

*The Viennese Classical School:
a Challenge to Musicology*

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It seems unlikely that there is any other important period of Western music for which a common basis of real knowledge is still lacking so much as in the case of the Viennese School of the second half of the 18th century. Of course I do not mean to say that there has not been much written about it, including many valuable books and articles, especially about the leading composers, Mozart and Haydn. Nevertheless, I do think that so much remains to be done that my statement retains its validity. I should like to sum up in this article some of the points which I consider essential to forming an opinion on this matter.

A few remarks on the general approach to this period and the present stage of development of research in its music may help to make my point of view clear. First of all, since we are still so close in time to this music, it is a rather common belief that we are able to evaluate it unbiassedly from a normal concert-goers' point of view—but that is certainly not the case!¹ Performing traditions have changed so much in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries that we more often than not hear performances which tend to modernize 18th-century music. A brilliant performance is not necessarily a performance which brings us closer to the spirit of the music and of the composer. In short, if we wish to study the music of the Classical period seriously, we must try to adjust ourselves better to its music. We must approach it as we do Medieval or Renaissance music, as a style in its own right, complying with laws which we must discover in as unbiased a manner as possible. In this respect musicology has not yet made very much progress. In contrast with an unbroken research tradition for Medieval and Renaissance music—with three or four generations of scholars like Bellerman, Jacobsthal, Wolf, Ludwig, Bessler, Bakofzer, Reese, and others—no similar research traditions in our field exist. What has been done until now is mainly the work of single scholars, and mostly about problems in special fields.

If we wish to give an outline of what might be done to establish a similar research tradition within the realm of Viennese Classical music, we may sum up our considerations primarily under three

headings: source foundations, historical background, and musical analysis.

Source foundations

Obviously the primary problem in investigating the Viennese period, as with any other period, is to compile the sources—the manuscripts and printed editions of music which form the basic material for any reconstruction of the original version (and possible later versions) of any single composition. Though this might seem self-evident, we are far from having arrived at even an inventory of sources. How much has to be done is revealed by admirable single efforts, such as Barry Brook's *La symphonie française*, William Newman's *The Sonata in the Classic Era*, or Warren Kirkendale's *Fuge und Fugato in der Kammermusik des Rokoko und der Klassik*. Jan LaRue has laid the foundation for a real repertorium of the classical symphony, which will be of central importance.

But even when we have compiled a complete catalogue of sources of this kind, comprising all the relevant material in Austrian, Czech, Hungarian, German, Italian, French, British, American, and other collections, it will be only the first step. We will not have considered the difficult problem of authenticity, especially that of a single work ascribed to two or three different composers. And even at this stage of a research plan we would have to face the problem of making limiting decisions, leaving out works and composers of presumably only local importance. But we have to be careful. (As an example of this we may mention Wenzel Raimond Birk [1718–63], a not unimportant composer, given due credit by Kirkendale, but unknown to MGG, Grove, or Riemann.)

Once we have completed—as far as it can ever be complete—our inventory of sources, the next step would be to have microfilms made of all relevant sources. This is above all a large-scale practical and financial effort. Some substantial microfilm collections have already been set up, such as the specialized Haydn collection in the Joseph Haydn Institute in Cologne, but a comprehensive collection of sources from the Viennese School in general would of course be of much larger dimensions.

The next step to be taken is again primarily of a practical and financial nature: the scoring of all the works handed down to us only in single parts, which is the case for the greater part of the

instrumental music from the Classical period. The scholar who deals primarily with vocal music (opera, church music) can scarcely imagine how lost one may feel amongst mountains of unscored symphonies.

The scoring of this microfilm material would of course be an immense help to scholars, and in this connection we must add still a fourth step. If we have in mind the establishment of a real research tradition, we must issue a publication which would enable scholars in different parts of the world to make use of the scored material. The editions of various sorts of *Monumenta*, indispensable as they are, always have to limit themselves to selections—and we know from existing editions that such selections are of necessity insufficient for the specialist. It might be possible, through some sort of copying procedure (microfilm, microfiche, Xerox, or the like) to organize the distribution of copies to a certain number of leading music collections in the various countries. This would certainly be expensive, but not nearly as expensive, and not requiring nearly as much labor, as the preparation of printed editions.

