

EDITORIAL



On 5 January of this year the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, one of Germany's leading newspapers, informed its readers about the 'jubilees of 2014'. Two of these anniversaries were musical ones: fifty years ago, in 1964, The Beatles triggered 'an incurable hysteria' in the USA, with five singles occupying ranks one to five on the *Billboard* Hot 100 of 4 April; the author of the article attributes to The Beatles' music 'a basic cultural joy, an optimism, an aesthetic that is so undeniably upbeat that we long for the future promised by that present, as when we watch "Mad Men"' (38). The other musical anniversary related to two composers born three hundred years ago, in 1714: Christoph Willibald Gluck, 'the child of a forester from the Upper Palatinate' who composed '104 rather mouldy operas and three magnificent ones', and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, who wrote '170 piano sonatas and a book on the *True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* that is still useful today'. These rather arrogant comments begin with the remark that someone born in 1714 who wished to become a world-famous composer had been dealt 'a bad hand', for 'a giant ([J. S.] Bach) marched in front and was followed by three more (Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven), so that later the term "Kleinmeister" became necessary to describe the gulf between them'.

Several thoughts ran through my head when reading this: first, that 2014 might be called the year of the 'eighteenth-century *Kleinmeister*', considering that Gottfried August Homilius was born in 1714 and Johann Friedrich Reichardt died in 1814; second, that the common *feuilleton* view of eighteenth-century music history is obviously still dominated by a concept of heroes' tales; third, and most disquietingly, I wondered whether there is any historical connection between The Beatles as paragons of twentieth-century *popular* music and composers like C. P. E. Bach, Gluck, Homilius and Reichardt as supposed eighteenth-century 'little masters' of *classical* music.

What made me wonder about this last point in particular was the author's felicitous identification of the joyful, optimistic and upbeat aesthetic of The Beatles' music that is still palpable today. When did this aesthetic arise? Are there any lines we can draw between mid-eighteenth-century 'non-heroic' music history and twentieth-century popular aesthetics? This is the target of the following small thought experiment.

For Germany's leading musicologists of the 1960s through to the 1980s to ask questions like these would have been impossible (see Michael Fuhr, *Populäre Musik und Ästhetik: Die historisch-philosophische Rekonstruktion einer Geringschätzung* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007)). In 1977 Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht (*Musikalisches Denken: Aufsätze zur Theorie und Ästhetik der Musik* (Wilhelmshaven: Noetzel, 1977), 208) was convinced that popular music is *Unterhaltungsmusik* or light music; that it is 'not aesthetic music' or is 'the music without aesthetics'. In 1984 Carl Dahlhaus ('Ist die Unterscheidung zwischen E- und U-Musik eine Fiktion?', in *Musik zwischen E und U*, ed. Ekkehard Jost (Mainz: Schott, 1984), 16) showed at least some understanding of the provocative power of popular music and the close link between classical-period aesthetics and social distinction:

Wer die ästhetische Überlegenheit des Streichquartetts oder der Symphonie über die Popmusik behauptet – und es ist unmöglich, sie nicht zu behaupten, ohne die gesamte bisherige Ästhetik preizugeben –, demonstriert zugleich, ob er will oder nicht, ein durch musikalische Symbole ausgedrücktes Sozialprestige, das er für sich selbst in Anspruch nimmt und anderen verweigert.

Whoever claims the aesthetic supremacy of the string quartet or the symphony over popular music – and it is impossible not to claim it without abandoning the entire aesthetics of the time – documents at the same time, whether he wishes it or not, a social prestige expressed by musical symbols that he claims for himself and refuses to others.



The string quartet and the symphony, Dahlhaus believed, are the great achievements of late eighteenth-century Viennese classical music. They belong to the realm of 'heroic' composers of this age – Haydn as the supposed 'inventor' of the string quartet; Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven as masters of the classical symphony – while the 'non-heroic' region has been metaphorized as the huge flock of 'little masters' fenced in between Johann Sebastian Bach and the Viennese classics on the large but scraggy meadow of 'pre-classical' music. Of course, today every music historian – or at least every specialist in eighteenth-century 'art' music – would refuse to label C. P. E. Bach and Gluck as *Kleinmeister*; on the other hand, the public perception of these composers and the reception history of their works since the early nineteenth century has put them at a clear distance from the above-named heroes. Those who know and esteem *Die Israeliten in der Wüste*, Wq238, or the highly expressive F minor keyboard sonata by C. P. E. Bach, Wq57.6, or an opera like Gluck's *Ezio* are less than the happy few – at least in Germany and in good old Europe generally. So on the one hand there is this separation between 'heroes' and 'non-heroes' in the realm of classical music, and on the other a separation between 'classical' and 'popular' music. In my opinion, these phenomena cannot be regarded separately because they both belong to *one* Western musical culture.

