In the past decades, the study of nationalism and national identity in the musical culture of the 19th century has both opened up new perspectives and threatened to close off old ones. On the positive side, as Richard Taruskin recently noted with approval at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, no one any longer uses the phrase «nationalism in music» to refer only to a stylistic gesture of folksiness employed by non-German composers, caught in the powerful undertow of German instrumentalism.¹ «Nationalism in music», as Taruskin’s own influential entry on nationalism in the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians amply demonstrates, is now widely accepted as referring to political purposes as well as stylistic gestures, to contexts as well as contents, to Germans as well as to everyone else.² Both musicologists and historians have made important contributions to the re-calibration of the terms nationalism or national identity when used in reference to the musical world. The result, speaking very generally, has been a heightened sensitivity to the political and the social dimensions of music history and a greater willingness to put the tools of musicology, specifically musical analysis of particular compositions, to work in finding evidence for a composer’s political or social awareness, not just for their secret love affairs, their numerical obsessions, or (most commonly) their purely musical designs.

But all this has been achieved at a cost. While few people want to resurrect triumphalist notions about the universality of music by German composers and/or indulge in a complacent belief in the pristinely aesthetic, the attention to national contexts and national identities and the loss of faith in music’s universality have worked to obscure something obvious, perhaps too obvious. And that is the non-linguistic nature of music, its happy transcendence (another concept out

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of favor) of what Benedict Anderson memorably called the «fatal diversity of human language», which made the nation a possible, and plausible, form of human community. Music’s non-linguistic character helps to explain many things, including traditional musicology’s greater attention to style and genre than cause and effect, to time period rather than place, to synchronic rather than diachronic explanation, in short, to the music itself rather than the circumstances of its composition and reception. But its non-linguistic character also underlay an assumption, one could even say an article of faith, that the community of musicians was an international one. Composers might be born in this place or that, and «schools» of composition may have clustered in places, alongside actual buildings where music was performed or taught, but performing and composing musicians were travelers, border-crossers, itinerants in a world where most people in most places and in most time periods have stayed put. Moreover, this belief characterized attitudes toward music and musicians up and down the social scale, low to high. The internationalism of music finds an understated but vivid expression in the first pages of Edith Wharton’s The Age of Innocence. «On a January evening in the early seventies», so the novel begins, «Christine Nilsson was singing in Faust at the Academy of Music in New York.» Wharton goes on to tell us that «She sang, of course, «M’ama» and not ‘he loves me,’ since an unalterable and unquestioned law of the musical world required that the German text of French operas sung by Swedish artists should be translated into Italian for the clearer understanding of English-speaking audiences.» English-speaking audiences, one might add, in North America.

But now that a great deal of analysis exists on how important national contexts have been to musical life in Europe, it is indeed time to return to the long-assumed transnational character of music and look at it anew as well, from the perspective of a more broadly cultural history. Scholars today have available to them a rich array of concepts by which to analyze this supra-nationalism and the nationalism of musical culture in the 19th century and some have already begun to do so. This essay will consider the figure of Adolf Bernhard Marx (1799–1866), one of the most important musical writers and disseminators of musical knowledge in the 19th century, in order to illustrate the extent to which the effort to define the nation necessarily involved a broad engagement with other nations as well.

Marx is acknowledged, though by no means universally admired, as an important music theorist, and notorious for his attention to the German tradition – the greatness and dignity of which he advocated in his journalism – teaching, compositional treatises, and books on music for the general public.

5 An exemplary work is D. Gooley, Virtuoso Liszt (New York, 2004), the first sentence of which reads «Virtuosity is about shifting borders».
6 One review, in Music and Letters, of Peter Rumenhöller’s Musiktheoretisches Denken im 19. Jahr-

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said of Schumann that his «quiet lyricism and drunken intoxication with feeling» threatened German music with «its greatest danger, the loss of its voice for the soul of Europe and its descent to something dealing merely with the fatherland.»

