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978-1-108-00474-9 - Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future: History and Aesthetics

Francis Hueffer

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**Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future**

Francis Hueffer (1843-1889) was music critic for *The Times* from 1878 to 1889 and was also secretary of the Wagner Society founded in 1873. This 1874 book, much of it originally published in the *Fortnightly Review*, considers Wagner's role in the musical developments of the nineteenth century that followed the watershed of Beethoven's ninth symphony. It is one of the first works in English to explore the nature of Wagner's genius, and builds on an essay published by the author in *The Academy* about Wagner's own pamphlet on Beethoven. Hueffer's analysis of the formation of Wagner's artistic values and musical philosophy as embodied in his writings and music dramas is complemented by discussion of the songs of Schubert, Schumann and Liszt. The appendix provides an account of the performance of Beethoven's ninth which Wagner conducted at Bayreuth in 1872, and the laying of the foundation stone of the Festspielhaus.

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*History and Aesthetics*

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*HISTORY AND ÆSTHETICS.*

BY

FRANZ HUEFFER.

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## PREFACE.



A CONSIDERABLE part of the contents of the present volume has been previously published in the 'Fortnightly Review;' a smaller portion, consisting chiefly of the letters of R. Schumann, appeared in the 'Academy.' Everything, however, has been recast and made subservient to the purposes of this book, about which the author now begs leave to make a few introductory remarks.

Musicians and theorists of all colours (for now-a-days one must distinguish the different shades of party opinion, in music as well as in politics or religion) agree in the one point, that, by the works of Beethoven's latter years, and especially by the Ninth Symphony of that master, a new phase is marked in the history of their art. In the last-mentioned work, or, to speak quite accurately, in its three first movements, it was finally shown, how far music in its separate condition could go in achieving the ultimate aim of all art, *i.e.*, the render-

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ing of the emotions of the human heart. It may in this respect be called the triumph of absolute music; and, indeed, no symphonic work of a later period can be said to have surpassed, or even equalled in beauty and power of expression, this gigantic effort of a master-mind. But in this very splendour of artistic perfection we indistinctly, but no less certainly, feel the want of something that remains unexpressed; and by acknowledging this want, as founded in the nature of music itself, and introducing into the last movement of his D minor symphony the human word, as a firm basis for his lofty aspirations, Beethoven has at the same time ushered in a new period of his art.

To define the æsthetical foundation of this new idea in music, and at the same time follow the course of its growth, will be my chief task in the following pages. Here I will only try to indicate in a few words its most general characteristics, and first of all to fix its nondescript airiness into a local habitation and a name. The new movement, therefore, which arose after and, to a great extent, through Beethoven's reformatory deeds, we will henceforth call the period of *poetic music* (the strict definition of which term I must defer to another occasion); or, in case the reader should prefer an



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old to a new-coined expression, we will occasionally apply the generally acknowledged *sobriquet* of the Music of the Future.

The poetic principle, alluded to, may be divided into a lyrical and a dramatic part; which distinction, translated into musical terms, will lead us to the two important forms of the *Music-Drama* and the *Song*. At the same time it seems to me that only in these two kinds of development music shows a decided advance upon Beethoven's creations, a remark which, of course, is made without any derogatory tendency with regard to the instrumental works of modern composers. In many cases these have displayed individual beauties of the highest order without, however, adding essentially new features to the symphonic form, as established by Beethoven.

As a further means of subdivision, I have headed the single chapters of my work with the representative names of Richard Wagner for the dramatic, and Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt, and Robert Franz for the different shades of the lyrical phase of modern music.

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I.

The Drama.

“Blest pair of Sirens, pledges of heaven’s joy,  
Sphere-born harmonious sisters, Voice and Verse,  
Wed your divine sounds, and mix’d power employ,  
Dead things with inbreath’d sense able to pierce.” ·

*Milton.*