When did the great division between 'great', 'sublime', 'heroic' art and 'non-heroic' art that is 'merely' pleasing occur? Johann Nikolaus Forkel is a good place to start if you are looking to find the origins of the whole separation between 'E-' and 'U-Musik', between serious art music and merely entertaining popular music. Consider Forkel's narrative of Johann Sebastian Bach's visits to the Dresden opera house together with his son Wilhelm Friedemann (*Ueber Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke* (Leipzig: Hoffmeister and Kühnel, 1802), ed. Christoph Wolff and Michael Maul (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2008), 60; English translation from *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*, ed. Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, revised and enlarged by Christoph Wolff (New York: Norton, 1998), 461):

Er hatte auf diese Weise immer eine ausgezeichnet ehrenvolle Aufnahme in Dresden, und ging oft dahin, um die Oper zu hören. Sein ältester Sohn mußte ihn gewöhnlich begleiten. Er pflegte dann einige Tage vor der Abreise im Scherz zu sagen: Friedemann, wollen wir nicht die schönen Dresdener Liederchen einmahl wieder hören? So unschuldig dieser Scherz an sich ist, o bin ich doch überzeugt, daß ihn Bach gegen keinen andern als gegen diesen Sohn geäußert haben würde, der um jene Zeit ebenfalls schon wußte, was in der Kunst groß, und was bloß schön und angenehm ist.

He was therefore always received in an exceedingly honorable manner at Dresden, and often went thither to hear the opera. He generally took his eldest son with him. He used to say in joke, some days before his departure: 'Friedemann, shan't we go again to hear the lovely Dresden ditties?' Innocent as this joke was in itself, I am convinced that Bach would not have uttered it to anybody except this son who, at that time, already knew what is great in art and what is only beautiful and agreeable.

Or look at Forkel's characterization of C. P. E. Bach (*Ueber Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben*, 56; *The New Bach Reader*, 458):

Dieser kam frühe genug in die große Welt, um noch zu rechter Zeit zu bemerken, wie man für ein ausgebreitetes Publikum componiren müsse. Er nähert sich daher an Deutlichkeit und leichter Faßlichkeit seiner Melodien schon etwas dem Populären, bleibt aber noch vollkommen edel.

He went soon enough into the great world to remark in time how it is proper to compose for a numerous public. In the clearness and easy intelligence of his melodies, he therefore approaches in some degree the popular style, but is always perfectly free from everything common.

The popular realm that in Forkel's view is at least associated with C. P. E. Bach encompasses the non-heroic region, the region of non-sublime art that is addicted to fashion ('Mode') and is slave to the dominating



and ever-changing taste of the crowd, betraying the ideals of great art in favour of commercialized craftsmanship (*Ueber Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben*, 88; *The New Bach Reader*, 478):

Sich nach dem herrschenden Geschmack der Menge zu richten, erfordert höchstens einige Gewandtheit in einer sehr einseitigen Behandlungsart der Töne. Künstler dieser Art sind dem Handwerksmanne zu vergleichen, der seine Arbeiten ebenfalls so einrichten muß, daß seine Kunden sie gebrauchen können. [Johann Sebastian] Bach ließ sich nie auf solche Bedingungen ein.

To follow the prevailing taste of the multitude needs, at the most, some dexterity in a very partial manner of treating tones. Artists of this description may be compared to the artisan who must also make his goods so that his customers can make use of them. [Johann Sebastian] Bach never submitted to such conditions.

For Forkel the history of music culminates in Western polyphony, specifically Handel's fugal choruses and Johann Sebastian Bach's instrumental fugues. Yes, Forkel's concept of music history is Eurocentric, fraught with the ideologies of colonialism and the conviction that there is an absolute musical beauty deriving from man's nature and gaining consciousness in Western art music (compare Frank Hentschel, *Bürgerliche Ideologie und Musik: Politik der Musikgeschichtsschreibung in Deutschland 1776–1871* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2006), especially 25–48), but it is also a document of the distinction between merely popular, time-dependent, 'non-heroic' music and elitist, timeless, 'heroic' art music, a distinction that is still in our heads today – or at least in the heads of many German journalists.