Historical background

In one of his remarkable articles on the great epochs of music, Blume talks about the different impressions obtained from close and distant views of a mountain. The Baroque, he tells us, is like a mountain. If one sees it from a distance, it may look as monolithic as a great massif, but when one comes near it, the unity dissolves into so many details that it approaches chaos.² I am afraid we shall have to admit that most of the current thinking about the Viennese Classic period is determined by the fact that we are just beginning to come closer to the mountain. We shall find out that things look different when we come close enough to form an impression founded on real observation, not on traditional clichés.

If we are to find out what really happened in the development of the Viennese Classical tradition, there is one thing which is urgently needed, and which is very difficult to grasp: chronology. We must try to gain exact knowledge about the composers in question, their life and work, from whom they learned, what music they really heard and played. And we must try to get even closer. We must try to be able to date single compositions

much more exactly that we can do now. One example may show the importance of precise dating.

We know that a quite decisive development took place around 1770. The traditional cliché, as far as Haydn is concerned, is "the Romantic crisis"—or *Sturm und Drang*—period, though nothing points to an explanation of that kind. Rather, it was the breakthrough of the Classical style—the final synthesis. And just at this stage of development we are left without important details of chronology. It would seem that along with Haydn, Vanhal was one of the most important pioneers. But we cannot tell to what extent Haydn learned from Vanhal or Vanhal from Haydn. It would be most valuable if we could date the symphonies of this period with greater exactitude, but so far we have not been able to do so.

Here again, important pioneering work is being done. The primary sources which can give us the most exact dating will most often be manuscripts and printed editions. In the case of manuscripts, only dated autographs can give us really exact information, but in many cases we are faced with undated copies. Much has been done in recent years to establish methods of determining the age of manuscripts through research in watermarks, copyists' handwriting, etc. And as far as printed editions are concerned, we have gotten fine information by digging out material about old publishing firms and their catalogues. But still it must always be remembered that the composition itself can be of an earlier date than any known copy or print. Even taking into account the great progress that has been made through the work of scholars like Deutsch, Weinmann, LaRue, Cari Johansson, Landon, Barry Brook, and others, there is still a great deal to be done if we want to come closer to finishing our complex jig-saw puzzle.

Of course there are many other questions relating to historical background about which further information is needed, but scarcely any that are as basic as the problem of chronology. As far as performance practice is concerned, much depends on the collection of purely historical material, but the real problems are so much bound up with questions of musical interpretation that they call for quite special consideration.

Musical analysis

Compared to the work on source problems, which has really

made wonderful progress in the years since the last war, the studies in style problems have not been very conspicuous or revolutionary. Of course it might be said that as long as the material is available only to a rather limited degree, there is no point in turning to the problems of style and musical analysis. But I do not think that the real difficulty in working along these lines is related to the incompleteness of the material. The greatest obstacle for renewed activity in this field is an old and deeply rooted tradition of regarding and judging music of the Classic period with preconceived expectations of form in the manner of a 19th-century textbook, and not regarding it as the object of unbiased historical investigation. Not only does this result in a considerably narrowed viewpoint, but on the whole it is an application of analytical means and methods which cannot lead to a real understanding of the problems we wish to investigate.

In the center of any discussion of formal structure, we usually find the so-called sonata form, the form of the first movement of almost any symphony or sonata and also the form of many other movements. The more conspicuous shortcomings of analyzing this form according to traditional textbook notions can be summed up as follows:³ (1) The textbook type of sonata is not an 18th-century concept, but a 19th-century reconstruction of a form mistakenly thought to be the common basis for the music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Moreover, it was codified to serve the purpose of teaching composition, not of explaining any historical development in music. (2) This sonata-form type is in most cases regarded as a model, not merely as a framework. Deviations from the fixed type are explained as anomalies, as signs of imperfect, immature handling of the form, when they should rightly be seen as variations in style and form, as varying ways of filling out the frame. (3) The whole conception of this form is linked with a rather one-sided focusing on certain thematic ideas, on the assumption of a fixed construction, based on a "principal" and a "subsidiary" theme as indispensable formal pillars.⁴ This limitation of viewpoint alone would make impossible any real understanding of the development of form in the music of Haydn.

If we wish to make clear the stages and variations in the process of formation of the Viennese Classical style in music, we must widen our analytical base and improve our tools. Let us consider a few points where further investigation might be useful.

(1) There are two fundamentally different types of form included under the rubric of sonata form: a type introducing only a few motives and aiming at a basic impression of formal wholeness, and its counterpart, a form based on the introduction of several individualized themes or episodes, and aiming at an impression of change and contrast. The first of these two types is characteristic of Haydn, the second of Mozart.