And so might one say of Schumann’s contemporary and sometime teacher, A. B. Marx, that his criticisms of French and Italian music and, more consequentially, his development of a system of musical composition and instruction that placed German instrumental works (Bach and Beethoven) at the centre of the universe, marked the descent of musical judgment from aesthetic independence into mere patriotism. But we need to be careful of any uninflected analysis of nationalism’s influence on political or cultural activities. As Carl Dahlhaus suggested more than a quarter-century ago, nationalism in the 19th century «was seen as a means, not a hindrance, to universality», and further, a «strong national tint» was «not an obstacle to international recognition» but rather «almost always the vehicle». In its context, Dahlhaus’s observation applied mainly to composers and their music, but the basic idea applies, with modification, to those who wrote about music (Marx was also a composer, though of no distinction). To understand the path Marx pursued in recovering the music of the past, reviewing the music of the present, and attempting to influence the musical life of the future, we need to understand him in the context of Europe as a whole.

Here terminological issues and modes of analysis become relevant. While we can agree with Dahlhaus’s characterization of nationalism as «the governing idea» of the 19th century, with transformative consequences for musical culture, his further statement that «nationalism in fact underwent a profound alteration during the nineteenth century», from cosmopolitan and tolerant beginnings to «haughtily exclusive and even aggressive» endings, needs more consideration that he could give it in a short, provocative essay. The basic narrative line Dahlhaus


9 C. Dahlhaus, «Nationalism and Music», in Between Romanticism and Modernism, transl. →

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reproduces is certainly a familiar one, dating back as it does to Friedrich Meinecke’s classic Weltbürgerturn und Nationalstaat (1907). But even if we, along with Dahlhaus of course, now regard the gradual retreat of enlightenment universalism with dismay rather than approval, the whole premise that one way of thinking or being or acting replaced or evolved into another one itself requires revision. In this context, Prasenjit Duara’s reconceptualization of the history of China and India outside the categories of «a linear, evolutionary history of the Enlightenment/colonial model» has important things to say about European history writing as well. In pointing to a new kind of narrative of modern China, Duara writes about the need to challenge «the notion of a stable community that gradually develops a national self-awareness like the evolution of a species (History)». He suggests instead that the history of communities, national ones in particular, be told as a process in which «various social actors – often different groups of politicians and intellectuals» redefined the boundaries of community by a «deliberate mobilization within a network of cultural representations.» Duara’s analysis relies on a view of communities (national or otherwise) as not «well-bounded entities» but marked by «various different and mobile boundaries that delineate different dimensions of life». Some of these boundaries are hard and cannot be crossed without violating the integrity of the community; others are soft and easily crossed: «one or more of the cultural practices of a group, such as rituals, language, dialect, music, kinship rules or culinary habits, may be considered soft boundaries if they identify a group but do not prevent the group from sharing and even adopting, self-consciously or not, the practices of another.»10 All communities, he suggests, consist of a combination of hard and soft boundaries, each marking degrees of privilege and inclusion, intolerance and exclusion, group cohesion and the capacity to change.

The terms Duara proposes for shaping our understanding of national communities provide an effective explanatory framework for the experience of German-speaking central Europe in general and for the activities of musical intellectuals like A. B. Marx in particular. Marx formed part of a larger, though ill-defined, group of intellectuals and would-be politicians. Their activities in the public sphere worked together to constitute and to influence German perceptions of what they shared only as Germans – the hard boundaries of community – and what they shared as Europeans or indeed as humans – the soft ones. That all such definitions and perceptions were in flux throughout much of the 19th century ought to go without saying, but needs to be said, so persistent in the historical literature on German nationalism is the view that Herderian notions of national


10 P. Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China (Chicago / Ill., 1995), 65–66.
essence, once promulgated, removed the possibility of a European sense of cultural community in Germany. But as Brian Vick has argued, putting Duara’s insight into different language, even by 1848 «debate was still emphatically not about the construction of a culturally-homogenous nation-state» and functioned «within the porous confines of a national identity still partly open». Hard boundary making came later: «The oddly, often egocentrically elastic notion of German national character and of broad-based criteria for nationality generally would eventually funnel into the confining flask of a much more exclusivist and assimilationist ideology.»

