

Absolute vs. Program Music? Dramaturgical Topics and Program- Related New Formal Strategies as Alternatives to an Outdated Perception Pattern

STEFAN KEYM

Universität Leipzig

✉ keym@uni-leipzig.de

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The controversy “absolute vs. program music” is considered a central theme in 19th-century music history. Especially in studies on music aesthetics, it has often been presented as a significant paradigm shift. In contrast, music analysis has traditionally paid far less attention to program music than to absolute music. This imbalance is due to the fact that the founders of musicology were themselves deeply involved in the controversy (especially Eduard Hanslick). The controversy is therefore very revealing for the context of the emergence of our discipline. But is it as helpful for understanding 19th-century instrumental music? This seems rather doubtful to me, as it suggests a black-and-white perspective in which the diversity of musical phenomena is reduced to a dichotomous either/or instead of a more differentiated view of poetic, expressive and other life-world references in music.

In this paper, I will outline two complementary approaches that bridge the old divides between absolute and program music. On the one hand, I will look at dramaturgical topics that shape the musical experience in instrumental works with and without a program; on the other hand, I will

Muzyka absolutna czy programowa? Zagadnienia dramaturgiczne i nowe formalne strategie programowe wobec przestarzałego modelu percepcji

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consider how programmatic aspects have contributed to the emergence of new formal strategies that also work independently of a program. First, I will briefly summarize the historical background of the controversy.

1. The Controversy over Absolute and Program Music

Many advocates of the idea of “absolute music” are hardly aware that this term was originally meant negatively and used in a context that involved opera. The earliest evidence can be found in texts by Richard Wagner: in his program notes for a performance of Ludwig van Beethoven’s 9th Symphony in Dresden (1846) and in his extensive monograph *Oper und Drama* (1850/51)¹. Analogous to Ludwig Feuerbach’s accusation of “absolute philosophy” directed at Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel², Wagner understood “absolute music” to mean an absolutization of musical principles in the symphony and in Gioachino Rossini’s *belcanto* opera³. With his criticism of the one-sided focus on beautiful vocal melodies in Italian opera, Wagner drew on a French debate rooted in the 18th century⁴. However, this original context was soon forgotten, as the term *absolute Musik* became positively reinterpreted as the ideal of a new aesthetics which saw the meaning of music primarily in itself. In 1854, the Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick proclaimed this ideal of “pure, absolute musical art” in his habilitation thesis *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* and defined it as “tonally

1 Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Dichtungen und Schriften*, vol. 2, Leipzig 2/1887, p. 61 (“die Schranken der absoluten Musik”), and idem, *Oper und Drama*, ed. Klaus Kropfinger, Stuttgart 1984, p. 41 (“absolut musikalisch”). Cf. the English translation of a large fragment from Wagner’s 1846 program in: Mark Evan Bonds, *The Idea of Absolute Music. The History of an Idea*, Oxford 2014, p. 132.

2 See Klaus Kropfinger, *Wagner und Beethoven. Untersuchungen zur Beethoven-Rezeption Richard Wagners*, Regensburg 1975, p. 136, and Sanna Pederson, “Defining the Term ‘Absolute Music’ Historically”, *Music & Letters* 2009 no. 90, p. 242.

3 R. Wagner, *Oper und Drama*, op. cit., p. 43, 323 “absolute Melodie”.

4 See Matthias Brzoska, *Die Idee des Gesamtkunstwerks in der Musiknovellistik der Julimonarchie*, Laaber 1995, p. 102–115.

animated form”⁵. He was the main protagonist of a classicist-formalist sub-current of the discourse on “absolute music”, which tried to strictly separate the “specifically musical” from the so-called “extra-musical”⁶.

This current has to be distinguished from a Romantic-metaphysical sub-current that originated with the early Romantic poets Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck and was applied to Viennese instrumental music by E.T.A. Hoffmann in his famous review of Beethoven’s 5th Symphony in the Leipzig *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (1810). Hoffmann declared instrumental music to be the “most Romantic of the arts”, which “purely expresses the peculiar essence of this art” and opens up a “spiritual realm of the infinite” that “has nothing in common with the outer sensory world”⁷. Hoffmann did not yet use the term *absolute Musik*; however, by enthusiastically transfiguring music into a religion of art, he attributed a metaphysical dimension to it. Thus, “absolute music” could also be understood as the evocation of the absolute. Carl Dahlhaus consistently presented the history of classical-romantic music aesthetics from the perspective of “the idea of absolute music”, bringing the positions of Hoffmann and Hanslick closely together⁸. This is misleading insofar as

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- 5 Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen. Ein Beitrag zur Revision der Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, critical edition by Dietmar Strauß, Mainz 1990), p. 52 (“reine, absolute Tonkunst”) and 75 (“tönend bewegte Formen”). Cf. also M. E. Bonds, op. cit., p. 141–209. According to Daniel K. L. Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning*, Cambridge 1999, p. 227, Hanslick “hijacked the term” from Wagner.
- 6 E. Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, op. cit., p. 74 (“ein spezifisch Musikalisches”) and 10 (“einen fremden, außermusikalischen Gedankenkreis”).
- 7 Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, “Recension” [of Beethoven’s 5th Symphony], in: *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 1810 no. 12, col. 630–642, 652–660, quotations 631. Hoffmann’s article “Beethovens Instrumentalmusik”, published in 1814 in his collection *Kreisleriana*, is a slightly altered version of this review: “Sie ist die romantischste aller Künste [...], denn nur das Unendliche ist ihr Vorwurf. [...] Die Musik schließt dem Menschen ein unbekanntes Reich auf, eine Welt, die nichts gemein hat mit der äußern Sinnenwelt, die ihn umgibt und in der er alle bestimmten Gefühle zurückläßt, um sich einer unaussprechlichen Sehnsucht hinzugeben”. E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Kreisleriana*, ed. Hanne Castein, Stuttgart 1983, p. 26–27.
- 8 Carl Dahlhaus, *Die Idee der absoluten Musik*, Kassel–Munich 1978). For a critical assessment of Dahlhaus’ perspective see also M.E. Bonds, op. cit., p. 13–14.

Hanslick directed his book primarily against what he called “the rotten aesthetics of emotion”⁹: the conviction that music primarily expresses and excites emotions, which had been commonplace since antiquity. Hoffmann, on the other hand, only claimed that when listening to instrumental music “one leaves behind all specific feelings in order to surrender to an inexpressible longing”¹⁰. In spite of his adherence to the *Unsaubarkeits-topos* of music, Hoffmann often referred to emotional terms and poetic images in his music criticism, but without imposing these as a binding program (similar to Robert Schumann). This hermeneutic approach was rejected by Hanslick as subjective and therefore irrelevant, as were the emotions triggered by music.

Hanslick’s term “extra-musical” (*außermusikalisch*) still shapes the academic debate on program music today. However, he did not introduce this term as a neutral category, but as a purist term of struggle in order to protect the “specifically musical”¹¹. The term “transmusical” seems more appropriate to me. It makes clear that something comes into play which goes beyond the purely technical aspects of composition and refers to the reality of the listener’s life; however, this reference also becomes part of the musical-aesthetic experience through its conscious inclusion in the composition and an awareness thereof on the part of the listener.

The lasting dominance of Hanslick’s formalistic point of view — especially in German music literature — is due to the fact that the idea of absolute music was closely linked to the enormous rise of the aesthetic and social status of music and musicians during the 19th century¹². The Romantic

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- 9 E. Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, op. cit., preface to the 1st edition, p. 9 (“Genug wenn es mir glückte, siegreiche Mauerbrecher gegen die verrottete Gefühlsästhetik auf den Kampfplatz zu tragen”).
- 10 E.T.A. Hoffmann, „Beethovens Instrumentalmusik”, op. cit., p. 27 (quotation in footnote 7).
- 11 In fact, the term *außermusikalisch* is not found in the original version of Hanslick’s book *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*. It was added in the preface to the second edition (1858), p. 10 (see quotation in footnote 6).
- 12 Cf. David Gramit, *Cultivating Music: The Aspirations, Interests, and Limits of German Musical Culture, 1770–1848*, Berkeley 2002.

poets glorified instrumental music as the most romantic of the arts and contributed significantly to the canonization of the works of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven as eternal classical masterpieces — drawing an analogy to the canonization of the Weimar Classics Goethe and Schiller in literature and applying their principle of artistic autonomy. However, the rise of “pure instrumental music” also served to strengthen German national identity¹³. As the German lands were politically fragmented at the time, the concept of *Kulturnation* was used to establish a common foundation. This required unique cultural achievements of which one could be proud, and these were found in the new Viennese instrumental music in particular. The postulate of the superiority of German music, which was repeatedly proclaimed in the music press (above all in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, the house organ of the important music publisher Breitkopf & Härtel in Leipzig), could only be maintained if it referred to the large instrumental genres¹⁴.

