

Music of Progress and the Future: On the Roots of a Fierce Press Feud in the Second Half of the 19th Century

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“Zukunftsmusik” was a catchword that appeared in the mid-19th century and was intended to brand the camp of the “New Germans” in the musical party dispute until it was positively adapted by them. Richard Wagner fuelled the controversy with his essay *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1850) and further fanned the flames with an open letter *Zukunftsmusik* (1861). As the original dedication of the second main aesthetic writing of the Zurich period (1850) to Friedrich Feuerbach on the basis of his writing on *The Religion of the Future*¹ demonstratively proves, Wagner, according to his own testimony (in the preface to the *Collected Writings and Poems of 1872*), “surrendered himself without critical consideration to the guidance” of this “witty writer.”² This is connected to his decision not to work out a *Jesus of Nazareth* but a *Siegfried*, with which Wagner deviated from the primarily Christian theme he had pursued until *Lohengrin*. He thus came into clear conflict with his supporter and friend Franz Liszt, who had enthusiastically supported *Lohengrin*.³ With his move from Weimar to Rome a few years

- 1 Friedrich Feuerbach, *Die Religion der Zukunft* (Zurich and Winterthur: Verlag des literarischen Comptoirs, 1843).
- 2 Richard Wagner, “Introduction,” in Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Verlag E. W. Fritzsche, 1872), 4.
- 3 Helmut Loos, “Richard Wagner’s *Lohengrin* und sein religionssoziologisches Umfeld,” in *Transgression in Music - Międzynarodowa Konferencja 23.–25. listopada/November 2021*, ed. Anna Nowak (Bydgoszcz: Akademia Muzyczna im. Feliksa Nowowiejskiego, forthcoming).

later, Liszt demonstratively placed himself in the Christian tradition, while Wagner embraced the Germanic myth.⁴

The Germanic myth of origin and superiority, like the enthusiasm for Greek antiquity, formed an aggressive social antithesis to the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Enlightenment had promoted the search for alternative models of society that could be adapted to the idea of progress and evolution. The resulting modernity in its various forms was united by its opposition to orthodox Judaism and above all Christianity. According to Thomas Nipperdey, the “*struggle for Christianity and modernity*”⁵ formed a fundamental root of the socio-political division in the 19th century. Art, with its claim to represent the “*true, the good, the beautiful*,” was not unaffected by this, and music in particular, with its processual, quasi-ritual appearance, partially developed into the art religion of modernity. It was not least this inherent moral claim that was responsible for the fierce press feuds,⁶ which, in contradiction to the world-unifying myth of music, led to hostile camp formations. The music of the future functioned as an exponent of progress.

Richard Wagner held Ludwig Bischoff (1794–1867)⁷ responsible for the introduction of the fighting term “future music.”⁸ In fact, Bischoff took a decidedly conservative standpoint in the *Rheinische* (1850–1859) and *Niederrheinische Musik-Zeitung für Kunstfreunde und Künstler* (1853–1867), both of which he founded and for which he was editorially responsible (until the third volume), and criticised above all the religiously influenced idealisation of artists.⁹ Bischoff often speaks of “idols” and of “self-deification.”¹⁰ In

4 Sibylle Ehringhaus, *Germanenmythos und deutsche Identität* [Germanic Myth and German Identity], *Die Frühmittelalter-Rezeption in Deutschland 1842–1933* (Weimar: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswiss., 1996).

5 Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800–1866, Bürgerwelt und starker Staat* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1983, special edition 1998), 403.

6 Beverly Jerold, “Zukunftsmusik/Music of the future. A moral question,” *The journal of musicological research* 36, no. 4 (2017): 311–35.

7 Robert Lee Curtis, *Ludwig Bischoff. A mid-nineteenth-century music critic* [Contributions to Rhenish Music History, vol. 123] (Cologne: A. Volk, 1979).

8 Richard Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 8 (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, s. a.), 242f.

9 Cf. Helmut Loos, “Das etwas andere Beethoven-Bild des Ludwig Bischoff und seiner *Rheinischen* und *Niederrheinischen Musik-Zeitung*,” in *Beethoven 9. Studies and Interpretations*, ed. Magdalena Chrenkoff (Krakow: Akademia Muzyczna), forthcoming.