In the case of music, such hard boundaries arguably never fully took hold. Thus both these perspectives help provide a context for A. B. Marx’s consciousness of what «his» music, that of Germany, shared and did not share with the other nations surrounding, influencing, and influenced by it. Marx’s writings show an awareness of the many different layers of community to which he belonged, ordered conventionally in his writings from the local to the national to the European to the universally human. On the one hand, he was in the business of defining, and thereby hardening, the distinctions among the art music of various European nations. But even while doing so, his participation in a public sphere, an Öffentlichkeit that extended beyond the undefined borders of the German nation, and the ways in which he conceived of his work as an advocate of German music, of Bach and Beethoven in particular, kept these partially hardening boundaries, these «networks of cultural representations» from serving only an exclusive community of Germans. We must turn, then, to Marx’s writings over the course of his life, attentive to the difference it made that an awareness of nationality, even in its most essentialist mode, took place in a world of other nationalities.

1. Marx in Berlin

Marx’s entry into the public sphere took place in Berlin, and his understanding of the meaning of art in society always carried the mark of these beginnings. Marx was twenty-one when he arrived in the city in 1821. Disillusioned with the study of law and looking with admiration at the «many-sided genius» of E. T. A. Hoffmann, he tried composing and writing, while pursuing further musical studies. At the same time he threw himself into the intellectual life of this city of Hegel and Schleiermacher, re-inventing himself as the first important exponent of Hegelianism in music criticism. A happy encounter with the publisher Adolf

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Schlesinger led to Marx becoming the editor of a new journal with high intellectual aspirations, the *Berliner Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (1824–1830). It had almost been twenty years since a music journal with such ambition had existed in the city (Reichardt’s *Berlinerische Musikalische Zeitung*, from 1804 to 1806), and in the interim, the first sustained episode of political nationalism in Central Europe had taken place. Prussia’s defeat in 1806 had imbued commonplace words like «Vaterland», «Volk», and «Nation» with a politically aggressive and sacralized charge, and a nationalist discourse that promoted the hardest of boundaries between the Germans and the French had matured. The popularity of such rhetoric among urban populations was considerable; no one who frequented the educated circles of Prussian life could fail to have encountered this heightened consciousness of Fatherland. And while the opportunities for political activism diminished, decisively with the Karlsbad Decrees of 1819, the promotion of cultural unity and national fulfillment through the consumption of culture and the contemplation of history remained.\(^{13}\)

Marx’s Berlin journalism fell within the nation-making project of German cultural exploration. It reveals both why people sought to make firm distinctions among allegedly national cultures, as well as the difficulties they had in doing so. His journal became the finest music publication in the city, the mouthpiece of his efforts to raise the musico-national consciousness of Berliners. The Berlin in which Marx arrived had much weaker claims to musical distinction than the much smaller Leipzig, let alone Vienna. It had declined musically during the years of warfare and economic depression and had only one stage of any note, no concert hall, despite a steady growth in numbers of subscription concerts, and entertainment sheets that catered to the local appetite for theatre gossip. Marx’s new journal began as it meant to continue, on a sustained note of seriousness – about the life of the mind, about art, about music among the arts. His themes were few and frequently repeated. He believed that Berlin’s concert life was in terrible shape – «sunk nearly to the lowest level possible», a junkyard of «one virtuoso after another», possessing only «technical fluency, decked out in fashionable mannerisms». He objected to the performance of only short works, or senseless excerpts of longer ones, to the relegation of instrumental music to opera intermissions, to the neglect of unfamiliar or difficult works of known composers or of great works of forgotten composers or of all the work of young, unknown composers. And he objected to gifted performers wasting their talents on trivial pieces and poor performers making a hash of difficult ones.\(^{14}\) In one setting after

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\(^{13}\) On cultural and political nationalism, see Vick, *Defining Germany*, 16–17.


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another, he instructed the reader in the ways of his musical universe, divided between profound and superficial music, between music of lasting value and music of ephemeral pleasure.

