Introduction: Pleasure in history

NICHOLAS MATHEW AND BENJAMIN WALTON

> It was at end – that day the deified of Europe, *Rossini* lolling in the rankest lap of luxury, deemed it becoming to pay the world-shy anchorite, the moody *Beethoven*, already held for half-insane, a ceremonial visit – which the latter did not return. What thing may it have been, the wanton, roving eye of Italy's voluptuous son beheld, when it plunged unwitting in the eerie glance, the sorrow-broken, faint with yearning – and yet death-daring look of its unfathomable opposite? Did there toss before it the locks of that wild shock of hair, of the Medusa-head that none might look upon and live?
>
> Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*.[1]

"Above all, make a lot of Barbers!" Beethoven's comment to Rossini after their meeting in Vienna in 1822 is a well-known feature of the anecdotal landscape of nineteenth-century music, situated somewhere between the scratched-out dedication to Napoleon on the autograph of the *Eroica* and Schumann's review of Chopin's Op. 2 Variations ("Hats off, gentlemen, a genius").[2] The symbolism of such stories, drawing on the reliable narrative appeal of relationships between one great man and another, is plain enough: the republican Beethoven sees through the newly crowned Napoleon; the clear-sighted Schumann raises up the unknown Chopin from the morass of *stile brillante* Parisian pianism. In the case of Beethoven and Rossini, the older composer's parting shot tersely encapsulates a number of persistent critical assumptions: that Rossini is essentially a composer of light comedies inimical to Beethovenian profundity; that Rossini was a populist while Beethoven turned away from the public realm altogether; and that Beethoven is a source of authority, who delivers the injunctions while Rossini listens.

The story originates with Rossini himself, who related it to Wagner almost forty years after the event during the latter's visit to Paris in 1860. Or so we are told: the encounter between Rossini and Wagner was itself recalled by a friend of Rossini's, Edmond Michotte, and appeared in print another forty years on, at the start of a new century.[3] Other accounts by Rossini of his Beethoven encounter, to Eduard Hanslick and Ferdinand Hiller, make no mention of Beethoven's advice; Wagner himself had left the encounter portentously

open-ended in *Opera and Drama* (quoted above as our epigraph); Anton Schindler denied that the meeting took place at all.[4] Perhaps, then, Beethoven's words were an invention by Michotte, or – more probably – by Rossini, either freshly minted or polished to a shine through retelling, as one great embellisher reminded another of his connections to the great tradition.

By 1860, this tradition looked increasingly graven in stone. Much of the Beethoven myth was in place, and Rossini had become a living classic, his quips and opinions eagerly recorded and relayed. And given that Rossini played such an active role in constructing his own public image, it is striking that, in his reported conversation with Wagner, he confirmed that he did indeed prefer writing comic operas: it is left to Wagner to express gratitude that he ignored Beethoven's advice.[5] Later in the conversation, Rossini also recalled his confusion on the evening of his Viennese encounter, while attending a grand dinner hosted by Metternich, as he compared Beethoven's miserable existence with his own glamorous lifestyle. A vivid picture was lodged in the historiographical imagination: Rossini feted by the aristocracy, darling of his age, while the misunderstood genius Beethoven languishes in poverty.

It was an image that took a long time to fade, and would go through several twentieth-century retouchings before biographers and historians began to tinker with its outlines, as part of a more general process of demythologization that has tended to play up similarities – or at least affinities – between the two. Beethoven has undergone a process of reconnection to his own world, and to the realm of the worldly, while the belated publication of reliable editions of works and correspondence by Rossini has invited new appreciation for his aesthetic ambition.[6] Yet the myths retain their power, to the point that even the act of debunking can quickly slip into just another form of homage – an excuse to turn once more to the same beloved figures. The more research that is produced on both composers, meanwhile, the less the disentanglement of fact from fiction appears enlightening. And when the two composers are brought into contact, it becomes evident that this may have always been the case: within just a few years of the supposed meeting of 1822, for instance, an unnamed visitor to Beethoven is recorded in one of the conversation books asking if it was true that Rossini had tried to call, but that Beethoven had refused him entry. We lack Beethoven's reply, but it is hard not to feel, decades before Schindler, Michotte, and the rest, that it was already beside the point. The meeting was part of a larger narrative: a meeting of two ideas.