Forkel's construction of great and timeless polyphonic art music is not the way the century he was born in thought about music. Quite to the contrary, the early eighteenth century's concept of composition was characterized by a flexible alignment between music and a constantly changing ideal of taste whose standards had to be mediated and renewed again and again in public discourse (see several contributions in *Musikalische Norm um 1700*, ed. Rainer Bayreuther (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010)). Just how narrowly the terms of these 'negotiations' were set is revealed by Johann Mattheson's remarks on the delayed edition of his violin sonatas published in 1720 under the title *Der brauchbare Virtuoso*. He had composed them three years before, Mattheson explains in his Preface, and noted that his current music was 'already somewhat more galant' ('schon etwas galanter'): that is, in a more modern style. So his own sonatas struck him as outmoded – after only three years! Publishing music in the eighteenth century was of course a business, and Mattheson's statement must be seen in part as a commercial strategy of self-stylization in which the composer portrays himself as a galant thinker at the forefront of musical developments.

Of course, all these issues represent aspects of the 'non-heroic' eighteenth century as a culture of galant communication and conduct constantly searching, establishing, defining and redefining distinctive features that were regulated by the public and by economic principles (concerning the literary realm see Dirk Rose, *Conduite und Text: Paradigmen eines galanten Literaturmodells im Werk von Christian Friedrich Hunold (Menantes)* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), especially 1–32). And of course this is one of the lines that can be drawn between eighteenth-century 'non-heroic' music history and popular music in the twentieth century, since a critical public and a forceful 'billboarding' were inventions of the early eighteenth century.

Within the context of a galant ideal of communication (that constituted not a 'style', but an act-oriented habitus; compare the books of Bayreuther and Rose already quoted), we encounter sharp criticism of learned counterpoint in Germany around 1700, echoed a half century later in France in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's attacks against fugal feats as 'evidence of barbarity and poor taste' ('évidemment des restes de barbarie et de mauvais goût': Rousseau, *Lettre sur la musique française* (Paris, 1753), 44; Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, volume 5 (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 308). He also attacked polyphony as the great false path of Western civilization; see the final passage of his article on harmony in the *Dictionnaire de musique* (Paris: veuve Duchesne, 1768), 241–242) and the *Lettre sur la musique française*. As early as 1722 Mattheson (*Critica Musica* (Hamburg: Mattheson, 1722), volume 1, 345) formulates an idea of melody that elevates the emotional efficacy of simplicity over the contrapuntal way of thinking: 'Eine blosse / bewegliche / von einer schönen Stimme gesungene /



Melodie / wozu nur etwan ein ganz simples accompagnement kömt / hat mehr Kraft über die Herzen / als alle gekünstelte Harmonien' (A plain, moving melody sung by a beautiful voice to a very simple accompaniment has more power over hearts than all artificial harmonies).

'Simplizität' (simplicity) is a keyword in eighteenth-century aesthetics (see Karsten Mackensen, *Simplizität: Genese und Wandel einer musikästhetischen Kategorie des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2000), and has remained a challenge for all those who seek the peculiarities of musical beauty beyond the Western idea of polyphonic complexity. 'Simplicity' is above all an aesthetic of reduction to the essential; therefore it needs a foil of more complex phenomena against which it can be judged as a reduction, and a frame of values or convictions that justifies the special appreciation or pre-eminence of a reduced-art concept.

Let me explain what we might call the triangular concept of simplicity through an early eighteenth-century example. In 1706 Lecerf de la Viéville wrote his *Comparaison de la Musique italienne et de la Musique françoise* (edited in Pierre Bourdelot and Pierre Bonnet, *Histoire de la musique et de ses effets*, volume 4 (Paris: Jean Cochart, Etienne Ganeau and Jacques Quillau, 1715)). The text was part of the musical *querelle des nations* that had raged since the later seventeenth century, and an answer to Abbé Ragueneau's *Parallele des Italiens et des François en ce qui regarde la musique et les opéra[s]* of 1702 (Paris: Jean Moreau). Viéville defends the ideal of French church music against modern Italian music, characterizing the French motet as 'expressive, simple' and 'agréable' (58); these terms define a pattern of conduct and an aesthetic ideal of 'bienséance' (decency) marked by narrow, lean formulations and a special reservation against emotional extremes (62–63):

Elle [la musique du Grand motet] doit être simple, & parce qu'autrement elle ne seroit pas expressive, ni agréable, & parce que les raisons de bienséance que nous avons expliquées au premier Article, lui prescrivent une grande simplicité. Le respect dû à Dieu, à son Temple, à son Ecriture, à ses Fêtes ne souffre pas qu'on babille. Il demande une éloquence courte & resserrée.

