

PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON GENIUS  
AND TALENT IN MUSIC AND ON  
THE PURPOSE OF THIS WORK<sup>8</sup>

The genius for musical composition is only a favorable natural aptitude for this art. It manifests itself, (1) through a great passion for music, (2) through a burning need to create (that is, to compose) and to exploit what one has done, (3) through a great capacity to conceive and realize ideas, (4) through a keen and profound feeling for this art, judgement of which is prompt and accurate whenever applied, this being the most salient requirement for music. With these characteristics it is easy to recognize this kind of genius.<sup>9</sup>

These favorable natural aptitudes, or genius, cannot be imparted through a mere treatise if nature has deprived us of them. Horace's and Boileau's *Art of Poetry* will not create a Virgil, a Pope, a Corneille, a Racine, a Molière, a Wieland, or a Voltaire.<sup>10</sup> Cicero's *The Orator*<sup>11</sup> and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* will not produce a Demosthenes or a Mirabeau.<sup>12</sup> Nor will the innumerable throng of treatises on composition, or more accurately, *treatises solely on harmony*, produce a Handel, a Jommelli, a Gluck, a Haydn, a Cimarosa, or a Mozart. Here lies the dividing line between didactic art and genius. Thus, let no one assume that the aim of my work is to impart a genius for melody to those who do not possess it.<sup>13</sup> But excellent treatises may be of the greatest help

<sup>8</sup>It was thought appropriate to insert part of these remarks in the *Journal des Arts*. See No. 240, 1813.

<sup>9</sup>These aptitudes often manifest themselves solely for harmony while not for melody, and *vice versa*, which clearly proves that harmony is a quite different thing from melody. Thus it can be explained why one nation, such as Germany, generally shows a greater aptitude and genius for harmony, while another, such as Italy, aspires only to melody. It is important for our schools to take notice of these differences and to apply a student who shows greater aptitude toward harmony to strict study in the art of melody, without which he will remain, if not a bad, at least a too mediocre melodist.

<sup>10</sup>Horace, full name: Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65-8 BC); Boileau, Nicolas (1636-1711); Virgil, full name: Publius Vergilius Maro (70-19BC); Pope, Alexander (1688-1744); Corneille, Pierre (1606-84); Racine, Jean (1639-99); Molière, pseudonym of Jean Baptiste Poquelin (1622-73); Wieland, Christoph Martin (1733-1813); Voltaire, pseudonym of François Marie Arouet (1694-1778); Cicero, Marcus Tullius (106-43 BC). Quintilian, full name: Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (c.35-c.100). [PL]

<sup>11</sup>Horace's *Art of Poetry* and Cicero's *The Orator* clearly prove that great poets and orators should explain the precepts of their art and combine genius and learning.

<sup>12</sup>Demosthenes (384-322 BC); Mirabeau, Honoré Gabriel, Comte de (1749-91). [PL]

<sup>13</sup>It is a matter here of demonstrating what may be said that is instructive and useful about the most interesting subject in music, without claiming to impart genius; it is in short, a matter of creating the *Art of Melody*, just as there exists the *Art of Poetry*.

to those in whom genius manifests itself, for these favorable aptitudes do not make an artist, much less a great artist. Their talents must be directed toward a rational objective. They must be developed, although not suffocated (as so often happens). Finally, the artist must take advantage of these natural aptitudes, for the sake of the public as well as his own. It is up to the genius to study, to learn, to investigate in depth, and to become acquainted with the resources, the nature and the secrets of art, for the genius alone can successfully exploit and use them. This is how our greatest artists were formed.

A big distinction must be made between genius and talent. Talent is acquired at the cost of strict, assiduous, painstaking application, and must furthermore be well directed. A superior talent is a most rare gift. Genius without talent amounts to little and often comes to nothing. Genius is more common than one thinks, and as Voltaire has aptly said: *It walks the streets*.<sup>14</sup>

While thousands may have had the genius that was given to Racine by nature, there probably does not exist one amongst them who has had the diligence and patience necessary to acquire as great a talent for the expression of ideas, without which the genius is only a rough diamond which can never shine. This reminds us of the following metaphor by Gray.<sup>15</sup>

These observations lead to the following conclusions:

- (1) Talent, even without genius, especially when guided by taste, will always be fruitful.
- (2) Genius without talent amounts to little.
- (3) Talent, supported by genius, is everything.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>On this subject, see also Rivarol's\* reflections on talent and the mind, where by mind he means genius. (*Esprit de Rivarol*, from page 86 onward).