*

The appearance of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* in 1980 offered a good opportunity to sum up the historiographical position of both composers within contemporary Anglo-American musicology. Joseph Kerman and Alan Tyson, writing on Beethoven, singled out Alexander Thayer's late-nineteenth-century *Life of Beethoven* as the work that had "correct[ed] the mass of misinformation that had grown up around his subject and . . . debunk[ed] romantic inventions."[7] Philip Gossett, by contrast, placed an accurate understanding of Rossini still somewhere in the future: "the image of Rossini as man and artist remains distorted . . . the general view of Rossini the composer is equally mistaken."[8] This imbalance was implicitly addressed through a seriousness of intent: a commitment to the establishment of facts, the consultation of reliable sources, and reasoned criticism of the music. An age of clear-sighted realism and renewed artistic appreciation seemed within reach; and sure enough, by the second edition of *The New Grove* in 2001, Gossett could announce that Rossini was "no longer simply the composer of some delightful comic operas."[9]

The shared scholarly methods, however, served to emphasize the composers' separation. This derived from indisputable differences – period and place of birth, favored genres, compositional aims – but became easily mixed up with a longer tradition of disciplinary allegiances and aesthetic preferences. And it was these larger forces that would be channeled by Carl Dahlhaus into the conception of the *Stildualismus* that underpinned his *Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts*, also published in 1980. For Dahlhaus, the differences between the two composers were foundational: Rossini and Beethoven became nothing less than symbolic progenitors for the entire nineteenth century.[10] And in doing so they underwent a new mythologization: old tropes rewoven into a new interpretive framework.

To begin with, the *Stildualismus* indicates a division between the thematic density of instrumental music and melodically driven opera.[11] Yet, as the argument unfolds, "Beethoven" and "Rossini" become an omnivorous pair of terms, consuming all the musical practices and styles in their path. Their opposition rapidly absorbs early-nineteenth-century German and Italian musical cultures, then operatic and instrumental music, then light and serious music, then all performer-oriented and text-oriented music. "Rossini" encompasses French grand opera and the theatrics of nineteenth-century virtuosos; "Beethoven," the austere metaphysics of so-called absolute music and the grandiose authorial aspirations of Wagner. Music as text vs. music as practice; music as truth vs. music as rhetoric. It turns out, in fact, that there is hardly any distance between "Rossini"/"Beethoven" and Carolyn Abbate's recently sketched opposition (derived from Vladimir Jankélévitch) between

the "drastic" and the "gnostic" – music as a physical presence vs. music as a way of knowing.[12] Only a short step from here lies the dualism of body and mind. What starts out as a couple of nineteenth-century musicians ends up as one of the basic conceptual structures of the West.

The implications and repercussions of Dahlhaus's approach are addressed by several authors in this book. In terms of the wider balance between history and myth, though, it is significant that this hyperbolic escalation of binary terms arises from the nature of these oppositions themselves, in part simply showing that Dahlhaus gave expression to patterns of thought not wholly confined to his own work. His is a way of thinking that, within music history, has made oppositions out of Wagner and Verdi, Schoenberg and Stravinsky, Bach and Handel.[13] In each case, an intellectual, writerly vision of music – whether in the form of *thematische Arbeit*, motivic construction, or contrapuntal density – contrasts with a physical, implicitly performance-oriented one. One form of music harbors hidden meanings that must be winkled out with exegesis; the other possesses a euphoric physical presence that forecloses interpretation altogether. Rossini, then, offers an alternative – whether desired or despised – to the intellectual tradition that prefers music as a vehicle of revelation rather than of sensual pleasure.