Against this cultural-political background, it is understandable that the mainstream of Germanic music aesthetics, theory and musicology — from Hanslick via Hugo Riemann and Heinrich Schenker to Dahlhaus — always adhered to the primacy of absolute music, to its clear separation from program music and to the marginalization of the emotional and poetic aspects of music listening.

Nevertheless, the antagonistic juxtaposition of absolute and program music can also be found in some writings of Franz Liszt, the founder of the new genre of the symphonic poem (*symphonische Dichtung*). In a long essay on Hector Berlioz and his program symphony *Harold en Italie* (1855), Liszt contrasted Hanslick’s “specifically musical composer” or “mere musician”, who “concatenates tones according to certain traditional rules” and

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- 13 Cf. Celia Applegate, “How German Is It? Nationalism and the Idea of Serious Music in the Early 19th Century”, *19th-Century Music* 1998 no. 21/3, p. 274-296.
- 14 See e.g. Ernst Ludwig Gerber, “Eine freundliche Vorstellung über gearbeitete Instrumentalmusik, besonders über Symphonien”, *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 1813 no. 15, col. 457-458, and Stefan Keym, “The Role of Intercultural Transfers in the Invention of ‘Classical Music’ in Early Nineteenth-Century Leipzig”, in: *Intercultural Transfers and Processes of Spatialization*, ed. Michel Espagne, Matthias Middell, Leipzig 2022, p. 17-36.

remains in the limited sphere of his craft, with his new ideal of the “tone poet”, who renders “an image clearly present in his mind, a succession of states of the soul” and thereby “extends the boundaries of his art”¹⁵. Furthermore, he called on the “poetic symphonist” to use his works, like other artists of the time, to engage in social and philosophical debates. Liszt defined the program as a means of drawing the audience’s attention “in advance to the poetic idea of the entire work”¹⁶. He also attributed a social function to the program which is often overlooked. Liszt justified the use of the program as a strategic tool to make large instrumental works more accessible to an influential group of listeners: the “people of thought and action” (*Denk- und Tatmenschen*)¹⁷, intellectuals and politicians who did not allow themselves to be “penetrated by the indeterminate but powerful emotions” that music evoked in less educated listeners and who regarded music only as a “sensual nerve stimulus or as an incomprehensible, almost superfluous intellectual game”¹⁸. In order to attract these people, music had to convey ideas.

With this strategy, Liszt obviously had in mind the French audience of his virtuoso years in Paris. Already Schumann, in his review of Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique* (1835), speculated that Berlioz had conceived the program primarily for his French compatriots, adding: “All of Germany

15 Franz Liszt, “Berlioz und seine Harold-Symphonie” [1855], in: idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Julius Kapp, Leipzig 1910, vol. IV, p. 124 (“Doch ist ein großer Unterschied zwischen dem Tondichter und dem bloßen Musiker. Während der erstere, um seine Eindrücke und Seelenerlebnisse mitzuteilen, diese reproduziert, handhabt, gruppiert und verkettet der zweite Töne nach gewissen traditionellen Regeln”), p. 125 (“die Grenzen seiner Kunst zu erweitern”) and 126 (“ein in seinem Geist deutlich vorhandenes Bild, eine Folge von Seelenzuständen”).

16 Ibidem, p. 101 (“im voraus auf die poetische Idee des Ganzen”).

17 Franz Liszt, “Robert Schumann” [1855], in: idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, op. cit., p. 233.

18 Franz Liszt, “Marx und sein Buch ,Die Musik des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts und ihre Pflege” [1855], in: idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, op. cit., p. 387 (“Sie können und wollen sich nicht von den unbestimmten, aber lebendigen, mächtigen Gefühlen durchdringen lassen”) and 388 (“in ihren Augen ist ihre Wirkung nichts anderes als ein auf das Gefühl sich berufender sinnlicher Nervenreiz oder als ein unverständliches, fast überflüssiges geistiges Spiel”).

gladly returns it to him”¹⁹. The same negative echo was later found in much of the German music press about Liszt’s program music²⁰. By this time, the German music public was already more accustomed to contemplative listening to large instrumental works. Critics such as Hanslick regarded programs not only as superfluous, but even as an obstacle to an appropriate, deep understanding of “absolute music”²¹ and as a means of questioning of its achievements. It seems to be no coincidence that Beethoven’s *Sinfonia pastorale*, his only symphony with specific movement titles, was rarely played at the Leipzig Gewandhaus in the late 19th century. In France, on the contrary, this work was particularly popular thanks to its program²². Liszt’s hope of attracting new audiences to symphonic music with the help of programs was obviously based on a French-German misunderstanding.

Today, program music is receiving more attention in research, especially from an interdisciplinary and intermedial perspective that focuses on correspondences between the arts²³. However, the fact that many of the literary works to which these compositions refer have fallen into oblivion is an obstacle to their present-day reception with respect to a larger public.

In this article, I am less interested in intermedial aspects than in the question of the common basis of instrumental works with and without

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- 19 Robert Schumann, “Sinfonie von H. Berlioz” [1835], in: idem, *Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, ed. Josef Häusler, Stuttgart 1982, p. 50 (“Ganz Deutschland schenkt es ihm”).
- 20 See the anthology *Die Neudeutsche Schule — Phänomen und Geschichte. Quellen und Kommentare zu einer zentralen musikästhetischen Kontroverse des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Dominik von Roth, Ulrike Roesler, Kassel 2020.
- 21 See for example Hanslick’s review of a Viennese performance of Liszt’s symphonic poem *Les Préludes* in 1857, reprinted in Eduard Hanslick, *Geschichte des Concertwesens in Wien*, vol. 2, Vienna 1870, p. 117–121.
- 22 See Stefan Keym, “Un répertoire populaire pour un public d’élite? Étude comparée des Concerts populaires d’Angers et des concerts symphoniques à Leipzig entre 1877 et 1893”, in: *140 ans de musique instrumentale à Angers (1877–2017)*, ed. Nicolas Dufetel, Paris 2020, p. 214, 226.
- 23 See Cord-Friedrich Berghahn, “Literatur, Kunst und ‘poetische’ Musik. Intermedialität in Franz Liszts ‘Années de Pèlerinage’”, in: *Musik im Spannungsfeld zwischen nationalem Denken und Weltbürgertum. Franz Liszt zum 200. Geburtstag*, ed. Dorothea Redepenning, Heidelberg 2015, p. 101–123.

a program. According to Constantin Floros, there was no such thing as absolute music at all, as every instrumental work was ultimately based on a program, possibly a concealed one, which musicology had the task of deciphering²⁴. With this approach, Floros has opened up a new perspective on many instrumental works (e.g. by Johannes Brahms) which have long been studied one-sidedly according to technical, above all motivic-thematic criteria. But Floros' perspective also seems one-sided to me and above all predictable. The outcome is a foregone conclusion.

I am going to introduce an alternative perspective here that starts from a broad continuum between the extreme poles of absolute and program music; a perspective that is not dichotomously restricted to "either/or", "black/white", but allows for analytical **as well as** hermeneutic approaches, for one and the same work. This perspective will be approached from two opposite directions which represent complementary paths to the same goal.

2. Dramaturgical Topics in Instrumental Music: the Case of the Incursion

In his theory of "resonance", the philosopher and sociologist Hartmut Rosa compares the relationship between the self and the world with the resonance that music has with us. According to Rosa, music creates a "very specific form of relationship to the world"²⁵ which encompasses physical as well as emotional and cognitive aspects. Music is able "to express and to create all kinds and shades of relationships"²⁶. Rosa sees these relationships as being expressed in their purest and most existential form

24 Constantin Floros, *Musik als Botschaft*, Wiesbaden 1989, especially p. 140–154 ("Verschwiegene Programmmusik").

25 Hartmut Rosa, *Resonanz. Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung*, Frankfurt/Main 2019, p. 161 ("eine ganz spezifische Form der Weltbeziehung").

