

## Chapter 20: Musical Politics in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

- I. Introduction
  - A. The “War of the Romantics” pitted conservative composers (Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Brahms) against progressive ones (Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner).
    1. Liszt turned his attention to instrumental works, composing symphonic poems, single-movement works intended to express a poetic idea.
    2. The ideas of the New German School were opposed by critic Eduard Hanslick, who argued that sound and form made the beauty of music.
  - B. New concertos were demanding both for virtuoso soloists and for the orchestra.
  - C. Much music history is cast in the tale of the composers, but the people who actually do the writing are also significant contributors to how the story is told.
- II. Franz Brendel and the dialectic of history
  - A. Franz Brendel promoted the idea that “music is the sovereign art of the present.”
    1. He wrote the most popular music history of the nineteenth century, *Geschichte der Musik . . .* (1852).
    2. The philosophy behind his history was dependent on ideas put forth by Hegel and concerned the dialectic.
    3. Brendel adopted these values.
    4. The idea that music must evolve led to a division between those in the know and everybody else.
  - B. The New German School
    1. Brendel became editor of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* after Schumann, and his aesthetic preferences differed substantially from those of his predecessor.
    2. He formed a new organization to promote his agenda for progressive music and gave the keynote address at its formation.
    3. The New German School came to be identified with Liszt, Berlioz, and Wagner.
    4. As conductor in Weimar, Liszt championed the music of Wagner and himself (among others).
  - C. Liszt’s symphonic poems
    1. He began writing symphonic poems, which follow the Hegelian ideal of “unity of the poetic and the musical.”
      - a) These are single-movement works, but can be quite lengthy.
  - D. Liszt’s *Les Préludes*
    1. *Les Préludes* is by far the best known and often performed of Liszt’s symphonic poems. It comes from a famous poem by Alphonse de Lamartine.
    2. The piece unfolds in four episodes played without pause: Love, Storm, Pastoral Calm, and Battle and Victory.
  - E. The meaning of *Les Préludes*
    1. The piece was conceived in a different poetic context that preexisted the content that created it. It was originally conceived as an overture to *Les quatre éléments* (The Four Elements), a quartet of choruses Liszt wrote in 1844.

2. In most of his symphonic poems, Liszt draws on recognizable generic types of music.
- F. “The Music of the Future”
1. The composers of the New German School adopted the slogan Music of the Future (Zukunftsmusik), coined by one of Liszt’s lovers.
  2. The phrase was easily turned into joke, and Brendel advocated not using it.
- III. Eduard Hanslick and absolute music
- A. While many non-German composers decried the “universalist pretensions” of the New German School to be at heart nationalistic, the most famous opposition came from the Viennese critic and historian Eduard Hanslick.
- B. Brahms and the violinist Joachim (who resigned from working with Liszt, see excerpt) represented Hanslick’s position.
1. Joachim wrote a response to Brendel’s keynote address and sent it around to like-minded musicians for review.
- IV. The concerto transformed
- A. The New German School’s agenda had implications for genre definitions.
1. Chamber music was not a part of their world. They wrote symphonic music and operas.
  2. Those in opposition to the New German School generally eschewed opera.
  3. The New Germans saw his progressive innovations; the opposition to the seriousness of his concertos (as opposed to the virtuoso flash of Liszt and Paganini).
  4. During the Romantic period, the balance of forces was weighted in favor of the soloist (“lonely hero”).
  5. The relationship between the soloist and orchestra became an important issue.
- B. Concertos by Mendelssohn, Schuman, Liszt, and Berlioz
1. Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto exemplifies many of the new changes in the concerto.
  2. Schumann’s Piano Concerto in A Minor also points the way for innovations in form and the interplay between orchestra and soloist.
  3. Liszt wrote two concertos. The first, in E $\flat$ , is structurally substantial but with colorful orchestration.
  4. Berlioz never compose a concerto, but his early work, *Harold en Italie* (Harold in Italy), comes close and demonstrates how the boundaries among genres are not clear.