In this context, the decision to choose Beethoven and Rossini as the symbols of an intellectual dichotomy might appear to be no more than a matter of convenience. And in the years since the publication of *Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts*, scholars have closely scrutinized the wider musical traditions informing Dahlhaus's argument, together with their gradual congealment within the institutions that shaped the musical canon over the course of the nineteenth century.[14] Yet his original provocation – to start from the pairing of Beethoven and Rossini, whether as individuals or as ideas – has gone largely unaddressed.[15] Beethoven specialists are as unlikely to think about Rossini, and vice versa, as they ever were. Indeed, the lack of interaction between the two sets of scholars, both engaged in the study of musicians and works not only contemporary but unavoidably proximate in the emerging concert lives of Europe's capitals, can at times seem close to a re-enactment of Hanslick's account of that same 1822 meeting in Vienna, in which Beethoven's deafness led to a brief exchange with Rossini characterized by mutual incomprehension, the two figures inhabiting different worlds even while in the same room.[16]

Hence the original idea for the conference that gave rise to this book: to invite scholars of Beethoven and Rossini to swap sides, and to delve into unfamiliar territory. The difficulties of implementing this plan (for the two

editors of this book, among others) might well reveal much about the impermeability of disciplinary boundaries, separating even those scholars preoccupied by the same part of the nineteenth century. But if the remit changed over time, the challenge remained: to see what happened when the two composers were brought into contact from a variety of perspectives – aesthetic, historical, and analytical – in order to think through and beyond the invention of Beethoven and Rossini.

*

All the essays in this volume question the intellectual tradition that has constructed these composers as opposites, but they also proceed on the assumption that music historians cannot simply divest themselves of the pervasive and multifarious values that Beethoven and Rossini represent, nor should they necessarily wish to. Yet it would be hard to deny that some of these values already hold less sway than they once did. No longer is dealing with nineteenth-century Italian opera as a written artifact, especially in the course of producing critical editions, axiomatically regarded as a "dignifying" practice – a transference of Beethovenian levels of textual attention to Rossinian repertoire.[17] Meanwhile, some of the strongest challenges of recent decades to disciplinary paradigms have explored ways to incorporate concepts such as collaboration, performance, embodiment, hybridity, narrativity, and – crucially – listening pleasure into the study of the great monoliths of the Germanic canon.[18] Indeed, in retrospect, it might appear strange that a professedly Beethovenian conception of art should have achieved such institutional success when it has been so hostile to the idea of the "merely" sensuous: the drastic impulse repressed by or perhaps sublimated into an overwhelmingly gnostic discourse.[19] Perhaps, in these terms, the neurosis of Beethovenian asceticism could be cured by Rossinian aestheticism.

Yet one paradox of this notionally therapeutic encounter is that the modes of scholarly inquiry associated with "Rossinian" values are primarily those of the historian: a new attentiveness to lost voices and more or less forgotten celebrities, to the spaces in which music was heard, and to the vanished realities of listening – to the surprising and confusing sprawl of distant historical circumstance.[20] It is tempting to invoke yet another psychoanalytic term to explain this paradox: scholars have displaced their aesthetic pleasure onto the business of doing history. The mystique of historical micro-narratives, encounters between *dramatis personae*, and enticing *objets trouvés* becomes a proxy for the work of art in all its

sensuous, inscrutable complexity. Granted, this displacement of pleasure from art work to historical work can be found in all vintages of historicism (not for nothing does Philip Gossett write of the "Romance of the Critical Edition," as though scholarly practice were in some way akin to *La donna del lago*).[21] Yet the irony of the most recent historicizing turn is that it promises, with its very material allure, to rescue critical discourse from the bloodless formal austerities and specious universalism of what, in the Beethovenian tradition, has so frequently been called "aesthetics."[22] "Rossini," in other words, turns out to be less one half of a rich set of binaries than a sort of Pandora's Box – an invitation to go not just beyond the Austro-German tradition, but beyond opera too, as traditionally conceived, chasing the allure of the historical detail or the magical presence of the art work.