So familiar is this dichotomy to us today, and so ubiquitous the efforts to deconstruct it, that it takes some effort to appreciate the work that went into its construction.\textsuperscript{15} Marx described the task as one of «doing justice to the many artists and artistic accomplishments» which went unrecognized in times marked by the «to and fro of partisan clamor».\textsuperscript{16} His calls for free debate on serious issues and his insistence on the need for leaders to sustain a public life of intellectual substance for the people amounted to a critique of political life and the Prussian state overall, especially the moribund public sphere of Prussia’s capital. As he remembered them much later in life, Berliners of the 1820s had lacked independence of judgment. They had been frivolously cosmopolitan, liking music because it was fashionable and had come to them from Paris or Vienna, and they had been narrowly provincial, liking music because it was written or directed by people with whom they were comfortable, as in the case of the hoary and, in Marx’s critical view, musically-inexpert director of the Berlin «Singakademie», Carl Friedrich Zelter. In both cases, becoming national meant becoming independent but not necessarily chauvinistic in this period. It meant not dismissing the substantial talent and vision of the Franco-Italian eminence of the Berlin opera scene, Gasparo Spontini, out of thoughtless patriotism, and it also meant not rejecting the most recent work (\textit{Euryanthe}) of a celebrated German, Carl Maria von Weber, just because the Viennese had found it boring.\textsuperscript{17} The kind of community, then, which Marx hoped to build through a reform of musical life he conceived of as both national and thus necessarily progressive.

Moreover, his means of bringing it about – editing and writing a journal in order to shape public opinion – announced his politico-cultural sympathies as loudly as the particularities of what he wrote. For Marx, as for the liberal, educated Germans who saw themselves as participants in the project of nation-building, the all-important aspect of their work was its publicness, and the publicness that concerned them was not that defined by commerce – quite the contrary, in fact – nor that defined by state authority. This was instead, of course, \textit{Öffentlichkeit}, the publicness that Jürgen Habermas identified as a space for the exercise of

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\textsuperscript{15} On the philosophical origins of this dichotomy, see B. Sponheuer, Musik als Kunst und Nicht-Kunst: Untersuchungen zur Dichotomie von ‹hoher› und ‹niederer› Musik im musikästhetischen Denken zwischen Kant und Hanslick (Kassel, 1987).

\textsuperscript{16} Marx, \textit{Erinnerungen}, vol. I, 82.

\textsuperscript{17} Marx, \textit{Erinnerungen}, vol. II, 56–59.
autonomous, rational judgment – a space in which «the mind was no longer in the service of a patron» and «opinion» became emancipated from the bonds of economic dependence».  

In theory, the public sphere was «a politically and culturally neutral space of communication accommodating many voices», but in practice it meant more than that to liberal Germans, particularly in an era marked by as much censorship as in the German states in the middle decades of the 19th century.  

The vital charge of the public sphere can be felt in Marx’s work as well, from the solemnity with which he inaugurated and closed his journal to the critically engaged tone he employed throughout. His journal would represent no faction but would serve as «a forum [Sprechsaal] for all, to find freely-expressed views on artistic matters and on all matters of conviction» there.  

Neither progress, nor freedom, nor the common consciousness that was the essence of nationhood existed automatically. All had to be formed, «from the scattered lives of individuals» through the active molding, shaping, and expression of public opinion, through activities in the public sphere. And people had to be able, as well as free, to undertake such participation. In the case of music, for Marx, this meant not just reading his journal, but also attending good concerts and working to understand the significance that great and difficult music had in the life of the German nation and of Europe as a whole. When he finally left the editorship, closing down the journal at the end of 1830, he urged his readers to «stay true to the task» of striving toward «pure thinking and pure judgment of music» and expressed his «hope in the progress of art and of the German people».  

