apparent in their marriage diary, some of the tensions and conflicts in the couple’s family life were in some way or other tied to Clara’s persona: her career as a musician, an artist, and a professional; her existence as a person in her own right alongside other aspects of her personality and identity that implied serving others, particularly as a wife and mother. Of course, no-one expected Robert Schumann to play a more active, not to say equal role in managing the family’s “internal” affairs – the household, the paperwork, and the children’s education. All of this reflects, of course, the Zeitgeist of the 19th century.

However, as early as December 1840, Schumann writes, “Later we must arrange matters differently, so that she [Clara] can play as often as she wants.” In May 1841 he expresses his curiosity as to whether Clara set to music some poems as he suggested. Here we have an example of Schumann’s professional and moral support of his wife as a composer, and no less important – appreciation and anticipation of her work.

Nonetheless, approximately a month later, in June 1841, Clara mentions, “My piano is falling behind. This always happens when Robert is composing. There is not even one little hour to be found in the whole day for myself!” This, although Clara was a professional pianist responsible for a substantial portion of the family income (not least during periods when Schumann barely functioned due to severe mental crises). At the beginning of their marriage, Robert Schumann granted Clara very little access to the piano – until her own instrument arrived – for he needed it entirely for himself for composing. Of all the complaints reflected in the diary, Clara’s limited access to the piano is perhaps the most bitter, not just because she was a brilliant pianist and aspiring composer. Keeping a musician away from their instrument with no ability to practice is experienced as a cruel, sometimes truly unnerving measure.

Yet it is important to qualify this statement and note that a close reading of the diaries paints a complex picture (to the extent that a diary can be taken as a reflection of “objective” reality) with respect to Schumann’s attitude toward Clara. Schumann was an avid admirer of her work, supported her, and was actively involved in her career. It is evident that Schumann considered her a great musician and drew much inspiration from her work. Does this mean he was willing to see her as his equal, that is: to prioritize her artistic identity and allow this dominant aspect of her personality to shine, both inwardly and outwardly? Did he enable her, as he did himself, to draw into her inner world and create? A close reading of their writings, the marriage diaries in particular, indicates that ultimately, the gender norms of the time took precedence. Schumann may have considered Clara to be a great musician, but he still expected her to sacrifice her artistic urge for the sake of their union, to assume full responsibility for raising his children, for running the household, and so forth, and of course – to be his wife. Did he expect the same of himself? Was he required to carry the same load in maintaining their relationship? Was there a symmetry between them, or something approaching a symmetry? That definitely does not appear to be the case, which was entirely in accordance with the times.

An intriguing question is: how would someone like Schumann act today? In all likelihood, a Schumann of our day an age, an allegorical Schumann, if you wish, would take a different approach. It is very possible that the current Zeitgeist would prompt our imaginary Schumann to see Clara as a separate entity, with an autonomous, independent identity (distinct from, and alongside her identity as a spouse and a parent) – a subject, a person with her own artistic and careerist ambitions. Perhaps he would see her much like he saw himself and make decisions accordingly, which would have allowed them to maintain their relationship and family life in a way that also accommodated her own, separate aspirations and would contribute towards their fulfillment.

A modern-day Schumann might even have done everything in his power so that Clara “the (house)wife and mother” could make room for Clara “the composer.” Inevitably, Schumann was himself, in a way, a victim of the prevailing misconceptions of his time – as a person and as a spouse, but also as a musician who deeply respected another musician, who also happened to be his wife. Schumann might have rejoiced at Clara’s development as a composer (as mentioned above, there is evidence for his genuine appreciation of her work), not just out of “altruistic” motives, as someone who loved her dearly (which I believe he did), but also as a composer who welcomed insight and inspiration from other respected members of his trade. One of art’s most beautiful features is the openness of artists (at least, those among them who are dedicated and committed to growth and innovation) to mental, spiritual, and professional nourishment from esteemed colleagues. All the more if they happen to love these colleagues.

On November 26, 1839, when she was but twenty, Clara wrote in her diary: “I once believed that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea. A woman must not desire to compose – there has never been one able to do it. Should I be the one?”

Nearing the end of her thirties, Clara gave up composition altogether. It is my conviction that the loss was not hers alone, but ours. The few pieces she left us certainly leave one wishing for more. We can only wonder how Clara would have developed as a composer if the division of labor between her and Robert Schumann was different, if she could have regarded herself as a “composer” in all senses of the word. It should be noted in this respect that composing and creating requires not only material, but also mental and emotional resources.