26 *Ibidem*, p. 162 ("alle Arten und Schattierungen von Beziehungen auszudrücken oder zu stiften").

in instrumental music²⁷. Consequently, instrumental music can be perceived as a phenomenon whose elements and sections stand in specific relationships to each other: contrast, similarity, repetition, intensification, decrease, continuity, rupture. Such relationships are effective on several formal and parametrical levels and create a dramaturgy of form and expression which affects the various levels of human musical resonance, not only with respect to analytical reasoning, but also when it comes to the emotional listening experience. This dramaturgy is based on a set of topics which began to emerge in the 18th century and can be found in many instrumental works of the long 19th century²⁸. In contrast to the topics which musical topic theory has mainly dealt with thus far²⁹, the significance and effect of these **dramaturgical topics** does not lie primarily in themselves (and in their transmusal cultural connotations), but results above all from their relationship to the context immanent in the work. The relational and emotional impact of these topics may be specified by programmatic references, but does not need to be. Dramaturgical topics largely depend on so-called “quantitative parameters”³⁰, such as dynamics, register and motion. Moreover, they interact with established formal schemes, such as sonata form, and their listening expectations³¹.

Theodor W. Adorno outlined some of these dramaturgical topics in his book on Gustav Mahler, presenting them as categories of a “material theory of form”: breakthrough, suspension, fulfillment³². The breakthrough

27 Ibidem, p. 483.

28 Cf. Stefan Keym, “Dynamik-Topoi als Faktoren der Formdramaturgie von Sonatensätzen des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts”, *Musiktheorie* 2023 no. 38, p. 153–164.

29 Cf. Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic. Hunt, Military and Pastoral*, Bloomington/Indianapolis 2006, and V. Kofi Agawu, *Music as Discourse. Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music*, Oxford 2009.

30 Leonard B. Meyer, “A Universe of Universals”, *The Journal of Musicology* 1998 no. 16/1, p. 8.

31 David Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation*, Cambridge, Mass. 2006.

32 Theodor W. Adorno, “Mahler. Eine musikalische Physiognomik”, in: idem, *Die musikalischen Monographien*, Frankfurt/Main 1986, p. 190 (“Durchbruch, Suspension, Erfüllung”) and 193 (“materiale Formenlehre”).

(*Durchbruch*) in particular has come into focus in recent anglophone research³³. It is important to emphasize that this term was by no means an invention of Adorno's and has found a broader use in German musical discourse since the 19th century³⁴. The term, which originally stems from the mining industry, refers to a forceful, generally violent passage from one zone to another, with a positive, liberating connotation. In music, it is usually associated with a shift from a minor to a major key, corresponding to a tonal dramaturgy which, starting with Beethoven's 5th and 9th Symphonies, became the model for most of the symphonies and other multi-movement instrumental works in minor keys in the 19th century³⁵. The breakthrough is a spectacularly staged moment that is closely linked to the overall dramaturgy of the work and often functions as its goal. Its mechanisms can be analyzed objectively, but its effect is aimed at emotionally overwhelming the listener. From the very beginning, this strong effect was characterized with metaphors: E.T.A. Hoffmann already spoke of night

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- 33 James Hepokoski, "Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero? Strauss's Don Juan Reinvestigated", in: *Richard Strauss. New Perspectives on the Composer and his Work*, ed. Bryan Gilliam, Durham-London 1992, p. 135-175; James Buhler, "'Breakthrough' as Critique of Form: the Finale of Mahler's First Symphony", *19th-Century Music* 1996 no. 20/2, p. 125-143; Karol Berger, "The Breakthrough Once Again: On Mahler's First Symphony", in: *Musik im Zusammenhang: Festschrift Peter Revers zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Klaus Aringer, Vienna 2019, p. 369-378; Kelvin H. F. Lee, "Formalising Star Clusters. Sonata Process and Breakthrough Function in the Adagio of Mahler's Tenth Symphony", *Music Analysis* 2021 no. 40/2, p. 178-226.
- 34 See Laurenz Lütteken, *Der verborgene Sinn. Verhüllung und Enthüllung in der Musik*, Kasel 2021, p. 157-170, and Katarina Markovic Stokes, *The World of Mahler's Early Symphonies: From Idea to Form* (Ph.D. Diss., Brandeis University, 2004). I thank Rafael D. (Ardi) Echevarria (Durham, UK) for the inspiring exchange on the topic of the breakthrough.
- 35 See Julian Horton, "Introduction: Understanding the Symphony", in: *The Cambridge Companion to the Symphony*, ed. Julian Horton, Cambridge 2013, p. 4-9; Stefan Keym, "Wien — Paris — Wien. Beethovens Moll-Dur-Dramaturgie im Licht einer 'histoire croisée'", in: *Beethoven. Studien und Interpretationen*, ed. Mieczysław Tomaszewski, vol. 4, Kraków 2009, p. 407-419; James Hepokoski, Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory. Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century*, Oxford 2006, p. 307-317; Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 2, Oxford 2005, p. 691-739.

and light in his review of Beethoven's 5th Symphony³⁶. Later, teleological pairs of terms emerged such as “per aspera ad astra” or “struggle and victory”³⁷. In my book on late 19th- and early 20th-century Polish symphonic music, I have shown how the minor-major-key dramaturgy was used for political-patriotic purposes³⁸. A similar programmatic concretization is already evident in Mendelssohn's *Reformation Symphony* (1830–32) and in Parisian opera overtures of the late 18th century. Nevertheless, the effect of this dramaturgy is immediate and also works without any title or detailed program. It therefore is a connecting element between absolute and program music.

In the following, I will discuss another dramaturgical topic, which to a certain extent represents the negative counterpart to the breakthrough and which has not yet been systematically examined across a broad repertoire: the **incursion** (*Einbruch*)³⁹. By this term I mean the sudden onset of something frightening and uncanny. Just as the breakthrough, the

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- 36 E.T.A. Hoffmann, “Recension”, op. cit., col. 655: “Mit dem prächtigen, jauchzenden Thema des Schlusssatzes, C dur, fällt das ganze Orchester, dem jetzt noch kleine Flöten, Posaunen und Contrafagott hinzutreten, ein — wie ein strahlendes, blendendes Sonnenlicht, das plötzlich die tiefe Nacht erleuchtet”.
- 37 See Stefan Keym, “Von der langsamen Einleitung zur Schlussapothese. Die zwei Typen der Moll-Dur-Dramaturgie in Pariser Opernouvertüren des späten 18. Jahrhunderts und ihre Relevanz für Beethoven”, in: *Dur versus Moll. Zur Geschichte der Semantik eines musikalischen Elementarkontrasts*, ed. Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen, Stefan Keym, Vienna 2020, p. 155–188.
- 38 Stefan Keym, *Symphonie-Kulturtransfer. Untersuchungen zum Studienaufenthalt polnischer Komponisten in Deutschland und zu ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit der symphonischen Tradition 1867–1918*, Hildesheim 2010, p. 327–373; Polish version: *Symfoniczny transfer kulturowy. Studia kompozytorów polskich w Niemczech oraz ich spotkanie z niemiecką tradycją symfoniczną 1867–1918*, translated by Marcin Trzęsiok, Barbara Świdorska, Warsaw 2024, p. 469–556.
- 39 Hitherto, the German term “*Einbruch*” has been used occasionally as a metaphor in analytical studies, but not as a concept of music theory or aesthetics. See e.g. Gernot Gruber, *Mozart verstehen. Ein Versuch*, Salzburg 1990, p. 245–246, and Peter Gülke, ‘*Triumph der neuen Tonkunst*’. *Mozarts späte Sinfonien*, Kassel–Stuttgart 1998, p. 183–184. J. Hepokoski & W. Darcy (op. cit., p. 142) mention “minor-mode intrusions midway into normally major-mode S-space” (with regard to the secondary theme of Beethoven's String Quartet op. 18/6 which, however, does not display a violent fortissimo outburst). Anglophone

incursion is based on an interplay of mode on the one hand and dynamics/texture/instrumentation on the other. Whereas the breakthrough leads from minor to major, the incursion shifts from major to minor. Both topics normally move from piano to forte; this is the basis for their violent or “breaking” effect; in the incursion, however, the change of dynamics is always sudden, whereas in the breakthrough it might be prepared by a crescendo. Consequently, the breakthrough often has a teleological dimension, whereas the incursion may only have a local effect. Its characteristically high degree of discontinuity and surprise (or *imprévu*, the unforeseen⁴⁰) results from a stark contrast with the immediately preceding section, which has to be calm and peaceful. In spite of its clearly negative effect, the incursion seems to elicit fascination among composers and listeners. As Hartmut Rosa observed, it is often the musical reflection of a negative, alienating relationship to the world that attracts us the most, permitting a reaction of intensive resonance as the music and our personal life-world experience interact⁴¹.