Indeed the Berliner Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung proved only the first in series of efforts Marx made throughout his life to educate the public, in Germany and beyond, and to reform musical life. Leaving behind journalism to preside over musical studies at the University of Berlin, he spent the next decades publishing influential works on music theory and composition that were translated into English and French and found readers in the United States as well. He also composed many songs and choral works, edited important historical editions, and helped to found the Berliner «Musikschule», later known as the «Stern’sches Konservatorium». He became the first to name and analyze the sonata form. He wrote important, thorough, and (to be sure) highly idealized biographies of Beethoven and Gluck. He also worked in a number of ways to promote progressive reforms in music education, often arguing, as he had before, that the great

21 Vick, *Defining Germany*, 40.
22 Marx, *Erinnerungen*, vol. II, 56; Marx, «Abschied des Redakteurs».
works of the past could be a «living memory» in the service of a «new flowering» of art.23

In sum, his writings on music up to the time of his death made technical and general knowledge of music accessible to the lay musical public, inside and outside of German-speaking Europe. In that sense they served for what had always been his broader purpose, that of building national communities – in particular his own – through aesthetic improvement. Like many of the nationalist intellectuals who lived through the development of new forms of society, his commitment to Bildung, aesthetic experience, and progress did not change as much as is often assumed. In 1855, he was still saying that musical learning could «purify [the learner’s] feelings and inclinations without depriving them of their originality or individuality» and that without artistic culture, mankind would «come to a standstill, and relinquish the ideal to which we once aspired.»24 A decade later, in his guide to the performance of Beethoven’s piano compositions, he wrote that art offered an alternative to «our workaday lives» and «lifeless industries» – «the promise of another life infused with imperishable fragrance, the life of inner feeling, higher contemplation, great achievements», of «justice and freedom and the well-being of people and nations».25 To make sense of Marx’s views of the German nation in a world of nations is thus to confront a liberal and surprisingly internationalist vision of national community that only the actual experience of nationhood undermined and even then, never completely in the case of musical life.

2. The Music of the Past and the German Nation

Marx’s views about the centrality of the nation to his work of musical reform found a philosophical basis in his Hegelianism, the watered-down A. B. Marxist version of which survived not only Hegel’s death but all the subsequent struggles between Hegelians old and young. Like Friedrich Rochlitz, the Kantian music journalist who sought to overcome Kant’s ill-considered dismissal of music, Marx became the Hegelian who used Hegel’s ideas to prove Hegel wrong about music’s lesser status in relation to the other arts.26 Whereas Hegel knew little of instrumental music and seemed to have had no notion of musical progress, Marx believed fervently that music did progress, specifically in its ability to express objective ideas and to contribute to the «mature culture of the mind».27

26 Marx compared the Kantian era of the Leipzig Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung and «new period» of his journal, which he described in a torrent of Hegelian concepts: «coming into being», «development and further development», «concatenation of emergence and consciousness», and so on. See his «Andeutung des Standpunktes der Zeitung», BAMZ 2, 52 (28 December 1825), 421.
27 BAMZ 2, 52 (28 December 1825), 421; BAMZ 2, 45 (9 November 1825), 358; BAMZ 2, 51 (21 December 1825), 407; BAMZ 5, 1 (2 January 1828), 1.
he could say of a piece of music, German or non-German, was that it provided a «mindless amusement of the senses», and «destroyed [the public’s] capacity for more profound, more introspective listening».

The best he could say, as when he challenged the Berlin public to prove its mettle by listening to Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, was that a work was «too great, too rich and too deep to be grasped in its completeness and its full grandeur upon hearing it for the first time».

His history of music was thus informed by a broader effort to demonstrate the seriousness of music’s place in society, and in doing so, he did not confine himself to German music alone. In his scheme, each era of European music had a distinctive «consciousness».

Music in its deepest origins was sensual «play», yet this «harmless play with tonal forms» had within it the «original and inexhaustible source of art», literally the very breath of life, the «organic necessity of giving vent to our feelings in audible sounds» which would lead eventually to «the revelation of the inner life».

Before such revelation could emerge, an antithetical era of «bravura singing and virtuosic performances», all for the pleasure of the ruling elite, developed. But now, in his own day, a new era of musical endeavor had emerged, in accordance with the advent of rights and freedom for people in the political world. In it, the «free and full life of individuals» began to take precedence over «religious interests» and «court pleasures», and art could become the «common wealth of the entire public».