Clara was not the only woman composer of her time. Many women composers, however, were “in the closet.” In the event that they published their works, they often did so under a pseudonym. An example for such a composer is Fanny Mendelssohn, sister of famous composer Felix Mendelssohn, who appears to have held her in very high esteem – so much so, that he published some of her works under his name to save them from oblivion.[[24]](#footnote-24) We also know that their parents requested this of him. It was the father of Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn who is quoted at the beginning of this chapter. He made it very clear to Fanny, who had shown great talent from an early age, that for her, music will forever be confined to a hobby. Fanny was privileged to have a wonderful brother: Felix Mendelssohn, who, at least at times, admired her, supported her, and praised her work before their difficult father, in addition to publishing some of her works under his name, as mentioned above. Among other things, he told their father: “But truly there is music which seems to have distilled the very quintessence of music, as if it were the soul of music itself – such as these [Fanny’s] songs.”

Later on, after she had married, Fanny’s brother continued to encourage her to compose works for larger ensembles, and she even managed to publish some of her works under her own name. According to historical sources, we know that after Fanny’s death, Felix mourned her deeply and suffered pangs of guilt for not having supported her more as a composer. For this reason, he sent Breitkopf & Härtel, an important music publisher, some of her works, which indeed got published in 1850.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Luckily, some of the works of these two composers are widely performed today. Since we’ve discussed Lieder, it is worth mentioning Clara Schumann’s lovely Lieder, which are slowly carving a space for themselves in the genre’s canon.[[26]](#footnote-26)

**“The essence of a conductor's profession is strength. The essence of a woman is weakness.”**

Moving on from the women composers of the 19th century, we shall now discuss the current century. Today, there are many women composers whose works are performed, receiving active interest and recognition, among both the professional milieu and public audiences. While quite a few women composers still report conservative attitudes and discrimination, there is a sense that in the big scheme of things, we are seeing meaningful improvements in this field and have grown as a society in this regard.

And yet, the following question warrants examination: Are perceptions that devalue women as creative artists for different reasons – on the basis of their merits, capabilities, and desires, or their compatibility with a certain image of domesticity that prioritizes male ambitions – entirely a thing of the past? Do women “self-advocate,” or are their choices, ambitions, and passions still predetermined and mediated on their behalf? Do men, particularly those in positions of power, still articulate for women what is possible and desirable for them, even actively shaping their reality?

We shall examine this issue in the context of a particularly difficult field where women are trying to make themselves heard and leave a mark, and where visibility is at its highest. This is perhaps the musical profession that exudes the most presence and authority: women orchestral conductors. Historically, this is a relatively new phenomenon, yet another mark of our growth and development. But as we shall see, the situation is far from simple. We will try to identify the main difficulties.

As I mentioned in chapter 5 (“Conducting – Is it Really Necessary?”), the number of women who succeed in making a career in conducting as compared to the number of women who train in this profession, is small. Not to mention that the number of women who achieve a meaningful, demanding career, what some would call “glamorous,” out of the women who studied conducting or considered it as a profession – is significantly smaller than the equivalent number of men. Recent years have seen a welcome trend in this regard, and from time to time, we come across women conductors. And yet, this often happens in a manner that is compatible with traditionally female professions such as education, therapy, and working with children: narrated concerts for children and youth or concerts with a “light” program. In addition, while there are women who conduct small orchestras or ensembles, women are still greatly underrepresented in larger, symphonic orchestras. It should be duly noted that women are very prominent as choir conductors, typically in children’s choirs (a field intimately linked to education, as opposed to purely professional adult choirs). Indeed, it seems that the leading, most prominent choirs today (particularly the adult choirs among them) are still largely conducted by men.

Are women systematically precluded from conducting? Or is it the women who choose not to conduct?

We will examine a few cases that can shed some light on this issue. Every so often, different conductors, some of them quite young, address the question of female conductors. The following is an assortment of statements from recent years published in the international media and on other platforms: orchestras respond better to male conductors because this way, the musicians have “less sexual energy and can focus more on the music”; because “a cute girl on a podium means that musicians think about other things”; and because “when women have families, it becomes difficult to be as dedicated as is demanded in the business.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

Another example of the attitude towards women conductors is reflected in the words of an important maestra, one of a rare few who managed to overcome the preclusion of women from this field. She told of how at the end of a concert one of the instrumentalists came up to her and told her: “You were just excellent! I totally forgot you were a woman.” This anecdote sheds considerable light on the success of women as conductors and the price they must pay for the right to stand on the podium.