In principle, a slow, peaceful composition seems to provide the best context for an incursion. In fact, there are a number of slow movements with a stormy middle section, particularly in the work of Mozart (for example, in the late E-flat major and “Jupiter” Symphonies K. 549 and 551 or the D minor Piano Concerto K. 466)⁴². However, in these slow movements, it is usually the entire middle section which is stormy. The moment of the incursion coincides with the beginning of a new main section. Therefore, the degree of surprise is not so great, because the preceding section has

colleagues as Benedict Taylor, Julian Horton and Sean Reilly advised me to use the term “incursion” for the phenomenon in question.

40 See Hermann Danuser, “Das ‘*imprévu*’ in der Symphonik. Aspekte einer musikalischen Formkategorie in der Zeit von Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach bis Hector Berlioz”, *Musiktheorie* 1986 no. 1, p. 61–81.

41 H. Rosa, op. cit., p. 484–489. The song *Frühlingstraum* (*Spring Dream*) from Franz Schubert’s cycle *Winterreise* is among the music examples discussed by Rosa. This song consists of two sharply contrasting sections, the second of which expresses the disillusion of the romantic dreams described in the first and starts with an incursion.

42 See also Fryderyk Chopin’s *Nocturnes* op. 9/3 and 15/1 as well as his 2nd Ballad op. 38.

been completed and a contrasting element is expected thereafter. The surprise effect is stronger when the incursion occurs in the middle of a slow introduction, as in Mozart's "Prague" Symphony in D Major K. 504 (1786).

In a major-key sonata exposition, the place where a minor-key incursion would most likely be expected is the transition. Since modulation, minor chords and high volume are very common here, special precautions are necessary to achieve a surprising effect. In the first movement of Mozart's Piano Sonata in F Major, K. 332 (1783), the primary theme is followed by another section in the home key, with a calm, pastoral character (bar 13); both are sealed off with perfect authentic cadences before a transitory section in D minor, where stormy *appassionato* passages suddenly break in (bar 23). The term "transition" is only applicable here in a higher, abstract sense, as there is no real transition to the D minor section, which instead begins with sharp abruptness. A similar effect returns in the finale of the same sonata: At the end of the primary-theme group, the music seems to come to a standstill, turning aimlessly in on itself and essentially falling asleep before the incursion (bar 36). The two incursions correspond with other unexpected shifts to minor keys in this Sonata⁴³, but these are coupled with piano dynamics and thus constitute another dramaturgical topic: the clouding (*Eintrübung*)⁴⁴.

A dramaturgy with an even more surprising effect is the use of the incursion within the exposition of the secondary-theme zone: that is, after the secondary theme but before the decisive cadence, the so-called "essential expositional closure" (EEC) according to the terminology introduced by James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy⁴⁵. The first movement of Mozart's "Jupiter" Symphony in C Major K. 551 (1789) provides an *exemplum classicum* for this strategy: just two bars on a minor chord are enough

43 W. A. Mozart, Piano Sonata K. 332, movement I: bar 58 (second section of the secondary-theme zone), movement II: bar 5 (repetition of the primary theme); movement III: bar 50 (secondary theme).

44 J. Hepokoski, W. Darcy, op. cit., p. 26, 142, 311, use the metaphor "lights-out" for all sudden changes from a major to a minor key in sonata form, without taking into account whether the change is combined with forte or piano dynamics.

45 Ibidem, p. 18, 120–124.

to achieve a spectacular effect (bars 80–81). The context is decisive here. The secondary theme (in G major) embodies the type of cantabile, lyrical piano theme commonly used at this point and is largely limited to string instrumentation. In bar 79, it suddenly breaks off on a dominant seventh chord and a general pause is followed by an orchestra tutti entrance, which includes timpani and trumpets as well as a tremolo in the strings on a subdominant C minor chord. Admittedly, the upper voice (*E flat-E-F*) takes over the chromaticism of the secondary theme and thus might seem to be motivically prepared, at least on an abstract structural level; and in the context of the tonal plan of the entire movement, the incursion only creates a brief delay in the expected confirmation of the second key by the EEC-cadence in bar 89. But thanks to its spectacular staging, this moment provokes a shocking effect of something very strange and threatening breaking in⁴⁶. It is the most outstanding moment of the exposition. What may appear to be just a short “prolongation” from a purely technical point of view is in fact a decisive event in the expressive dramaturgy of the whole work.

It is highly probable that this dramatic moment contributed to the symphony being given the title “Jupiter” in England in the early 19th century: as a reference to the ancient father of the gods as a mighty ruler, mostly serene, but occasionally thundering⁴⁷. However, this is just a poetic metaphor and not an official program. In fact, the interpretation of this symphony as a portrait of Jupiter even implies an opposing image to the metaphor of the “incursion”: not a threatening break-in of something external, but rather a sudden outburst of anger⁴⁸. Both metaphors, however, work to express the frightening emotional effect of this moment.

46 This effect has been highlighted in many analytical studies of the work. See e.g. P. Gülke, *Triumph der neuen Tonkunst*, op. cit., p. 183–184, Stefan Kunze, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Sinfonie in C-Dur KV 551, Jupiter-Sinfonie*, München 1988, p. 53, and Elaine Sisman, *Mozart: The ‘Jupiter’ Symphony No. 41 in C major, K. 551*, Cambridge 1993, p. 49 (“shock effect”).

47 This thesis is very convincingly argued by G. Gruber, *Mozart verstehen*, op. cit., p. 243–258 (with reference to the literary topics of “*Jupiter tonans*” and “*Jupiter fulgur*”). On the unofficial title of Mozart’s last symphony see also S. Kunze, *Mozart. Sinfonie in C-Dur KV 551*, op. cit., p. 19–20, and E. Sisman, op. cit., p. xi.

48 E. Sisman, op. cit., p. 37, uses the terms “interjection” and “outburst” synonymously.

Music Example No. 1: Mozart, Symphony in C Major K. 511, movement 1, bars 76–89

76

Fl

Ob

Fg

Hrn in C

Trp in C

Timp

Vl I

Vl II

Va

Vc / Cb

84

Fl

Ob

Fg

Hrn in C

Trp in C

Timp

Vl I

Vl II

Va

Vc / Cb

In spite of its short duration, the incursion has consequences for the large-scale formal structure of the symphony's first movement. It implies that the EEC has to be followed by a longer major-key section with a further, third theme in order to calm the waves of excitement after the brief thunderstorm (bar 101). For this theme, Mozart borrowed a melodic fragment from one of his own opera buffa arias (*Un bacio di mano*): again, there is a highly specific musical topic, but no particular program⁴⁹. In the recapitulation, Mozart heightens the effect of the incursion by continuing the subdominant minor chord (here F minor) into the Neapolitan sixth chord (D flat major) and also introducing the minor tonic (C minor) in the course of a chromatic downward progression (bars 268–277). With respect to the cyclic form of the “Jupiter” Symphony, the two incursions in the first movement correspond with further abrupt C minor entries in the second movement (bar 19) and in the finale (bar 127).

Mozart obviously had a particular preference for the incursion (similar to Beethoven's fondness of the breakthrough). In establishing this dramatic topic, it seems that he combined two traditions: on the one hand, the custom of placing a minor-key episode in the middle of the exposition was already established in Viennese symphonies, namely of Georg Christoph Wagenseil, albeit in the context of a relatively continuous formal structure that did not yet have a clearly distinct secondary theme⁵⁰. On the other hand, Mozart, like Joseph Haydn, appreciated Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's piano music, which was influenced by the free fantasia and rich in surprises. While Haydn developed this tradition (at least in his later works) primarily in the direction of wit and humor, Mozart turned it towards the

49 In fact, the text of the quoted aria fragment might be interpreted as an ironic commentary on the preceding incursion: “Voi siete un po' tondo, / mio caro Pompeo, / l'usanze del mondo / andate a studiar.” (“You are a bit coarse, my Dear Pompeo, go studying the manners of the world.”).