So it may turn out that to consider Beethoven and Rossini together is to pose questions of broad disciplinary consequence after all – just as Dahlhaus might have hoped. In writing about these two composers, it can be hard to know at times whether the result is historiography, reception history, or aesthetics – or whether the pairing of the composers itself makes the unavoidable scholarly oscillation between all three categories more apparent than usual. Some of the contributors to this book certainly broach the place of pleasure in the scholarly enterprise, and the history of musical pleasure itself, especially as it has been mediated through institutions and ideologies. But one set of issues remains contested: whether history always serves to relativize or distance composers' aesthetic aspirations, or whether the presence of an art work turns historical research into an aesthetic pleasure in itself – whether "Rossini" symbolizes a responsible, myth-puncturing material history, or whether the kind of aesthetic presence he has often represented is powerful enough to foreclose critical reflection, to free "Beethoven," and perhaps "Rossini" too, from the centuries of discourse in which they are entangled.

*

Many of the essays in this book thus either obliquely or directly return to conceptual first principles. Many also call upon the same cast of characters implicated in the process of invention, particularly in providing a Rossinian counterbalance to the Beethovenian master narrative. Stendhal, for instance, frequently takes center stage, thanks in large part to the impact and memorability of the *Vie de Rossini* in its various national editions. Others are less familiar within this history: Giuseppe

Carpani, for example – the man whose prose Stendhal made his name by plagiarizing – or Peter Lichtenthal, Milanese correspondent of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* during Rossini's period of greatest success. Meanwhile the Austro-German anti-Rossinians, such as A. B. Marx and E. T. A. Hoffmann, surface at various points, as do unexpected Rossinian enthusiasts such as Franz Grillparzer or Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel. And Wagner, inevitably, casts his shadow over much of the discussion.

Unsurprisingly, however, the most important points of reference remain Carl Dahlhaus, creator of the *Stildualismus*, and Raphael Georg Kiesewetter, author of the 1834 history Dahlhaus would claim as inspiration thanks to its final chapter, from which our opening section takes its subtitle ("The age of Beethoven and Rossini?"). The four chapters that make up this section all deal head-on with Kiesewetter's parsing of the early nineteenth century, the far-reaching philosophical and historiographical inferences that Dahlhaus drew from it, and the intellectual prehistory of terms that have since become *au courant*.[23] James Hepokoski begins by clearing the conceptual field with an exhaustive rethinking of the philosophies that Beethoven and Rossini have shaped, growing out of the foundational categories of text and event, and addressing the musicological possibilities that result. James Webster revisits Kiesewetter's *Geschichte der europäisch-abendländischen oder unsrer heutigen Musik* in search of a more nuanced, detailed, and responsible close reading of a text that is nowadays more cited than read, in the process contextualizing Dahlhaus's appropriation of Kiesewetter's categories. Gundula Kreuzer then situates Kiesewetter's writing in the context of nineteenth-century German music history, asking when and why the distinction between German and Italian music became the main driver of the historical narrative, and exploring the consequences that this dualistic outlook had for the historiography of French music, caught between German and Italian models. Lastly, Suzannah Clark reinserts Schubert into the "age of Beethoven and Rossini," showing how his music functions as another potential third term, realigning the discipline's prevailing historical and analytical models.

In the second section of the book ("Senses of place"), four chapters focus on the ways in which a perceived opposition between the worlds of Beethoven and Rossini played out in specific nineteenth-century urban contexts. Roger Parker discusses the concert life and music criticism of 1830s London, and the increasingly discernible division between text-oriented and event-oriented music – a division not yet exclusively reducible to perceptions of Beethoven and Rossini. The untidy coexistence of text- and