10 Ludwig Bischoff, “Was wir wollen,” *Rheinische Musik-Zeitung für Kunstfreunde und Künstler* 1, no. 1 (1850/51): 2; Ludwig Bischoff, “Noch Einmal: Was wir wollen,” *Niederrheinische Musik-Zeitung für Kunstfreunde und Künstler* 1, no. 1 (2 July 1853):

his programmatic opening article in 1850, he was convinced of the “*development of the life of nations*” and the “*progress associated with it*” as well as of the vitality of beauty, which was “*so intimately connected with the noble moral nature of man*.” He could not agree with “*the gloomy prophets who predict the complete decline of art, the downfall of the beautiful in the oppressive world domination of the useful*.” It is above all music that has “*already anticipated the movement of the present, [...] the struggle for the birth of a rejuvenated world*,” “*ever since Beethoven opened the gates of the future*.” Bischoff opposes the “*idolatry*” of “*the tonal formations of the South and virtuosity*” as well as “*the prejudice that art has its home only in the higher regions of society*.” Bischoff argues vehemently for an art that is not limited to the educated in a circumscribed temple, but serves the whole people, whether it is at home in the church, the concert hall or the theatre (it is remarkable that he does not exclude the church, but calls it equal).¹¹ He opposes a disdain for Joseph Haydn, “*what has been preached and pre-philosophised to us ad nauseam by many musical judges of art and sound, of progress and overcome point of view*.”¹² Rather, he is of the opinion that “*the heretical thought could not be rejected that art mocks the law of progress, that its course of development is a very peculiar one*.”¹³

At first, the Rheinische Musik-Zeitung expressed a benevolent, wait-and-see attitude towards Richard Wagner. In 1850, under “*kleinere Götter*” (smaller gods), one can read: “*What Richard Wagner, the composer of the future, will become, is still to be expected, the best to be hoped for*.”¹⁴ But the scepticism manifested itself a short time later:

For Richard Wagner arises [...] in some musical circles, as a result of the bellicose allarm raised by the Leipziger musikalische Zeitung, a curious interest is arising; and I think it quite possible that his treatises, rich in ingenious and incisively true thoughts, will also turn the heads of many here in Berlin, despite the confused and one-sided attitude in which they appear so far; the great masses are, as a rule, only capable of extremes and intemperance; nor may it do any harm that the exclusive-

2; Ludwig Bischof, “Aus London,” *Niederrheinische Musik Zeitung für Kunstfreunde und Künstler* 3, no. 21 (1855): 166.

11 Bischoff, “Was wir wollen,” 1–5.

12 Ludwig Bischoff, “Joseph Haydn’s Musik,” *Rheinische Musik-Zeitung* 1, no. 21 (1850): 161.

13 Ludwig Bischoff, “Plastische Musik,” *Rheinische Musik-Zeitung* 1, no. 46 (1850/51): 363.

14 August Hitzschold, “Die deutschen Opern-Componisten und Dichter,” *Rheinische Musik-Zeitung* 2, no. 92 (1851/52): 731–3, here 733.

ly musical endeavours should be contrasted for a time with the absorption of music in poetic inwardness, with the monotonous spinning off of an insignificant motif, with formlessness.¹⁵

Even after Ludwig Bischoff left the editorial office, the *Rheinische Musik-Zeitung* continued to pursue a critical line against Zukunftsmusik, for example when a Mozart review spoke of the “*shocking diminished seventh chords, whose nonsensical use in so-called Zukunftsmusik has become not only disgusting but truly sacrilegious.*”¹⁶ Musical authorities are readily quoted, such as Ludwig Rellstab in a report from Berlin, who, with regard to the followers of future music, said in the *Vossische Zeitung* that “*the new chaos composers*” had “*just arrived at the creation of future music,*”¹⁷ or François-Joseph Fétis, who, referring to the classics, especially Mozart, opposes the principle of progress among the followers of future music.¹⁸

With his newly founded *Niederrheinische Musik-Zeitung*, Ludwig Bischoff takes an even sharper line against future music, so it is quite understandable that the term has been attributed to him.¹⁹ Already in the first volume in 1853, Bischoff ironically refers to Richard Wagner:

O enviable alliance of the artists of the future, the apostles of the sung drama with the prophets of absolute religion and the aesthetic cult! [...] A sinister spirit runs through the house of German art and literature!²⁰

In the second volume, an article on “The Opposition of Southern Germany to the Music of the Future” is printed.²¹ A biblical comparison is used here:

Until now [...] Baal has not yet performed a miracle, no matter how much his prophets prophesied of signs and wonders that Baal would perform at his great festival in Karlsruhe; and therefore we Swabians faithfully honour our old gods and do not want to desecrate their sa-

15 G. E., “Berliner Briefe,” *Rheinische Musik-Zeitung für Kunstfreunde und Künstler* 2, no. 93 (1851/52): 738–40, here 739.