(2) The 18th-century interest in what was later to be called sonata form rested more on the demonstration of periods than on the nomination of "themes." The enumeration of themes has not too much to do with sensing the formal "happening." The distinction made between *Liedtypus* and *Fortspinnungstypus* in Fischer's famous article, "Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Wiener klassischen Stils" (1915)—one might also think in terms of Wölfflin's *offene* and *geschlossene* form—could certainly be utilized to greater advantage.

(3) A very important question, which has not been given enough attention, is that of texture. Besides purely homophonic style, the main types of texture that seem to have been generally accepted are true polyphonic style (the Finale of Mozart's *Jupiter Symphony*) and "thematic development." The very common, more "linear" development, where either a bass line or a melodic outline takes over the leading role for a while, needs further stressing. So also do the patterns of tutti-development. These often constitute an important part of the sonata form, distinct from or in direct contrast to the opening theme and other thematic episodes.

(4) The art of thematic invention should be studied much more attentively. Here again, Beethoven draws a dividing line in sonata tradition. In Beethoven we have to deal with strongly individualized themes, some of them worked on for years before the final version was found. But in Mozart and Haydn, we have to deal more with traditional types of theme formation related either to opera, to chamber music, to concerto style, to church sonata tradition, or to various other melodic idioms. A famous example, the similarity between the beginning of Mozart's *Symphony in G minor*, K. 550, and Cherubino's "Non sò più cosa son, cosa faccio," could scarcely be overlooked. The whole art of melodic invention needs further investigation and would certainly repay any labor.

Tendencies of expression and style of performance fall into

various categories: there are those that look back to Baroque traditions, or to the so-called pre-Classical style (in my article quoted above I use the more neutral term, "mid-century style"), and those that foreshadow the Classical style. We must be concerned with the division of phrases into periods—of the development from the unbroken *Fortspinnung* of the Baroque, through the endless chain of two-bar constructions of the "mid-century style," on to the harmonically based thematic, coherent, period formation of the Classical style. The harmonic conception must also become one of the primary fields of investigation, and here the analysis of "harmonic rhythm," which has been the especial province of American scholars, comes into the picture.

As far as expression is concerned, we cannot overlook all-important features like tempo and rhythm. Everyone studying the development of Haydn's symphonic art must be aware that the stylistic change around 1765-70—the so-called "Romantic crisis"—has two especially important sides: harmonic expression and rhythmic "drive." Even if we must admit that we approach domains where solid facts alone will not do, but where some sort of musical intuition or interpretation is needed, we cannot stop there. More than anything else, the changing stages in the development of the Viennese Classical style are characterized by changing means of expression. But here, as with the concept of sonata form itself, we must remember that we should investigate expression as understood in the 18th century, not in the 19th or 20th century. The relativity of 18th-century contemporaneous descriptions is too often forgotten. When, for example, Schubart, in his *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, writes of the Mannheim orchestra, "Its forte is a thunderstorm, its crescendo a cataract," we must of course view this description in the light of the orchestral style of 1770, and not that of 1870 or 1970.

Without a doubt, research of the kind that is suggested here can succeed only if it is undertaken by a very highly qualified team of musician-musicologists. Some recent conferences, such as those that took place in Brno and Kassel in October 1967, have provided the opportunity for discussions between musicians and musicologists, who are especially interested in historically oriented performance practice. Future conferences of this kind might contribute to the formation and solution of questions such as those I have enumerated.

This, then, is the shape of my dream for the future of research in the music of the Classic period: given the needed (substantial) financial support, the right scholars to carry out the project, and very careful organization, I envision the following developments: (1) the preparation of an inventory of sources, (2) the establishment of a source collection, (3) the scoring of all the works, (4) the collection of documentary background materials, (5) the initiation of a specialized style-analytical research project, and (6) the investigation of problems of performance practice. A crowning achievement of the project would be the supplemental distribution of copies of all the scores to a circle of leading libraries. This would clear the way for the preparation of editions and recordings by publishers and recording societies.

Will this dream one day become reality?

NOTES

¹ See my remarks on this subject in "Some Observations on the Development and Characteristics of Vienna Classical Instrumental Music," *Studia Musicologica* 9:115 ff. (1967).

² F. Blume, *Synopsis Musicologica*, p. 217.

³ See also "Sonatenform-Probleme" in *Festschrift F. Blume* (1963) pp. 221 ff.

⁴ "Sonata" in *Grout's Dictionary*, 3th ed., 7:886 ff. (1954).