event-based musical cultures could be thought to mirror the urban experience itself, Parker argues, with its disjunction between schematic and regulated constructions of the whole – represented by discourses of city governance and urban planning – and the "improvisatory" realities of street-level living. Martin Deasy turns to Milan, particularly in its Viennese-dominated postwar 1816–1817 operatic season. Examining the work and reception of the Milanese composer Carlo Soliva, frequently understood by his contemporaries as a propagator of "Germanic" musical styles, he offers rarely accessed insight into the Italianate perception of the Beethovenian half of the Beethoven-Rossini dyad. Benjamin Walton considers the reception of Rossini's *Zelmira* as a specifically "German" work, in order to explore the ways that the composer's music served to destabilize national musical categories in Vienna and elsewhere in Europe. Finally, Nicholas Mathew uses the second performance of Beethoven's Ninth in Vienna – preceded by Rossini's "Di tanti palpiti" – as a means to explore how criticism and historiography have turned the real voices at performances such as this into the figurative "voice" of Beethoven's music, a transformation that has rarely happened in the case of Rossini's music.

The three chapters in the third section ("Rehearings") critique the Beethoven-Rossini duality by proposing new ways of hearing particular works and musical devices. Listening closely to several overtures by Rossini, Scott Burnham asks why the cycling motivic fragments and extended tonic-dominant alternations of Beethoven's best-known formal apotheoses have come to bear the weight of so much poetic and philosophical speculation, whereas near-identical procedures in Rossini's music (such as the famous "crescendo") have not. Mary Ann Smart turns to a pair of ballets choreographed by Salvatore Viganò: the 1801 *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus*, with its music by Beethoven, and the 1813 Milanese *Prometeo*, which recycled two numbers from his Vienna score. Identifying passages in Beethoven's ballet in which bodily "hurry music" seems indistinct from signs of heroic interiority, Smart maintains that similarly ambiguous musical gestures are found across Beethoven's canonical works; that the physical in Beethoven is frequently indistinguishable from the metaphysical suggests that Beethoven's Italian reception after 1813 could have been identical to Rossini's, had it not been for the political rhetoric that crucially shaped Italian criticism. And Emanuele Senici traces the concept of repetition through Rossini's music and reception – from the level of the musical phrase, to the notoriety of his self-borrowings, to the endlessly repeated performances that characterized the Rossini craze. Observing that music analysis in the Beethovenian tradition

has habitually contrasted repetition with "development" (a concept that has accrued a good deal of philosophical baggage over the years), Senici shows that these concepts are frequently closer than most analysts would like, and that repetition, as well as the heroic trajectories of developmental process, should be regarded as a central characteristic of modernity and its musical echoes.

The chapters in the final section of the book ("Crossing musical cultures") concentrate on particular motifs of the Beethoven-Rossini pairing across history. Focusing on moments in the *Missa Solemnis*, the "Diabelli" Variations, and the Ninth Symphony, Julian Johnson argues that a dialectic of the worldly and the otherworldly – the trivial and the intellectual, the historically localized and the transcendent – is a crucial feature of Beethoven's late music. The poles symbolized by "Beethoven" and "Rossini" therefore can be seen as essential to modernity *tout court*, and, to varying degrees, to shape all modern music. Yael Braunschweig rereads the multiple versions of Schopenhauer's philosophical masterpiece *The World as Will and Representation*, and, carefully extricating the text from its mid-century Wagnerian appropriations, reveals the extent to which the paradigms of Italian opera, and opera by Rossini in particular, shaped Schopenhauer's metaphysics, so frequently co-opted for Beethovenian ends. John Deathridge traces the fraught claims of Beethovenian and Rossinian universality back to the proto-national culture clashes of the late eighteenth century, and forward again to the composer monuments of the late nineteenth century, and into our own time. Finally, turning to a twentieth-century medium, Richard Will compares two early biographical movies, Mario Bonnard's *Rossini* (1942) and Abel Gance's *Un Grand Amour de Beethoven* (1936) – films that notably reverse the main motifs of the Beethoven-Rossini duality, representing Beethoven as the sensualist and Rossini as the hero. In Gance's soundtrack, moreover, Will sees the possibility of defusing the opposition between the two composers, leading to a fuller appreciation of both. Wagner's opposites no longer unfathomable, then, and – as all of these chapters in their different ways show – reanimated by being brought into contact; only together able to hint at the wanton, roving, eerie, and sorrow-broken pleasures of both music and history.