16 Echo, “Die Briefarie im ‘Don Juan,’” *Rheinische Musik-Zeitung* 6, no. 7 (1855): 373.

17 Anon. “Berlin,” *Rheinische Musik-Zeitung* 6, no. 49 (1855): 390f.

18 Anon., “Ein ausländisches Urtheil über unsere neue Opernrichtung,” *Rheinische Musik-Zeitung* 7, no. 47 (1856): 369.

19 Christa and Peter Jost, “‘Zukunftsmusik.’ Zur Geschichte eines Begriffs,” *Musiktheorie. Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 10, no. 2 (1995): 119–35. According to this, the term was first used by Johann Christian Lobe in 1852.

20 S. in S., “Stoppellese,” *Niederrheinische Musik-Zeitung* 1, no. 5 (1853): 38.

21 J. B., “Die Opposition Süddeuschlands gegen die Zukunftsmusik,” *Niederrheinische Musik-Zeitung* 2, no. 4 (1854): 29f.

cred temple by erecting an opera altar for the idol Baal, the work of art of the future.²²

Without going into the many possible references here, one particularly characteristic one should be singled out:

All the ingratitude, the dizziness, all the vanity, all the self-reflection, all the inertia to push on the future what one should accomplish oneself, all the hollowness and hall bathing of the aesthetic chatters - how beautifully it all sums up in the one word 'future music'!²³

This article has recently been included in a large anthology containing writings on this central music-aesthetic controversy of the 19th century.²⁴ It is the result of a long-term research project initiated by Detlev Altenburg at the Franz Liszt School of Music in Weimar. In contrast to previously common treatises on the New German School, the critical voices are included in this anthology. It contains 12 articles from the *Rheinische Musik-Zeitung* and 24 from the *Niederrheinische Musik-Zeitung*. James Deaville writes about the selection of articles in his introduction:

Quite in contrast to the one-sided perspective [...] offered by previous, all-too-selective - and thus tendentious - source collections on the New German School, the inclined reader can now follow the debates exactly as they were conducted between the actors involved - we thus also get to read that to which the progressives responded with their writings!²⁵

What Deaville formulates so succinctly here is nothing other than a fundamental critique of the long-prevailing trend in German musicology to perpetuate "master narratives" of music history and to provide them with a scientific claim. I have called this direction the art religion of modernity²⁶ and thus point to the strongly religiously influenced language that is ex-

22 Ibid., 30.

23 Lp., "Zukunftsmusik," *Niederrheinische Musik-Zeitung* 7, no. 41 (1859): 324–6, here 325.

24 Dominik von Roth and Ulrike Roesler, eds., *Die Neudeutsche Schule – Phänomen und Geschichte. Quellen und Kommentare zu einer zentralen musikästhetischen Kontroverse des 19. Jahrhunderts*, 3 vols. (Berlin, Kassel: Metzler, Bärenreiter, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-04923-0>.

25 James Deaville, "Introduction," in *Die Neudeutsche Schule – Phänomen und Geschichte. Quellen und Kommentare zu einer zentralen musikästhetischen Kontroverse des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Dominik von Roth and Ulrike Roesler (Berlin, Kassel: Metzler, Bärenreiter, 2020), 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-04923-0>.