Marx’s musical history was a history of European music, in which the basic idea that shaped an epoch transcended national boundaries, affecting each national group equally. Yet Marx’s efforts to account for the past of the present provided him ultimately with the larger framework in which he explained the necessity of nations for the future. As Brian Vick has noted, the liberal nationalists of the mid-nineteenth century, like Marx, believed that the course of history brought the advance of culture, from undeveloped to sophisticated institutions, increasingly «infused with spiritual, moral, and intellectual self-consciousness», from «unreflected» communities to national ones marked, above all, by a community of mind, a «spiritual national unity» in the words of the philosopher Jakob Fries, which could form the basis of more and more complex and participatory states. For Marx as for his nationalist contemporaries, the writing of history involved a critique of contemporary political life, and for him as for them,
the choice lay not between a Europeanist cosmopolitanism that was progressive and tolerant and a German nationalism that was exclusive and chauvinistic but between anti-nationalist and, to some extent, cosmopolitan reactionaries and nationalist reformers. Cosmopolitanism, as Marx repeatedly described it, derived from «intellect alone»; it also tended toward frivolity in spiritual and artistic life; and as a holdover from an epoch in which the cosmopolitan, nation-less aristocracy were dominant, it stifled «all feelings of nationality and independence» and underwrote a «dishonorable indifference […] which has so frequently proved the transparent mask of moral cowardice».

But writing history only served as a pendant to active efforts to revive the music of the past, in which we again see the understanding of contemporary nationalists that nations had to be lived to be real. The music of the past was needed to reform contemporary musical life and with it the nations of Europe. His first and most extensive rescue mission involved recovering the music of Johann Sebastian Bach for the 19th century, a mission in which Marx was, of course, only one of many participants, most in German Europe, including Switzerland, but others in England. Marx came to realize the fullness of Bach’s achievement through the work of the much younger Felix Mendelssohn and his early, private rehearsals of the St. Matthew Passion in late 1827 and 1828. Here, and in the revival performances of 1829, for which he wrote extensive explanatory and laudatory commentary, he discovered «the total vindication of everything this journal has advocated». Marx’s advocacy of Bach concluded the work he had set for himself in shaping public opinion through music journalism. He had long favored more publication of musical scores from all eras and countries of Europe and had used his journal to draw attention to the availability of such long forgotten works. The growing interest in Bach’s music he considered «one of the most remarkable and profound developments in the cultural history» of music, the «sun of a new day in the fog of our times». As for the St. Matthew Passion itself, it represented «the full realization of the Ideal of composition». In the progress of musical culture, studying Bach became, for Marx, an integral part of musical reform. To recover Bach was to restore musical life to its properly progressive course of development, out of frivolity, into profundity. In Mendelssohn’s work of revival, he saw the sign that «our prediction of a new and more thoughtful period of music» had arrived:

35 Marx, Musik des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, 27.
36 For a full account of the role of Marx in Mendelssohn’s famous revival, see my Bach in Berlin: Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn’s Revival of the St. Matthew Passion (Ithaca / N.Y., 2005).
38 BAMZ 5, 13 (26 March 1828), 97; BAMZ 4, 52 (26 December 1827), 424.
«Every word I have written on music, every resistance I have offered to the errors and delusions of our times, finds [...] vindication only in the expectation [...] of a time when the trumpery of today’s fashionable shallowness [...] will be cast off.»

Bach’s «importance to German self-understanding» now stood revealed in all its fullness. And the public had understood, overflowing the performance hall not once but three times. Progress was at hand.