50 Cf. Mary Sue Morrow, “The Symphony in the Austrian Monarchy”, in: *The Eighteenth-Century Symphony*, ed. Mary Sue Morrow, Bathia Churgin (= “The Symphonic Repertoire” 1), Bloomington 2012, p. 431; Allan Badley, “Georg Christoph Wagenseil”, *ibidem*, p. 475; Stefan Kunze, *Die Sinfonie im 18. Jahrhundert* (“Handbuch der musikalischen Gattungen” 1), Laaber 1993, p. 198.

uncanny and dramatic. The latter's development of the free fantasia becomes very clear from a comparative look at his Fantasia in C minor K. 475 (1785), which contains two especially violent incursions. Whereas the listener could expect such shocking effects in a fantasia at every moment, they were rather uncommon in sonata expositions, so that the surprise was much greater. Thanks to incursions, major-key movements gain depth, sublimity and complexity. This also applies to the relationship between the different phases of the sonata form: the contrast **within** the secondary-theme zone becomes stronger than that between the primary and the secondary theme, resulting in a new dramaturgy of the sonata exposition.

The incursion may gain even more weight when it occurs within the secondary-theme zone of a minor-key movement, as in Franz Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony in B minor D. 759 (1822). The break occurs here at a similar point and with similar means as in Mozart's "Jupiter" Symphony⁵¹. Once again, the cantabile, rather sparsely scored secondary theme (in G major) suddenly breaks off on a dominant seventh chord and, after a general pause, the minor subdominant (C minor) follows with a *sforzato* and heavier instrumentation (with string tremolo and three trombones, bar 63; timpani and trumpets are only added when the effect returns in the recapitulation). In contrast to Mozart, further rests follow and the climax of the incursion phase is not reached until bar 71, with a cry-like diminished seventh chord. The *Fortspinnung* of the secondary theme is then continued, resulting in stronger thematic continuity (in comparison to Mozart). The expected EEC (bar 93) is pushed further back by the incursion and the development it triggers. As with Mozart, the incursion serves to increase the volume once again after the piano episode of the secondary

51 The effect has been described with terms similar to those used for Mozart's Symphony. See e.g. Peter Gülke, *Franz Schubert und seine Zeit*, Laaber 1991, p. 197 ("angesichts eines Grauens, als welches das erste Tutti des Orchesters nach einer Generalpause hereinbricht"), and Glenn Stanley, "Schubert Hearing 'Don Giovanni': Mozartian Death Music in the 'Unfinished' Symphony", in: *Schubert's Late Music. History, Theory, Style*, ed. Lorraine B. Bodley, Julian Horton, Cambridge 2016, p. 194 ("a completely unforeseen intrusion", "a shocked person's response to a terrible human action or natural event", "overwhelming horror and fear").

theme. However, the fact that Schubert's incursion occurs within a minor-key movement lends it a further significance that goes beyond the local effect: it already anticipates the dramatic and traumatic events in the development section and at the end of the movement. The idyllic tranquility of the secondary theme's *Ländler* melody is thus called into question at an early stage and exposed as deceptive and fragile⁵². Some scholars have drawn a parallel between this movement and Schubert's story "My Dream"⁵³; this is one, but by no means the only possible interpretation of its incursion-based dramaturgy.

An extreme example of an incursion is found in the finale of Schubert's last Piano Sonata in B-flat major D. 960 (1828), where this moment is expanded into a third thematic zone. Schubert uses a peculiar hybrid form to accomplish this, based on a mixture of sonata form and sonata rondo. The main theme, which oscillates between minor and major, clearly has the character of a rondo refrain. However, the two couplets immediately follow each other in order to achieve the surprise effect required for the incursion. Its preparation corresponds to the familiar pattern. The secondary theme or first couplet (bar 86) is a broad, somewhat repetitive melody in F major with "heavenly lengths", which is characterized by a high degree of continuous ostinato movement. Shortly before this melody finally breaks off, there are two punctual dark clouds of chromaticism (*D* flats in bars 151–152). These anticipate the move to the parallel minor key (F minor), which, after a long general pause lasting two bars, breaks in fortissimo in full texture with block-like chords and sharp dotted rhythms (bar 156). The incursion unleashes a stormy *appassionato* section (over 30 bars) that provides a stark contrast to the dreamy, peaceful episode of the first couplet. The effect of this minor-key section is particularly strong due to the

52 In the recapitulation, the incursion is combined with a modulation from D major to B major (cf. bars 256–311).

53 See Rudolf Weber, "Mythen und Legenden um die Entstehung von Schuberts Unvollendeter", in: *Musikermymthen. Alltagstheorien, Legenden und Medieninszenierungen*, ed. Claudia Bullerjahn, Hildesheim 2004, p. 191–221; Andreas Krause, "'Unvollendete' Traum-Vokabeln. Von Schubert und Mahler zu Reimann, Widmann (und anderen)", in: *Schubert und die Nachwelt*, ed. Gernot Gruber, München–Salzburg 2007, p. 171–185.

specific cyclic context, as the incursion only occurs at the end of the exposition of the finale of an extensive sonata which has hardly had any comparable moments of shocking outburst up to this point⁵⁴. Nevertheless, the late incursion is connected with various other, more subtle moments of discontinuity, such as stops and sudden major-minor shifts that run through the entire sonata, especially in the first movement⁵⁵. Its significance therefore goes far beyond its local effect. However, the third theme, or second couplet, includes a second part in which the appassionato melody is unexpectedly repeated in F major and piano (bar 185). In the recapitulation, the analogue modal shift (transposed to B-flat minor/major) allows Schubert to conclude the sonata in the major mode. It is significant that the return to the definitive major key is not achieved by a breakthrough but, typically for Schubert, by an unexpected forte-piano turn.

This example suggests a comparison with another case of minor-key incursion, placed at the beginning of the closing zone. This type can be found in Schubert's "Quartettsatz" in C minor D. 703 (1820) and, arguably, also in the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in F minor op. 57 ("Appassionata")⁵⁶. The decisive difference, however, is that in these movements the incursion occurs without a pause and coincides with the EEC, that is to say, with the beginning of a new section. There is a surprise effect, but only in terms of expression and not in terms of form (similar to incursions in the middle section of slow movements, e.g. in Schubert's String Quintet in C Major D. 956): What is surprising here is not *that* something new happens, but only *what* happens⁵⁷. In the finale

54 The only powerful climax of the first movement (in the development section) is carefully prepared.

55 Schubert, Sonata D. 960, movement I, bars 8 (the famous bass trill), 47 (sudden modulation), 94 (sudden stop), 105 (chromatic progression), 239 (sudden piano shift to F-sharp minor in the recapitulation of the primary-theme zone), 337 (coda).

56 On the "Appassionata", see J. Hepokoski, W. Darcy, op. cit., p. 312.

57 The central section of the *Adagio* in Schubert's String Quintet in C Major D. 956 begins fortissimo in F minor, creating a stark contrast to the main key of the first section, E Major. However, the first section is completely closed and rounded off before the incursion rushes in.

of Schubert's Sonata in B flat major, on the other hand, there is no EEC in the secondary-theme zone or first couplet. Thus, the incursion section cannot be regarded as a closing zone — either in terms of tonal or rhetorical form⁵⁸. The dramaturgy of this movement is as far removed from a conventional sonata allegro or rondo as possible, and might be called decidedly anti-classical.

The history of the incursion after Schubert cannot be traced here. It seems more heterogeneous than that of the breakthrough, for which there is a clear line of tradition in minor-key symphonies from Beethoven via Schumann and Brahms to Mahler. Nevertheless, there are also a number of later examples of incursions, in symphonies by Brahms (No. 1), Anton Bruckner (No. 7), Pyotr Tchaikovsky (No. 6), Mahler (No. 10)⁵⁹ and Dmitri Shostakovich (No. 5 and 7). Incursions sometimes also occur in compositions without any conventional formal scheme, such as Olivier Messiaen's early "méditation symphonique" *Les Offrandes oubliées* (The Forgotten Offerings, 1930). The three sections of this short orchestral work are entitled *La croix — Le péché — L'eucharistie* (The cross — The sin — The eucharist) and feature the unclassical tempo sequence slow — fast — slow. The sudden onset of hectic ostinato figures and sharp dissonances in the central section creates a strong surprise effect even without knowledge of the religious program, which the composer elaborated in the form of a poem⁶⁰. At the inauguration concert of the first Warsaw Autumn Festival (10th October 1956), this work was performed, for ideological reasons, under the neutral title "A Symphonic Fragment"⁶¹.