26 Helmut Loos, *E-Musik - Kunstreligion der Moderne. Beethoven und andere Götter* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2017).

pressed in the writings. Thus, beyond the musical, moral decision-making competence is claimed, which in the socio-political debate of the time can clearly be located on the side of modernity. It is no coincidence that the key words autonomy, rationality, individualisation and secularisation or better (according to Nipperdey) de-Christianisation can be found in this musical style.²⁷ The latter is easily recognisable in two prominent representatives, August Wilhelm Ambros (1816–1876) and Eduard Hanslick (1825–1904).²⁸

Eduard Hanslick strongly influenced German musicology with his statement that the content of music is the tonally moving form.²⁹ In his famous essay *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (*On Musical Beauty*), he excluded all musical genres “that serve certain external purposes, such as church, war and theatre compositions,” because he discovered that they were “often conventional instead of necessary.”³⁰ This is particularly evident in his music criticism. For him, the “public concert” is the “main place of music as such,” which “with the exclusion of the actual theatre, church and ballet music, encompasses the entire musical production.”³¹ Oratorios, for him merely “a surrogate for opera,”³² are characterised by “an ever stronger tendency from the ecclesiastical-religious to the profane-historical.” Robert Schumann “with his secular oratorio (*Paradise and Peri* sc.) gave the final blow to the tradition of this artistic genre.”³³ In Franz Liszt’s *Christus* (1st part: Christmas Oratorio), Hanslick sees the composer’s “leap from brilliant virtuosity to church music” as nothing more than “sought-after simplicity and naivety,” “musical frailty and emaciation of the carrier,” “the formal bankruptcy of a tone poet.”³⁴ In contrast, Johannes Brahms’ *Triumphlied* and *Schicksalslied* “belong to those great tone poems which rank Brahms among the first mas-

27 Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800–1866*, 403 – here quoted from the special paperback edition (Munich: Beck, 1998).

28 See: Helmut Loos, “The religious dimension of Beethoven reception in the 19th century,” *Beethoven 9. Studies and Interpretations*, ed. Magdalena Chrenkoff (Krakow: Akademia Muzyczna), forthcoming.

29 Carl Dahlhaus, *Die Idee der absoluten Musik*, 4th ed. (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2018).

30 Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen. Ein Beitrag zur Revision der Aesthetik der Tonkunst* (Leipzig: wbg, 1854), 8.

31 Eduard Hanslick, *Geschichte des Concertwesens in Wien 1869* (Vienna: W. Braumüller, 1869), IX.

32 Ibid., 19 and 23.

33 Eduard Hanslick, *Concerte, Componisten und Virtuosen der letzten fünfzehn Jahre, 1870–1885. Kritiken* [Concerts, Composers and Virtuosos of the last fifteen years. 1870–1885. critiques], 2nd ed. (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Literatur, 1886), 17.

34 Ibid., 41f.

ters.”³⁵ *The Schicksalslied* in particular contains “like an echo of his admirable ‘German Requiem’, the same Christian outlook, only in Greek form.”³⁶ He cannot deny Beethoven’s *Missa solemnis* his recognition, but the work is for him a “tone poem that is not both ecclesiastical and sacred in the highest sense.”³⁷ I already pointed out the reception of Beethoven’s *Missa solemnis* and the absurdity (from a historical-critical perspective, not ‘reception-aesthetic’ interpretation against the author) of numerous attempts at interpretation to deny the work a Christian dimension 25 years ago,³⁸ without this ever being deemed worthy of scholarly discussion.

The position that August Wilhelm Ambros (1816–1876)³⁹ took towards Hanslick is usually dismissed casually and somewhat contemptuously in musicological literature.⁴⁰ This overlooks the great esteem in which both personalities held each other and which they always maintained despite all factual differences. In 1856, two years after Hanslick’s first work, Ambros published his *Die Grenzen der Musik und Poesie*. Already in the title, Ambros expresses that he does not refer to music alone, but considers it in connection with other arts.

Ambros rebukes the “philosophers of form,” the “men of the sounding arabesque,”⁴¹ and advises composers “not to resist” the spirit of the time, insofar as it is compatible “with the immutable eternal laws of the true, the good and the beautiful.”⁴² In a brief outline of the history of music, he

35 Ibid., 51.

36 Ibid., 54.

37 Ibid., 6.

38 Helmut Loos, “Zur Rezeption der Missa solemnis von Ludwig van Beethoven,” *Kirchenmusikalisches Jahrbuch* 82 (1998): 67–76.