3. Music of the Present and the German Nation

For Marx, the Berlin reception of the St. Matthew Passion expressed a growing consciousness of German identity itself, because not only no other nation had produced a Bach but no other nation – or at least not the French – was capable of appreciating him. In the «new and higher period of musical art» that had arrived, Germany would no longer be «deprived of its greatest treasure» by its ignorant pursuit of the «lower sensuality of the Italians» and the «soul-less play of the French». Marx’s suspicion of things foreign sits uncomfortably with his interest in the music of all times and nations, as long as it was serious and good, and seems to suggest that chauvinism was all there was to Marx, that his effort to distinguish between the ephemeral and the eternal in musical creations amounted merely to an advocacy of the German over everything else. But to conclude this would be to underestimate the instability of the distinctions and boundaries he drew. He wrote with a sense of vulnerability to what seemed to him the dominance of Italian, French, and French-sponsored musical forms over everything German composers and musicians had created. As with other nationalists of his era, his view of history emphasized the centrality of struggle in the achievement of progress, and linked to that, the need to defend one’s own nationality in an international arena of many nations. What Vick has argued was true of the delegates to the Frankfurt Assembly in 1848, that «the notion that [...] the German nation [...] could become the object of foreigners’ contempt burned ulcer-like within these fledging national politicians», applied to Marx as well. The French had not understood or appreciated Bach (Marx had learned that much from Felix Mendelssohn); they did not respect the arc of musical development in central Europe of which Bach formed an essential part; and against all that contempt and indifference, German honor and greatness must learn to assert itself. Boundaries must, to put this in Duara’s terms, be hardened, though in musical life never to the point of isolation or exclusivity.
Marx hoped that a heightened understanding of the role of nationality in human affairs would lead to greater independence of judgment and a fuller development of individual and national identity for which the times were ripe. Music was crucial to the process of developing oneself and becoming national. Thus his concern for the state of musical affairs in Berlin and in Europe reflected a broader concern for «cultural awakening» among Germans. To improve the capacity to judge music was to strengthen an understanding of what it meant to be German in a world of nations, and Marx’s program for the educated public included first learning about all nations’ music, not just that of Germany’s Bach and Beethoven. He approved of a «greater diversity in the repertoire», which he attributed to «rapidly spreading education» and a «closer community with other nations». He urged Germans to listen to as wide a range of compositions as possible, from all nations, because musical works «have their true foundation in our time and in the spirit of nations worthy of our attention». «If we wish to understand our times and ourselves», he concluded, we must study them all.

Marx also believed that the educated public understood much less about nationality’s influence on music than it did about, for instance, national schools of painting or the differences between French and German tragedy. National differences, he argued, were not only a matter of «incidental traits, styles, or fashions». The truth was just the opposite, thought Marx: «Every artist, every nation, and every age has had a peculiar manner in music, as in every other art, and in the conduct of life itself» and this truth has «always been evident to every one at all acquainted with history and man.» Italians and Germans may both have had the «the gift of artistic creativity», but general knowledge of the world could never advance on the basis of such banal observations. Real knowledge required «the recognition of differences» among the «temperature, the local manners, the mode of life, the state and religious circumstances, and so forth, of ourselves, the Italians, and the French». To deny such was to «lose consciousness of one’s own intentions and tendencies». To know others one must also understand oneself, and vice versa. An artist, like everyone else, was part of the «ideas and tendencies» of «his time, his nation, and the whole human race», and «every work of art» bore «an impression of a more general nature than that individu-

45 «Ueber die Musik bei Schauspielaufführungen: ein Vorschlag zu Gunsten der Bühnen-Orchester», BAMZ 2, 42 (19 October 1825), 333.
46 BAMZ 3, 52 (27 December 1826), 421.
47 This excerpt, from an 1854 translation of one of Marx’s pedagogical works, was also reprinted in Novello’s Musical Times in 1855 (see discussion below). A. B. Marx, General Musical Instruction. (Allgemeine Musiklehre): An Aid to Teachers and Learners in Every Branch of Musical Knowledge, transl. G. Macirone (London, 1854), 106.
48 BAMZ 3, 45 (8 November 1826), 357–359.
ality». The thoughtful lover of art appreciated the «boundless diversity» of artistic creations and recognized that «the whole development of language and art, the education, culture, mental condition and feeling», entered into the experience of even a single, simple folk ballad.