\*Rivaroli, Antoine, (1753-1801), called himself Comte de Rivarol. A French journalist and Royalist during the French Revolution, he was best known for his epigrams collected under the title *LEsprit de Rivarol* (1802). [PL]

<sup>15</sup>Gray, Thomas (1716-71).

Full many a gem of purest ray serene  
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear;  
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

<sup>16</sup>When Horace asks what value a genius has without a knowledge of art, he is perfectly right, for without this base the genius cannot produce or realize his ideas; and if the genius believes that he can do without this foundation, or place himself above it (as is often the case), he will appear awkward and artificial.

This work is especially intended for the following:

(1) For all those with a natural aptitude for melody. They would not be in need of talent if they were not to profit from this work. It teaches them about true melody, its nature, and how to exploit their own ideas. It teaches them which plans, forms or dimensions to give to this or that melody, how to determine both its qualities and faults, how it should be laid out, conducted, and concluded, how melody may be practiced, and the principles of its harmonic accompaniment. Finally, it gives the skills all true artists need in order to analyze their own work.<sup>17</sup>

(2) For all those who wish to instruct themselves not only in harmony, but in the art of melody. And if nature has deprived them of genius in this area of our art, they may still serve as teachers of others, as did P. Martini, Marpurg, Kirnberger and Albrechtsberger, who were excellent teachers of harmony but did not possess the genius for composition.<sup>18</sup> They are the ones, in fact, who provide the genius with the ground on which the furrows have already been ploughed, leaving the genius only the task of scattering the seed.

(3) For use in our schools of music, for it clearly demonstrates that melody can be taught more profitably and even more soundly than harmony. The aptitude for melody should not be stifled (which is very easy to do) through practicing only harmony, and harmony should not be the only concern.

(4) For lyric poets. They will see that true melody is subject strictly to the laws of rhythm and that this rhythm should consequently be supported by the rhythm of the poem, as in the example of Metastasio or Quinault.<sup>19</sup> What is inappropriate for lyric melody are long verses in airs (unless a discernible caesura is observed); these periods are too long, have little or no variety in the poetic rhythm, etc.

<sup>17</sup>Everyone knows that harmony should be studied. Likewise, its study does not impart the genius required to master it, as did Palestrina, Giovanni Pierluigi (1525-1594), Marcello, Benedetto (1686-1739), Bach, J. S. (1685-1750) and Bach, C. P. E. (1714-1788) etc. The study of harmony provides knowledge only of this aspect of the art, and gives practical instruction in its resources. This is precisely what a good treatise on melody should do with regard to the resources of melody.

<sup>18</sup>Martini, Padre Giovanni Battista (1706-1784); Marpurg, Friedrich Wilhelm (1718-1795); Albrechtsberger, Johann Georg (1736-1809). History appears to have sustained Reicha's estimation of these eminent theorists. [PL]

<sup>19</sup>Metastasio, Pietro [Trapasi, Antonio] (1698-1782), Italian poet and dramatist. His 27 opera librettos were set to music by over 300 composers. Quinault, Phillipe (1635-1688), French dramatist and librettist. He turned to writing librettos, especially for the operas of Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-87), and is credited with creating the lyric tragedy. [PL]

*TREATISE ON MELODY*

In studying musical rhythm they will find many new rhythmic forms to enrich lyric poetry in an appropriate and useful way for melody. They may also benefit from the remarks on melodic forms, while creating analogous forms in lyric poetry.

The principles set forth in this treatise will show that any number of individuals may achieve similar results with equal success. But where will the differences lie? They will be in the quality, the feeling and the interest of the ideas, which will increase according to the relative feeling and genius of the composer.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, an incontestable advantage of this treatise on melody over all known treatises on harmony is that it stipulates the progression of melodic ideas, and with its help one may take advantage of the ideas of others. These are two benefits which have been unavailable until now, either in poetry or in the art of oratory. These latter may one day attain this end by the route set forth herein.

Thus, melody is the most logical of all the arts, and yet, up to now melody has been regarded as the most imprecise, for want of reflection, research, and analysis.

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<sup>20</sup>In the 1832 edition, Reicha rewrites this sentence as: "They will be in the quality, the interest, the character, the originality, or the charm of the ideas, which will grow as the gift of invention strengthens itself through practice, as the sensibility increases, and as the soul becomes more susceptible to the outpouring and the imagination of enthusiasm. [PL]"