Some years ago, in a masterclass for young conductors, a leading woman conductor advised a younger aspiring conductor to do as she did during the first stages of her career – to practice in front of a mirror how to avoid feminine gestures and thus shed off her femininity. In other words, in order to pave the way forward as a conductor, she must first objectify herself, internalizing this attitude towards women, and then accept the verdict and toe the line accordingly.

An issue that is no less important than the reality women conductors, particularly those who managed to break the glass ceiling, must contend with, is their willingness or refusal to “toe the line,” assuming this is somehow within their control. This raises the question of choice. Can women who do not make a conscious effort to comply with expectations, who remain true to their “nature” (out of their own free will or simply because they cannot do otherwise) – ever be admitted into the inner circle?

What happens when women conductors who learned the rules of the game refuse, or are unable, to play along? This is the “catch” faced by women conductors, and perhaps also, in some way or another, by women in positions of power in other professions. On the one hand, there is the urge to “shed off femininity” in order to be well-received, or received at all, as attested by the leading woman conductor mentioned above. On the other hand, women who communicate straightforwardly and assertively are considered “masculine” and often accused of being “aggressive,” and it seems they too have no hope of penetrating the inner circle. Indeed, it doesn’t really matter what they do or what their interpretation is for a given piece, the fact of their being women overshadows everything else and provides fertile ground for denigrating them. They are either too “feminine,” meaning too soft, or too “masculine,” meaning too assertive. The attitude toward women conductors is often devoid of any thoughtful, balanced, least of all professional deliberation and is typically binary, simplistic, and categorical.

No less important is the issue of authenticity. One might question how natural or healthy it is for humans to internalize their own objectification and adjust to it for the sake of their work, not to say art. At what cost does this profession come for women who have dedicated their whole life to study a particular body knowledge, and who, in trying to put it to practice, must contend with issues that have nothing to do with music? Another important perspective to consider is that when it comes to art, the authenticity and personality of the artist carry immense value and are vital for its realization.

A fascinating example in this regard concerns how Serge Koussevitzky (one of the most important conductors and musicians in the US and in the 20th century generally) taught conducting. He invited a dancer to help his students achieve more elasticity and grace in their movements. The language of classical ballet is considered “feminine”: “He hired a ballet master to help his students be graceful on the podium and had the room covered with mirrors so they could see themselves. Each day the class would begin with the students pirouetting and posturing. Finally Koussevitzky allowed them to conduct the student orchestra.”[[28]](#footnote-28)

Amazingly, a conducting class taught by such a great conductor as Koussevitzky and attended by another great conductor, Leonard Bernstein, would open every lesson with pirouetting(!). Pirouetting is many things, but a token of “classic” machoism is not one of them.

It is fascinating to compare this with the current state of affairs, roughly seven decades later. How ironic that what was considered a desirable professional skill seventy years ago – elegant, refined movements derived from a “feminine” aesthetic – later, at an ostensibly more progressive time, became something illegitimate, to be avoided and concealed.

Particularly controversial was the statement of a rather young, high-ranking and influential persona in the classical music world, who explained the lack of women conductors as deriving from “different ambitions which can be very different between men and women.” Not to mention, he added, “Sometimes women are disheartened by the physical aspect – conducting, flying, conducting again is quite demanding.”[[29]](#footnote-29) One of the best responses, in my view, to such claims came from a woman conductor who said, referring to a particularly intense concert, “I am four months pregnant and I have never felt this amount of energy before.”

Admittedly, there is truth to the argument that conducting is physically demanding and that a career in conducting involves frequent travelling, with all the implications of such a lifestyle. But this also applies to singers who tour the world just as frequently, and yet no-one expects female singers to cut their career short or to avoid it altogether. As a conductor and a soprano, I can confirm that singing is no less, if not more physically demanding than conducting. I also find it rather curious that a man would feel entitled to pass judgment on the capabilities of any woman – or worse, that this entitlement, ostensibly derived from his social and professional standing, would extend to setting limits and interfering in her life as if it were his own.