58 The distinction between tonal and rhetorical form was introduced by J. Hepokoski, W. Darcy, op. cit., p. 23.

59 The sudden and shocking passage building up a monumental fortissimo chord in A-flat minor in the middle of the first movement of Mahler's Symphony no. 10 clearly adheres to the tradition of the incursion. To interpret it as a breakthrough (as K. Lee, op. cit., p. 185, proposes), would only be possible if we admit that a negative breakthrough is an option, which would be at odds with the Germanic musical tradition of the 19th century.

60 See the text of the poem and its interpretation in Stephen Schloesser, *Visions of Amen. The Early Life and Music of Olivier Messiaen*, Grand Rapids, Mich. 2014, p. 106–112.

61 Cf. Małgorzata Gašiorowska, "The Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music. Transformations of Programming Policies", *Musicology Today* 2017 no. 14, p. 26.

Traditions of dramaturgical topics such as the incursion and the breakthrough have shaped the creative strategies of composers as well as listeners' experiences, and this in works both with and without program. They are therefore a common element of absolute and program music, affecting both structure and emotional impact.

3. Program-Related New Formal Strategies

In the last part of this article, I will follow the opposite path and discuss how programmatic ideas contributed to the development of new formal strategies in instrumental music. In his essay on Berlioz's *Harold-Symphony*, Liszt already claimed that program music had this capacity⁶². Unlike Liszt, I do not assume a unilateral causal effect of the poetic idea (and its verbal expression via a program text) on new musical forms; rather, it can be assumed that there is an interaction between the two aspects that goes in both directions.

Liszt himself provided a striking example of this reciprocal relationship with his most famous symphonic poem, *Les Préludes* (1848–54). This work was initially not linked to Alphonse de Lamartine's ode of the same name, but composed as a potpourri overture on thematic material drawn from Liszt's religious song cycle *Les quatre éléments* for male choir (1846)⁶³. While composing this work, Liszt obviously recognized that the original poetic content of the song cycle (based on poems by Joseph Autran) did not fit the dramaturgy of the new instrumental work anymore and thus decided to "reprogram" it, that is, to link it with another transmusical idea. In fact, even the new program of *Les Préludes* (which exists in two French

62 F. Liszt, "Berlioz und seine Harold-Symphonie", op. cit., p. 121 ("bis dahin ungekann- te Formen erstehen"), p. 125 ("Darum auch sind insbesondere diejenigen berufen, die Form zu bereichern, zu erweitern, geschmeidig zu machen, die sich ihrer nur als eines Mittels zum Ausdruck, als einer Sprache bedienen, die sie nach den Erfordernissen der auszudrückenden Ideen gestalten") and 135 ("neue Formen für neue Gedanken").

63 See Andrew Bonner, "Liszt's 'Les Préludes' and 'Les Quatre Éléments': a Reinvestigation", *19th-Century Music* 1986, no. 10/2, p. 95-107.

versions and an authorized German translation⁶⁴) does not completely correspond to the series of events presented in the composition. Especially its most famous and sublime section (bar 35: *Andante maestoso*), based on material from the song *Les Astres* (The Stars), finds no clear counterpart in the new program, thus allowing for a wide range of interpretations, all the way up to the abuse of this section for Nazi propaganda during the Second World War⁶⁵. The main structural innovation in this composition resides not only in the characteristic transformation of its motivic material but also in its unconventional dramaturgy, which starts with a long expositional phase in rather slow tempo. The first allegro is not reached until bar 109, with a stormy development section. In Liszt's *Tasso. Lamento e trionfo* (1849–54), the first main section is also in slow tempo (a funeral march), preceded by an introduction in fast tempo (*Allegro strepitoso*), a dramaturgical strategy already used in some of Berlioz's overtures⁶⁶. In Liszt's *Hamlet* (1858), a very slow and broody initial section serves as a starting point for a highly thrilling intensification and acceleration process, which leads via several intermediate stages to a fierce *Allegro appassionato ed agitato* (the main theme of which first arrives in bar 105). All these examples underline the importance of tempo changes for Liszt's program music⁶⁷. In fact, he himself defined the new genre of the symphonic poem as a "genre of one-movement pieces with changing tempo and meter"⁶⁸. Obviously, Liszt's inclination towards dramatic changes of tempo resulted

64 Cf. Rainer Kleinertz, "La Relation entre forme et programme dans l'œuvre symphonique de Liszt à l'exemple des 'Préludes'", *Ostinato rigore* 2002 no. 18, p. 85–98.

65 See Stefan Keym, "Ein Heldenleben sub specie aeternitatis? Zum Verhältnis von heroischem und religiösem Aspekt in Franz Liszts 'Les Préludes'", *Kirchenmusikalisches Jahrbuch* 2013 no. 97, p. 117–132.

66 Hector Berlioz, *Le Carnaval romain, Benvenuto Cellini, Le Corsaire*.

67 See Stefan Keym, "Zur Tempodramaturgie von Liszts Symphonischen Dichtungen im Licht der Gattungstradition der Ouvertüre", *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 2020 no. 77, p. 2–22.

68 Letter from Franz Liszt to the music publisher Breitkopf & Härtel, 19th September 1858, cited in: Oskar von Hase, *Breitkopf & Härtel. Gedenkschrift und Arbeitsbericht*, vol. 11/1, Leipzig 1919, p. 169 ("Gattung einsätziger Stücke mit wechselndem Zeitmaß und Taktarten").

from his experience with the genre of the opera paraphrase in his early virtuoso years: the characteristic transformation of popular opera melodies in this genre is effected mostly by changes of tempo and dynamics. According to the improvisation treatise of Carl Czerny, Liszt's early piano teacher, this method makes it possible to provide any melody with almost any possible expression⁶⁹. This approach almost automatically led to new formal dramaturgies, as did the transmusical connotations of the thematic material it used.

With regard to the form of program-linked compositions, a distinction must be made between works that still refer to a conventional formal scheme, though modifying it characteristically, and those that no longer show any such reference at all. Richard Kaplan and Steven Vande Moortele have shown that a number of Liszt's symphonic poems still contain references to sonata form⁷⁰. The same has been observed by Walter Werbeck in several of Richard Strauss's *Tondichtungen*⁷¹. These musical dramaturgies can be compared to the case of symphonies (and other classical genres), which modify the conventional form patterns in order to convey a transmusical idea.

In my book on late 19th- and early 20th-century Polish symphonic music, I discussed a group of symphonies in minor keys that anticipate the national liberation of Poland with the help of a minor-major key dramaturgy and quotations of patriotic songs⁷². This strategy was already developed in the 1830s by Ignacy Feliks Dobrzyński in his Symphony No. 2 in C minor op. 15 ("in the spirit of Polish music"). Zygmunt Noskowski and Ignacy Jan

69 Carl Czerny, *Systematische Anleitung zum Fantasieren auf dem Pianoforte*, Vienna 1829, p. 36, 75.

70 Richard Kaplan, "Sonata Form in the Orchestral Works of Liszt: The Revolutionary Reconsidered", *19th-Century Music* 1984 no. 8/2, p. 142-152, and Steven Vande Moortele, "Beyond Sonata Deformation: Liszt's Symphonic Poem Tasso and the Concept of Two-Dimensional Sonata Form", *Current Musicology* 2008 no. 86, p. 41-62, and idem, "Form, Program, and Deformation in Liszt's 'Hamlet'", *Dutch Journal of Music Theory* 2006 no. 11/2, p. 71-82.

71 See Walter Werbeck, *Die Tondichtungen von Richard Strauss*, Tutzing 1996, p. 387-463.

72 S. Keym, *Symphonie-Kulturtransfer*, op. cit., p. 327-373, and idem, *Symfoniczny transfer kulturowy*, op. cit., 469-556.

Paderewski developed it further, with consequences for the sonata form used in the final movement. In Noskowski's Symphony No. 2 in C minor (the *Elegiac*, 1876–79), the development section is modelled as a fierce conflict, as in the first movement of Beethoven's *Sinfonia eroica*. After a temporary collapse, the introduction and the primary theme from the first movement return, both in C minor. This time, however, these thematic reminiscences lead — via a process of intensification and acceleration to the decisive breakthrough — to a radiant C major. The breakthrough is coupled with the recapitulation of the secondary theme, which already had a hymn-like, triumphant character in the exposition. In contrast, there is no regular recapitulation of the fugato primary theme of the finale, which only reappears in the bass parts in the coda. The programmatic-patriotic idea of the work thus provides for a clear modification of the sonata form in the final movement⁷³.