It [the music of the grand motet] must be simple, because otherwise it would be neither expressive nor pleasing and because the fundamentals of decency that we explained in the first paragraph enjoin a great simplicity on it. The reverence for God, his temple, his word and his ceremonies doesn't endure that one twaddles. It demands a succinct and taut eloquence.

Owing to its moderate character, the motet can act on the listeners in a balancing way and thus can serve as a tool of religious and social regulation; listening to motets helps the subjects to live together in harmony (91):

Jamblique repète en quatre ou cinq endroits qu'ils [les Pythagoriciens] calmoient & qu'ils guérissent par des chansons leurs maladies de corps & d'esprit. Nous éprouverions la même efficace dans les Motets vraiment beaux, ils calmeroient les troubles qui s'élevent au dedans de nous.

Jamblique [Iamblichos, a neo-Platonic philosopher, 240/245–320/325] repeats in five or six places that they [the Pythagoreans] calmed down and healed their physical and mental diseases by songs. We will reach the same effect by truly beautiful motets; they will appease the troubles emerging among us.

So the motet, like the *ballet de cour* and the *tragédie lyrique*, is integrated into the doctrine of French absolutism as an educational and political instrument. The paradigm of this kind of 'simple' church music is the motets of Michel Richard Delalande, while the negative foil against which the motet is shaped is the Italian church music of a composer such as Giovanni Bononcini. High expressivity and emotionality, richness in dissonance, sharp contrasts and extreme changes in tempo, texture and metre, coloratura vocal writing and rich ornamentation – all these features of Italian music stood against Lecerf's ideal of true church music and were therefore held by him to be unnatural.

Another example comes from the end of the eighteenth century. I remember one of my colleagues who was of the opinion that C. P. E. Bach's *Heilig*, Wq217, was a shocking example of musical trash – all those superficial harmonic effects and an overload of mere sound and strong dynamic contrasts, disgustingly



simple music, cheap showmanship! Obviously he heard the piece with ears conditioned by Johann Sebastian Bach's church music. In the eighteenth century, Johann Friedrich Reichardt formulated a different view of the *Heilig*. In his *Musikalisches Kunstmagazin* (Berlin: Reichardt, 1782) he praises the harmonic shifts expressing the alternation of earthly and celestial choirs as great and overwhelming, *because* this means is so simple (85):

Jene schnelle Tonwechselungen sind nun nicht an sich und vor sich selbst merkwürdig, denn nichts ist leichter als durch enharmonische Rückungen in noch entferntere Töne schnell überzugehen, und ihre zu häufige Anwendung zeigt nur oft den Mangel ergiebigen Genies an. Aber die Anwendung derselben zum Ausdruck, zur Charakterisierung des Himmels- und des Erdenchors, die ist groß, und eben die Symplicität des Mittels macht den Zug zum Originalgeniezug. Alsdann die meisterhafte Vertheilung des *forte* und *piano*!

These quick modulations are not remarkable by themselves, because nothing is easier than modulating into still more remote modes by enharmonic shifts, and their overuse often merely documents a lack of genius. But their application for the expression and characterization of the earthly and celestial choirs is great, and it is the simplicity of means that marks this feature as one of an original genius. And then the masterly disposition of *forte* and *piano*!

C. P. E. Bach as the great genius of modern church music! The concept of simplicity has its roots in the tradition of Christian 'sermo humilis' (ordinary speech) as well as in Longinus' theory of the sublime. But it seems to me that the eighteenth century was the first epoch of Western music history that drew on this concept as the foundation of musical poetics and to define musical quality. The eighteenth century discovered in simple melodic formulae a source of unlimited pleasure and expression in all realms of musical creativity. And isn't it true that popular music of more recent times deliberately *reduces* its harmonic, melodic and polyphonic devices, a procedure that, when combined with upbeat rhythms and electroacoustic sound architecture, produces the music's particular qualities in a way accessible to everyone? So this is the second line I dare to draw from the 'non-heroic' eighteenth century to modern popular music: the idea of melodic simplicity as the central tool of expression and pleasure.