Naturally, this discussion also pertains to the broader issue of working conditions in the modern-capitalist era, and I whole-heartedly agree that the disadvantages of an international career and the physical strain it entails should be taken into consideration. But do these disadvantages apply exclusively to women?

Let’s get back to the afore-mentioned official who further claimed that there is no gender inequality. “For me,” he argued, “the only discrimination, no matter in which

discipline, is the entrance exam or competition.” It is worth mentioning in this context that the judges in competitions are themselves conductors. Furthermore, competitions often serve as a jumping board for an impressive career, which is why gaining entree to them is tremendously important. A respected conductor with an impressive career who regularly served as a judge in some of the most prestigious competitions, granting him considerable influence, also addressed the issue of women conductors. As quoted in the media, he found it odd that people resented the idea that women can’t conduct but would think nothing of the fact that a man can’t give birth. In support of his argument, he elicited God (or “nature”), who appears to be responsible for this “symmetrical” reality, and whom this conductor purportedly represents. He additionally quoted Marx in saying that his “favorite virtue” in a woman was “weakness,” and continued: “The important thing is, a woman should be beautiful, likable, attractive […] The essence of the conductor’s profession is strength. The essence of a woman is weakness.” It comes as no surprise that the conductor in question did not fail to mention the grave concern that musicians might get distracted by an attractive woman on the podium (an argument that, I find, is rather insulting towards men in that it assumes their inability to get the job done, not to mention the potential attraction of conductors to female instrumentalists and the sub-group of homosexual conductors and their potential attraction to male instrumentalists and vice versa).[[30]](#footnote-30)

A young section leader (the leading player in a particular group of instruments) in a prominent orchestra argued that the issue of women conductors is problematic, as “ultimately men don’t really want to be told what to do by a woman. If this happens behind closed doors or with a small ensemble that’s one thing, but in a big orchestra, where the woman would have considerable authority and there is publicity involved, that’s an entirely different story.” He added, “in any case, it is a woman’s place to convey her needs like women do, in a sophisticated, manipulative, refined, tender, hesitant way.” Conducting is an art that exhibits authority and directness and is not in the least bit apologetic. “It’s just unfeminine and no fun for men to come across women like that, with authority on the podium.”

As opposed to other, historically prevalent arguments (some of which are reviewed in this chapter), which regard women as a physical, sexual, or reproductive object, this argument construes women as a mental object, expressing what qualities this musician would have liked women to possess. In this case, a woman is expected to behave in a certain way that would find favor with the members of the orchestra. This argument is somewhat different and pertains to what manners of communication with a woman a man would find agreeable. For the musician in question, a woman should communicate coyly, indirectly, hesitantly, and pleasantly.

This argument contains hidden meanings, for it betrays something elusive and yet tremendously powerful when it comes to propelling or inhibiting certain processes. The musician quoted above chafes at direct, clear-cut, assertive, and unapologetic communication coming from a woman. Perhaps it is this argument that best clarifies why the element of visibility causes some people such discomfort. The presence, dominance, and publicity we spoke of, and perhaps the assertiveness inherent to the field of conducting, are often a hindrance and a burden to all sides: both for those expected to accept this authority, and perhaps no less for the women conductors themselves, who must contend with resistance that is so deeply embedded in the field, both mentally and historically.

Unlike women leaders in other fields, such as high-ranking managers or directors, whose work is done mostly “behind the scenes,” women conductors are in a leadership position at every stage of the musical process, also appearing on stage (with the exception of the initial stage of reviewing the score, which is negligible in this context).

It seems, then, that female conductors elicit very emotional responses, exposing deep residues in our culture that have to do with age-old patterns of gender dynamics and division of labor.

We will conclude on a more positive note. The issue of women in music is brought to the fore precisely because they are so widely involved in music-making. Discrimination is apparent, also in the recent past, and also among women instrumentalists. The Vienna Philharmonic, mentioned previously in other contexts and considered historically one of the crown jewels of classical music, started admitting female orchestra members as late as 1997 – and this too seemed nigh impossible. Indeed, several orchestras voiced harsh objections to admitting female and, unsurprisingly, non-white members. And yet today, great changes are afoot with respect to both race and gender. In 2005, a woman conducted the Vienna Philharmonic for the first time. Without a doubt, maestra Simone Young made history.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Now that we are permitted to sing again, to compose, and even to play in philharmonic orchestras, there are also women building impressive careers of the highest order in conducting, taking the lead in the most prominent musical institutions in the world.