The finale of Paderewski's Symphony in B minor (1903–09) is considerably more extensive and complex, but features the same modification of the sonata form⁷⁴. In both works, the patriotic message is conveyed by recourse to the *Mazurek Dąbrowskiego* (today's official Polish national anthem), *Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła*. In Paderewski's Symphony, this melody dominates the secondary-theme zone of the finale (already in the exposition), whereas its material is subthematically present in both outer movements of Noskowski's Symphony, appearing clearly only for a short moment in the coda of the finale: this moment may be called an “epiphany”, and, as such, constitutes another dramaturgical topic. In Noskowski's Symphony, there is presumably a second song quotation with political connotations. The primary theme of the first movement bears a clear resemblance to a well-known Russian church hymn: *Slava Bogu na niebie* (Glory

73 Cf. the detailed analysis *ibidem*, p. 334–348 (resp. 479–507).

74 Cf. the detailed analysis and the form table *ibidem*, p. 350–361, 614–615 (resp. 509–532, 871–874). A detailed program text to this work was written by Charles Maleherbe for the first French performance at the Paris Conservatoire in 1909. The complete text was reprinted in Stefan Keym, “The Tradition of ‘per aspera ad astra’ in Polish Symphonic Music from Zygmunt Noskowski to Karol Szymanowski”, *Muzyka* 2009 no. 54/3–4, p. 41–42.

to God in Heaven), which had already been used by Beethoven in one of his Razumovsky Quartets⁷⁵.

Music Example No. 2: Zygmunt Noskowski, Symphony No. 2, thematic relationships



Movement I: Primary Theme (bars 15-22: Allegro molto)



Russian Hymn



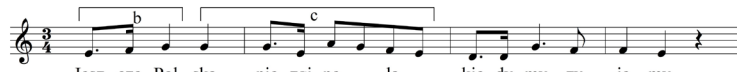
Movement IV: Primary Theme (Fugato; bars 11-18: Allegro assai vivace)



Movement IV: Secondary Theme (bars 61-68)



Movement IV: Coda with quotation of "Mazurek-Dabrowskiego" (bars 370-376)



Mazurek Dabrowskiego (Incipit)

However, the hymn melody is deformed: it is transferred from A-flat major to C minor and broken up into small fragments. Considering that Noskowski gave the first movement the title *Naród w niewoli* (The Nation in Bondage) at a performance in Kraków in 1883 (e.g. beyond the reach of Russian censorship), it seems plausible that he wanted to allude to the Russian rule over Poland. A special point of this work therefore lies in the

⁷⁵ Ludwig van Beethoven, Quartet in E Minor op. 59/2, movement III, trio. See also Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, *Chants nationaux russes*, St. Petersburg 1876, vol. 2, p. 10. I would like to thank Mrs. Ksenia Braining, M.A., (Hamburg) for drawing my attention to this hymn.

fact that its motivic-thematic material appears “Russian” at the beginning, but turns out to be “Polish” at the end. However, the Symphony is structured in such a way that it can also be appreciated without any knowledge of the specific political subtext (in fact, the validity of the program was questioned by a Cracovian critic⁷⁶). This also applies to the reminiscence of the first movement between the development and the recapitulation in the finale. This recourse not only strengthens the cyclical coherence of the symphony but also offers a solution to a dramaturgical problem that automatically arises when applying the *per aspera ad astra*-dramaturgy to a sonata form in a minor key: the problem of the double, analogous shift from a minor to a major key when the secondary theme appears (in the exposition from the tonic minor to the relative major, in the recapitulation to the parallel major)⁷⁷. A doubling of this decisive moment would weaken the effect of the breakthrough.

While sonata form was only gradually modified in these symphonies, Polish composers of the next generation (the so-called *Młoda Polska*) opted for stronger transformations in some of their symphonic poems⁷⁸. Mieczysław Karłowicz’s tragic love drama, *Anna i Stanisław Oświecimowie* (1907) provides a vivid example: as the catastrophe of Anna’s death occurs at the end of the development section, it becomes clear that a regular recapitulation of the largely optimistic exposition is out of the question; instead, its material undergoes a drastic transformation in the form of a monumental funeral march⁷⁹. Similarly, in Grzegorz Fitelberg’s *Pieśń o sokole* (“The Song of the Falcon”, after a novel by Maxim Gorki, 1905), the shooting and fall of the falcon leads to a decisive change and shortening of the recapitulation. If this plot and parts of its musical dramaturgy remind us of Camille Saint-Saëns’ symphonic poem *Phaëton* (based on the antic legend of the unhappy sky walk of Helios’s son, 1873), Fitelberg goes one

76 See Władysław Żeleński’s review in the journal *Czas* 1883 (11th April), p. 3.

77 This problem is already apparent in Haydn’s late symphonies No. 80, 83 and 95.

78 On this repertoire cf. Marcin Gmys, *Harmonie i dysonanse. Muzyka Młodej Polski wobec innych sztuk*, Poznań 2012, p. 117–185.

79 Cf. the detailed analysis and the form table in S. Keym, *Symphonie-Kulturtransfer*, op. cit., p. 426–433, 617, or *Symfoniczny transfer kulturowy*, op. cit., p. 656–671, 877–878.

step further by closing his piece in a different key than the tonic (E instead of G major), with a quiet, mysterious transfiguration ending. Saint-Saëns' compatriot Vincent d'Indy made an even more radical decision in his early symphonic poem *La Forêt enchantée* ('The Enchanted Forest', 1878), based on the ballad *Harald* by Ludwig Uhland. Here, a group of warrior-horsemen are led astray and enchanted by the bewitching song of female elves. After the development section, d'Indy breaks off the sonata allegro and entrusts the second half of the composition mainly to the elves' song in a slow tempo, into which only some modified fragments of the warriors' themes are interspersed.

In other symphonic poems, there is no longer any recognizable reference to traditional formal schemes. This applies to some works by Karłowicz (*Powracające fale; Odwieczne pieśni*) and to most by Ludomir Różycki (e.g. *Bolesław Śmiały* and *Anhelli*)⁸⁰ and Eugeniusz Morawski. A particularly striking example is provided by the latter's symphonic poem *Nevermore* (1911), after Edgar Allan Poe's poem *The Raven* (1845), in which the lyrical self indulges in grief over the loss of his deceased lover Lenore⁸¹. This compact work begins with an atmospheric fugato section (*Largo*) over a highly chromatic theme⁸² in low register and with no clear tonal center, which could initially be mistaken for a slow introduction. However, it turns out to be the exposition of the main theme of the work, to which the following *Allegro* merely provides rhapsodic, short-winded variants. These alternate several times with a plaintive motif in the English horn, which functions like a Wagnerian leitmotif in its topical, barely changeable shape. The middle section brings a brightening effect caused by a rising theme

80 Cf. the detailed analysis of the mentioned works *ibidem*, p. 417–426, 439–455 (resp. 640–656, 679–708).

81 Cf. M. Gmys, *op. cit.*, p. 177–180, Oskar Łapeta, *Eugeniusz Morawski – życie i recepcja twórczości* (PhD. Diss., Warsaw University, 2019), p. 385–387, and Stefan Keym, "Nevermore? Ciurlionis und sein polnischer Freund Eugeniusz Morawski", *Musikgeschichte in Mittel- und Osteuropa. Mitteilungen der internationalen Arbeitsgemeinschaft an der Universität Leipzig* 2025 no. 27, p. 79–104.

82 This theme contains all twelve notes of the chromatic scale, but with some notes being repeated and thus stressed.

beginning in C major (*Andante cantabile*), which, however, always tips over into a plaintive downward movement in minor. The final thematic element is a cantabile melody in D flat major, which seems like a passionate love theme (Tempo I, bar 239). What is unusual (from the point of view of the classical form tradition) is not this melody as such, but its late exposition in the last third of the piece, which is only followed by a brief process of climax and disintegration before the piece fades away quietly with a *morendo* ending. Further examples could be drawn from Karol Szymanowski, who rarely used explicit programs in his orchestral works but also composed some works with an unusual form, such as the 1st Violin Concerto, in which poetic inspirations have also been suspected⁸³.