Notes

1 Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, vol. II of *Wagner's Prose Works* (London, 1894), 45; the original German is hardly less florid: "Sie war zu Ende – an jenem Tage, als der von Europa vergötterte, im üppigsten Schooße des Luxus dahinlächelnde Rossini es für geziemend hielt, dem

weltscheuen, bei sich versteckten, mürrischen, für halbverrückt gehaltenen Beethoven einen – Ehrenbesuch abzustatten, den dieser – nicht erwiderte. Was mochte wohl das lüstern schweifende, dunkle Auge des wollüstigen Sohnes Italia's gewahren, als es in den unheimlichen Glanz des schmerzlich gebrochenen, sehnsuchtsiechen – und doch todesmuthigen Blickes seines unbegreiflichen Gegners unwillkürlich sich versenkte? Schüttelte sich ihm das furchtbar wilde Kopfhaar des Medusenhauptes, das Niemand erschaute, ohne zu sterben?" Wagner, *Oper und Drama*, 2nd edn. (Leipzig, 1869), 37–38.

2 "Surtout, faites beaucoup 'del Barbiere'." Edmond Michotte, *La Visite de R. Wagner à Rossini (Paris 1860): Détails inédits et commentaires* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1906), 52; English edition, *Richard Wagner's Visit to Rossini (Paris 1860)*, trans. Herbert Weinstock (University of Chicago Press, 1968), 32.

3 Michotte accounts for the length of time between the event and publication in a preface, saying that he had planned to keep his notes from the meeting private, but that those close to both composers had urged publication.

4 For added evidence that some sort of meeting between the two did take place, see Walter Brauneis, "Beethoven und Rossini in der Josefstadt: Neue Argumente für ein Begegnung der beiden Komponisten im Frühjahr 1822," *Jahrbuch des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Wien*, 54 (1998), 9–17. Rossini's other accounts of the meeting can be found in Eduard Hanslick, "Rossini" in *Aus dem Concertsaal* (Vienna, 1870), 525–530; and Ferdinand Hiller, "Plaudereien mit Rossini" in *Aus dem Tonleben unserer Zeit*, vol. II (Leipzig, 1868), 49; repr. in *Bollettino del Centro Rossiniano di Studi*, 32 (1992), 63–155. In the first edition of Schindler's biography (*Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven* [Münster, 1840], 256), he claims that Rossini tried to visit Beethoven four times, adding that "I shall make no comment on this fact, further than to observe that I wish Beethoven had not so acted." By the edition of 1860 (Münster, 1860, vol. II, 179), the context was fleshed out, and the number of attempts had fallen to two. Rossini, Schindler writes, became keen to see Beethoven, having heard Joseph Mayseder's group performing the quartets; Domenico Artaria sought a meeting, but was rebuffed, and Beethoven later refused to discuss the subject. Wagner's own account of his meeting with Rossini does not mention Beethoven at all; see "Eine Erinnerung an Rossini," *Augsburg allgemeine Zeitung*, supplement, December 17, 1868; trans. William Ashton Ellis as "A Remembrance of Rossini" in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. IV (London, 1895), 269–274.

5 Michotte, *La Visite*, 28.

6 From the Beethovenian side, see Nicholas Mathew, *Political Beethoven* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), and Stephen Rumph, *Beethoven after Napoleon: Political Romanticism in the Late Works* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). See also Scott Burnham and Michael P. Steinberg (eds.), *Beethoven and his World* (Princeton University Press, 2000). The Rossini complete edition (Pesaro: Fondazione Rossini; and, recently in addition, Kassel: Bärenreiter) now consists of more than thirty volumes; there are currently four volumes of the monumental