There is yet hope.

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1. To quote a dear teacher and friend, Prof. Menachem Tzur. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Of Galei Tzahal (Israel radio) and Tel Aviv University, edited by Dr. Hagai Boaz. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In many universities in the US, musicology is defined somewhat differently and is considered as distinct from musical theory. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Cadence” – a musical sequence that typically closes a phrase or movement. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In this opera, Madam Butterfly, the heroine, is “won over” and exploited (to the point of her complete demise) by the white man three times over: as a young “woman” – Madama Butterfly is a young geisha of about fifteen years of age, purchased by Pinkerton and hopelessly infatuated with him, an American navy Lieutenant serving in Japan; as a Japanese local in the face of a “strong” American, an army man; and finally, though perhaps to a lesser extent, as a person of lower social-economic status. The political and social dimension is very present in this opera, which is undoubtedly part of what makes it an important and influential piece, in addition to its artistic merits. As opposed to our Carmen, Madama Butterfly’s character is one of the most naïve and vulnerable in the literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. It is important to note that a number of (relatively minor) changes have been made in the opera after Bizet’s death. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Michael Kennedy, *Mahler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. As an aside, I cannot but help mention Mahler’s Jewishness and later conversion to Christianity, which took a considerable toll on his career. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. A synchronous aggregation of three notes or more. Usually, a chord forms part of a progression of chords with varying degrees of tension between them, which is an important part of the Western classical musical language. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Piano pedals, which the pianist depresses with her feet, help sustain or dampen the sound and affect its timbre. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. David Grossman, *Be my Knife*, trans. Vered Almog and Maya Gurantz (London: Picador, 2003), couldn’t find the page number. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Maqam is a kind of equivalent of the key in Arabic music but has additional features beyond a system of pitches. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For further reading on Professor Cohen’s research I recommend reading her manifold books, particularly *Contemplation and Experience*, and *East and West in Music,* both published by Magnes. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Andante*: a tempo marking indicating a moderate, walking pace. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *I love Thee*, tran. Henry Grafton Chapman (New York: G Schirmer, 1911), available at <http://hdl.handle.net/1802/9121>. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This renditon can be found in EMI Classics’ *Icon: Elizabeth Schwarzkopf – Perfect Prima Donna Soprano Box set*. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This rendition can be found in Acanta’s *José Carreras Live: The Comeback Concerts* with pianist Vincenzo Scalera (some electronic media mistakenly name a different pianist). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. It should also be noted that Mozart used this song as the theme for his C major variations (K 265). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Even if Saint-Saëns himself swore to the “innocence” (whatever that means) of his endeavor both in writing and in conversation, I reserve the right, shared by everyone, to question and contemplate the piece’s manifold possible meanings. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. According to most respected editions, although there are certain inconsistencies, and even different versions of this prelude. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. This performance can be found in *Rubinstein Collection,* Vol. 16: Chopin (RCA). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This performance can be found in *SOKOLOV-CHOPIN*, Preludes, Sonata No.2, Etudes Op. 25 (Naïve). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Found in *Great Pianists – Cortot, Chopin: 24 Preludes / 2 Impromptus*, Corto, 78 rpm Recordings, 1926-1950, Vol. 1 (Naxus). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. However, it should be added that different sources indicate the relationship between the Mendelssohn siblings was strained. Felix’s attitude toward his sister’s compositional endeavors was not always positive, but often ambivalent. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Edith Zack, *Love of the Sirens: On Composers, Compulsions, and Creations* (Scotts Vally: CreateSpace, 2015), missing p.# [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. On the subject of women Lieder composers, I can’t help but mention Alma Mahler’s wonderful piece from a later period. To put it mildly, Alma Mahler also had to contend with her husband’s less than favorable attitude towards her compositional endeavors. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. It should be noted that following public outrage in response to these statements, an apology was issued. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Joan Preyser, *Bernstein: A Biography* (New York: Billboard Books, 1998), 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Here too, the official in question issued an apology following public outrage. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The author is not aware that any apology was issued by the latter. As is often the case, also in other fields, many demanded in response to these statements that the relevant officials assume responsibility and even resign, but as of this writing it remains unclear whether such measured were taken. This incident led to much frustration among those interested in more progress and diversity in the field of conducting. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. As proper disclosure, I should mention that I worked with her as an assistant conductor. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)