Finally, the example of *La Cathédrale engloutie* from the first volume of Claude Debussy's *Préludes* for piano (1910) will serve to demonstrate how a poetic idea and allusions to traditional form concepts may merge in an innovative manner. In French musical discourse at the time, the cathedral metaphor was often used for large, highly unified works in sonata form. Vincent d'Indy, who had mutated into a "champion of Classicism"⁸⁴, even integrated it into his theory of "cyclical sonata form", unified by recurring motifs⁸⁵. Debussy's piano piece obviously alludes to d'Indy's cult of cathedrals and cyclical form⁸⁶. However, it does this in a subversive or rather submarine way, through a reference to the Breton legend of the sunken city of Ys, whose cathedral occasionally reappears from the floods.

Debussy's prelude displays a free form, grouped around the central climax event of the cathedral's re-emergence. This wave-like dramaturgy is very different from sonata form. Nevertheless, there are significant points of reference. The piece is based on two interrelated themes⁸⁷: the first is

83 See Alistair Wightman, *Karol Szymanowski. His Life and Work*, Aldershot 1999, p. 176–189.

84 Norman Demuth, *Vincent d'Indy (1851–1931), Champion of Classicism*, London 1951.

85 Vincent d'Indy, *Cours de composition musicale*, Vol. 2/1, Paris 1909, p. 377–378.

86 See Stefan Keym, "Neue Musik als 'retour au gothique'? Claude Debussy und Vincent d'Indy — von der 'Pelléas'-Premiere bis zur Versenkung der 'cathédrale sonore'", *Musiktheorie* 2013 no. 28/1, p. 3–20.

87 The three-note motif C-D-G, which is similar to Liszt's "tonal symbol of the cross", is omnipresent in both themes (as well as in the introduction and transition sections) and thus provides a high degree of subthematic coherence.

in a minor key, the second in a major key, as is the case in minor-key sonatas (both melodies are modally colored — the first by the “dorian” sixth, the second by the “mixolydian” seventh — but their harmonic contrast results mainly from the characteristic difference between the minor and the major third). Both themes are presented twice in their entirety, as is the case with exposition and recapitulation. However, it is not only the key constellation (C sharp vs. C) that is unusual (as well as the fact that both themes return in their initial key), but above all the dramaturgical relationship between their presentations. The second theme is more important than the first; thus, their traditional role is reversed⁸⁸. The minor-third theme first appears in an anticipatory, preliminary version in piano (bar 7) and only finds its definitive form and climax in the course of its passionate return (bar 47). In the case of the major-third theme, the so-called cathedral or choral theme, it is the other way around: after a long preparation section with an impressive crescendo, this theme arrives in majestic fortissimo (bar 28)⁸⁹; its final return, however, occurs in pianissimo and low register and thus appears as a reduced and muted “submarine” reminiscence (bar 72). This dramaturgy can clearly be related to the title of the piece: as a depiction of the cathedral’s ascent and renewed descent. However, Debussy placed the titles not above, but in brackets below his *Préludes*. And the programmatic references within the score do not refer to the sea and to a church building, but to something undefined emerging gradually from the fog⁹⁰. In fact, the dramaturgy of this prelude works without any knowledge of the title and the legend. The dualistic principle of the sonata form (two keys, two themes, two presentations) is reorganised here into a free and new dramaturgy of form and expression.

88 This was already pointed out by Serge Gut, “*La cathédrale engloutie*, prélude de Claude Debussy. Interférences entre le matériau, la structure et la forme”, *Analyse musicale* 1986 no. 4, p. 78–79.

89 This teleological development is also underlined by the bass line, which gradually descends from G (bar 1) to C (bar 28).

90 *Dans une brume doucement sonore* (bar 1); *Peu à peu sortant de la brume* (bar 16). Only the reference *Flottant et sourd* (bar 72) may be related to the programmatic context of the maritime title of the piece.

This example shows once more that form and program are not two strictly separate spheres in instrumental music, as the 19th-century controversy suggested for ideological reasons. Rather, they are closely and creatively related by the dramaturgy of the respective work. It is a rewarding endeavour to explore this connection further and, in doing so, to overcome the old divide between absolute and program music.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Stefan Keym is Full Professor of Musicology and Director of the Musicological Institute at Leipzig University since 2019. He studied musicology, history and

BIOGRAM

Stefan Keym jest profesorem zwyczajnym muzykologii i od 2019 roku dyrektorem Instytutu Muzykologii Uniwersytetu Lipskiego. Studiował muzykologię,

literature at the Universities of Mainz, Paris and Halle and earned his PhD in 2001 at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg with a study on Olivier Messiaen's opera *Saint François d'Assise*. His habilitation thesis, submitted at Leipzig University, was dedicated to the intercultural transfer of symphonic music from Germany to Poland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He was Visiting Professor at the Universities of Zürich and Berlin (Humboldt) and Full Professor at Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès in France. In 2024, he was elected ordinary member of the Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften at Leipzig. His main research fields are the history of music in France, Poland and the German lands, intercultural transfers, the evolution of sonata form dramaturgies (sonata, symphony, overture, symphonic poem), music institutions in Leipzig and concert repertoires.

ABSTRACT

Absolute vs. Program Music? Dramaturgical Topics and Program-Related New Formal Strategies as Alternatives to an Outdated Perception Pattern

Instrumental music is still often viewed through the prism of the supposed dichotomy between absolute and program music. This dichotomy stems from a historical controversy that is very revealing for the emergence of musicology in the German lands since 1850, but less helpful for understanding Classical and Romantic instrumental music, as it suggests

historię i literaturę na uniwersytetach w Moguncji, Paryżu i Halle, a w 2001 roku uzyskał stopień doktora na Uniwersytecie Marcina Lutra w Halle i Wittenberdze na podstawie rozprawy poświęconej operze Oliviera Messiaena *Saint François d'Assise*. Jego rozprawa habilitacyjna, przedstawiona na Uniwersytecie Lipskim, była poświęcona kulturowemu transferowi muzyki symfonicznej z Niemiec do Polski w końcu XIX i na początku XX wieku. Był profesorem wizytującym na uniwersytetach w Zurychu i Berlinie (Uniwersytet Humboldtów) oraz profesorem zwyczajnym na Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès we Francji. W 2024 roku został wybrany członkiem zwyczajnym Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften w Lipsku. Jego główne obszary badawcze to historia muzyki we Francji, Polsce i ziemiach niemieckich, transfery kulturowe, ewolucja dramaturgii formy sonatowej (sonata, symfonia, uwertura, poemat symfoniczny), instytucje muzyczne w Lipsku oraz repertuary koncertowe.

STRESZCZENIE

Muzyka absolutna czy programowa? Zagadnienia dramaturgiczne i nowe formalne strategie programowe wobec przestarzałego modelu percepcji

Muzyka instrumentalna jest nadal często postrzegana przez pryzmat domniemanej dychotomii między muzyką absolutną a programową. Dychotomia ta wywodzi się z historycznej kontrowersji, która jest bardzo wymowna dla powstania muzykologii na ziemiach niemieckich od 1850 roku, lecz mniej pomocna w zrozumieniu muzyki instrumentalnej klasycznej

a black-and-white picture instead of a more differentiated perspective on poetic, expressive and other life-world references in music.

The article presents two alternative approaches that bridge the old divides of this outdated perception pattern. On the one hand, it outlines a theory of dramatic topics which shape the musical experience in instrumental works with and without a program; on the other hand, it is shown how programmatic aspects contribute to the emergence of new formal strategies that also function independently of a program. The examples are taken from instrumental works by Germanic, French and Polish composers from the 'long 19th century' (from late Mozart and Schubert up to Noskowski, Morawski and Debussy)

KEYWORDS instrumental music, program music, topic theory, sonata form, dramaturgy/drama

i romantycznej, gdyż sugeruje czarno-biały obraz zamiast bardziej zróżnicowanej perspektywy na poetyckie, ekspresyjne i inne odniesienia do świata życia w muzyce.

Artykuł przedstawia dwa alternatywne podejścia, które przerzucają mosty nad starymi podziałami tego przestarzałego wzorca percepcyjnego. Z jednej strony zarysowuje teorię toposów dramaturgicznych, które kształtują doświadczenie muzyczne w utworach instrumentalnych z programem i bez programu; z drugiej strony pokazuje, jak aspekty programowe przyczyniają się do powstania nowych strategii formalnych, które funkcjonują również niezależnie od programu. Przykłady pochodzą z utworów instrumentalnych kompozytorów niemieckich, francuskich i polskich z „długiego XIX wieku” (od późnego Mozarta i Schuberta po Noskowskiego, Morawskiego i Debussy'ego).

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE muzyka instrumentalna, muzyka programowa, teoria toposów, forma sonatowa, dramaturgia