39 He was a nephew of Raphael Georg Kiesewetter (1773–1850), a pioneer of the revival and adequate performance of early music, see: Hartmut Krones, “Kiesewetter und die Folgen. Zur Frühzeit der historischen Aufführungspraxis in Wien,” in *Early Music in Austria. Research and Practice since 1800*. Symposium, Graz, 22–24 March 2007, Report, eds. Barbara Boisits and Ingeborg Harer (Vienna: Mille-Tre-Verl. Schächter, 2009), 9–32, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvdfomj3.4>. His view of history was strictly progressive, empirically rational and determined by Enlightenment thought. See: Raphael Georg Kiesewetter, *Geschichte der europäisch-abendländischen oder unserer heutigen Musik. Darstellung ihres Ursprunges, ihres Wachstumshumes und ihrer stufenweisen Entwicklung von dem ersten Jahrhundert des Christenthums bis auf unsre Zeit* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1834).

40 An exception is: Markéta Štědranská, *August Wilhelm Ambros im musikästhetischen Diskurs um 1850* [Münchener Veröffentlichungen zur Musikgeschichte 75] (Munich: Allitera, 2015). DNB

41 Ibid., 109.

42 Ibid., 114.

sketches the path of music as a situational progression with many setbacks from Gregorian chant to the enlightened Germany of his time: “*Generally, all the ‘educated’ acquired a religion whose credo was easy to remember, since it was reduced to the dogmas of a ‘supreme being’ and the ‘immortality of the soul’.*”⁴³ Ambros criticises the

true zeal in overthrowing and eliminating the old – churches are sold for demolition or converted into ‘useful institutions’, serious ruins of old castles are utilised as ‘granaries’, venerable town halls are ‘tastefully modernised’, and so on. The old cathedrals actually only remained standing because our elders built so unpleasantly solidly.⁴⁴

This speaks of a high esteem for church music. In the preface to his *Culturhistorische Bilder aus dem Musikleben der Gegenwart*, dedicated to Franz Liszt, he explicitly acknowledges the musical heritage of the Catholic Church:

The more sincerely I belong to the Catholic Church, in which I was born and brought up, the more I wish that excessive zeal should not devastate a part of the very gardens which are richest in blossoms and which the Church has tended and cultivated for centuries.⁴⁵

Ambros criticises the “*philosophical-theoretical speculation,*” since it is “*partly in fantasies, partly in abstractions,*”⁴⁶ and points out

that even the generally comprehensible work of art, apparently based on the purest beauty, does not entirely get rid of the inherited flavour of its origin according to time, place, religious creed, state constitution, climate, etc.⁴⁷

The controversy between Ambros and Hanslick makes it clear that the musical party formation of the 19th century had a strong socio-political-ideological dimension that was shaped “*by the struggle for Christianity and modernity.*” Julius Schaeffer already described this clairvoyantly, albeit biased, in 1852:

We are in the middle of the struggle of the ‘parties’. Not only the state and the church, not only the old social order is undergoing a process of

43 Ibid., 121.

44 Ibid., 122.

45 August Wilhelm Ambros, *Culturhistorische Bilder aus dem Musikleben der Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Matthes, 1860; 2nd ed.: Leipzig, 1865), 3.

46 Ibid., 11.

47 Ibid., 8.

decomposition and purification through this struggle, but also art. Immediately after Beethoven - and he himself gave the impetus for this - the split began among musicians between the enthusiastic supporters of the storming and pushing Romanticism and the representatives of an ossified Classicality.⁴⁸

If absolute music came to dominate in German music literature in the 20th century, this was part of the “*relative dechristianisation of our world*” (Nipperdey). If church music has been marginalised, if not excluded, in German music historiography as a whole since 1800, this follows the maxims of modernity. At the same time, other branches rose to religious veneration: Technology, commerce and the arts, above all music, if it knew how to exist on the concert podium as an ideal counter-world stripped of all social ties (serious music). In a society that believed in science, musicology knew how to adapt skilfully and, as a kind of religious congregation of the musical art religion of modernity, to secure for itself interpretive sovereignty and thus a high social position, religious battles included. The scientific claim to strive for objectivity and at least objective neutrality fell by the wayside.

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- 48 Julius Schaeffer, “Über Richard Wagner’s Lohengrin, mit Bezug auf seine Schrift: ‘Oper und Drama,’” *Neue Berliner Musikzeitung* 6, no. 20 (12 May 1852): 153–5; no. 21 (19 May 1852): 161–3; no. 22 (26 May 1852): 169–71.

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