My third and last point brings me back to the article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* characterizing The Beatles' art as joyful, optimistic and pointing toward a positive future. An image that cropped up in my mind when reading it was the dust jacket of the German edition of Jean Starobinski's *L'invention de la liberté, 1700–1789* (Geneva: Skira, 1964; simultaneously published in English as *The Invention of Liberty, 1700–1789*; German translation as *Die Erfindung der Freiheit, 1700–1789* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1988)). It reproduces Francesco Guardi's painting *La mongolfiera* (Balloon over the Canale della Giudecca in Venice), which shows a large group of people immersed in the pleasures of watching a distantly flying gondola held in the light blue air by a huge yellow balloon. For as long as I have known this wonderful book, and I have read it again and again, the painting has appeared to me as a kind of metaphor for the outwardly serene music of composers like Telemann, Hasse, Vinci, Graun and Johann Christian Bach (the Bach son whom Forkel placed at the greatest distance from his father: 'Der Bachsche Originalgeist ist ... in keinem seiner Werke zu finden' (The original spirit of Bach is ... not to be found in any of his works; *Ueber Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben*, 57; *The New Bach Reader*, 458)). In one of the most revealing passages of the book, Starobinski compares the aristocratic 'pursuit of pleasure' with the pleasures of imagination enjoyed by a strengthening bourgeoisie (*Die Erfindung der Freiheit*, 54; *The Invention of Liberty*, 54):

Für die feudale Gesellschaft, in der über die Hierarchie der zeitlichen Lehensherrschaft alles hätte Gott untergeordnet sein sollen, ist die Jagd nach Vergnügen das Zeichen einer Zersetzung. ... Für das Bürgertum jedoch schließt das Vergnügen keinen Verzicht auf eine Pflicht, auf eine Aufgabe mit ein; es ist ein Besitzergreifen, durch das der Mensch sein vorherrschendes Interesse an den Gütern dieser Welt bekundet. ... Dort das letzte Festmahl eines Libertins, der den 'steinernen Gast' erwartet ... dort die erste Erfahrung eines Wertes, der nur darum vorerst uns überlassen ist, damit wir um so stärker fühlen, daß er zum Besitz aller werden muß; sobald er nicht mehr



als eine Sünde gebrandmarkt wird, kann er zum natürlichen Maßstab für Recht und Unrecht werden. In dieser Bedeutung stellt das Vergnügen keine Zersetzung mehr dar; es ist, im Gegenteil, an ein Seinsbewusstsein gebunden, es ist die besitzergreifende Kraft, durch die das Bewusstsein sich seiner selbst bemächtigt, sich zusammenfaßt, sich der Welt und den Mitmenschen widmet.

For feudal societies, in which everything should be subject to God through the hierarchy of temporal suzerainties, the pursuit of pleasure is the sign of a certain dissolution... For the well-to-do middle-class man, on the other hand, pleasure does not imply any neglect of duty or of his proper function. He regards pleasure as a right, through which he affirms the ruling passion inclining him towards worldly wealth... We have the final revelries of the libertine who has said farewell to the 'man of stone'... We find the original experience of a special asset which at first belongs to the individual, only to make him more clearly aware that it should be shared by everyone; no longer stigmatized as a sin, it has become the natural measure of the just and the unjust. Taken in this sense, pleasure is not dissipation; it is, on the contrary, linked with the awakening of the individual, it is the triumphant energy which enables the mind to understand itself, gather up its strength and dedicate itself to the world and to others.

This open-ended, optimistic look at the world built upon and tied to the quintessentially secular category of pleasure, constituting 'das Wunschbild einer auf den Grundlagen der Natur und der Vernunft neu aufgebauten Welt' ('hope in a world reconstructed according to Nature and to Reason'; *Die Erfindung der Freiheit*, 54; *The Invention of Liberty*, 54), was invented in the early eighteenth century. And the aesthetics of The Beatles' music can be read as a kind of popular actualization of the eighteenth-century philosophy of pleasure. You don't have to quote John Lennon's 'Imagine' at length to understand that the utopia this music dreams of is essentially equivalent to the improvement of humanity promoted by the Enlightenment; in both cases the target point is the self-determined individual living in a society that makes this self-determination possible.

So all in all there is no reason to mock the eighteenth century's 'Kleinmeister' while elevating The Beatles over all earlier music, as the author of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* article does, because important dimensions of the group's aesthetic and social foundation came into being in the century when 'non-heroic' composers dominated the scene (other dimensions, of course, came from elsewhere; a complex conceptualization of popular music, especially pop music, has now been worked out by Dierich Diederichsen in *Über Pop-Musik* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch 2014)). On the other hand, there is good reason to celebrate the anniversaries of composers like C. P. E. Bach, Reichardt, Gluck and Homilius – not as *heroes*, but as *phenotypes* of a century that saw fundamental changes in the aesthetics and social anchoring of music.

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