Moreover, to be a great artist, Marx thought, one must be the vessel of one’s nationality. This attitude had its good and its bad sides. On the one hand, it underlay Marx’s unfeigned enthusiasm for a wide range of composers and artists of all nationalities. He could follow up a lukewarm appreciation for the German singers Anna Milder and Henriette Sontag with an enthusiastic one for the Italian singer Angelica Catalani («like the sun of her Fatherland»), thus holding himself aloof from the «German-Italian operatic war».

He could frequently write about his admiration for Spontini, Paganini, Rossini, Cherubini, and Auber. But at the same time, he anticipated, in milder tones, Richard Wagner’s notorious attack on Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn for their essential inauthenticity and lack of national character. In Marx’s account, both had squandered their rich musical gifts, Meyerbeer because of his eclecticism and Mendelssohn because of his historicism. Meyerbeer, wrote Marx, had been «brought up in the German school», but then moved on to Rossini’s style, Scribe and Auber’s «scenic contrivances», and finally, back to the German, Weber’s «popular German tone.» But despite his «astonishing talents and tact», he lacked one thing — «honesty, the honesty of an artist, which makes him elevate himself to his subject, with all sincerity and faithfulness». If Meyerbeer’s sin was to live in too many nations — cosmopolitanism, in other words — Mendelssohn’s consisted of trying to reproduce the essence of too many time periods. His adoption of the «forms and style of Bach», his effort to evoke the spirits of Sophocles and Aeschylus, not to mention his inadequate imitations of Beethoven all revealed a further regrettable tendency of the present, «when so many different ideas, opinions, degrees of cultivation etc. divide the people» and «an artist can no longer represent a nation» but becomes merely «the exponent of particular tendencies or interests».

In the end Marx’s lifelong engagement with the problem of the nation in music yielded the same conclusion, whether he was writing in 1824 or in 1854 — that Germany’s contributions as a nation were under-appreciated and to some degree also under-developed, both at home and in the world. Here lay the main purpose of his attempt to introduce the nation as a category of analysis in music. Marx observed a lack of balance in musical life, an unthinking preference for Italian music, an unhealthy deference to French musical leadership, and a

49 Marx, Musik des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, 31.
50 Ibid., 6–7.
52 Marx, Musik des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, 31, 78–81.
corrigible ignorance about German music. «A proper cultural life will begin,» he asserted, when as many German operas were produced on the stage as French and Italian ones and when singers were given the «knowledge and artistic comprehension» to appreciate «profound German music.» Marx also clearly thought that German music was simply better, not just neglected. If people would only listen to more of it, then this fact would become clear to them too — so he hoped.

To some degree, then, Marx’s sense of national identity betrayed the hardening of cultural boundaries, and as Sanna Pederson has noted, Hegel had something to do with this. Marx’s disdain for Italian music fell within his quasi-Hegelian analysis of musical progress and the musical future: «Just as surely as we Germans stand intellectually higher than does Italy with its Rossini», he wrote in 1825, Germans would also eventually demand for «a higher music.» His references to national differences consistently associated transient pleasures with the Italian national character and seriousness with the German. «The German», wrote Marx, «is too serious, too much inclined to reflection, to be able to apply himself happily and seriously to something that will lead to no results.» The Italians, by contrast, tolerated ridiculous operatic plots and dispensed with harmonic development, all for the sake of beautiful melody, and the French, a people «of very meager musical gifts», were «well entertained by cold, witty conversation pieces», valuing music «only as a superficial accompaniment» to such works. How could it be accident that the Germans should develop the symphony «to the highest state of perfection», while Italy or France had contributed «as good as nothing» to it? But the Germans were more than serious and instrumentally gifted. As Bernd Sponheuer has documented, Marx also refined a century-long discourse on Germanness in music, in which the Germans became the culture that included all others, incorporating the best of all national styles into their own. «German art», as he once put it, «is not exclusive but inclusive of Italian art.»

4. The Music of the Future and the German Nation

The question of national distinctions spoke, finally, to the future of music itself, especially among the Germans, who were the people best equipped to raise music to higher levels — and in turn to be improved by it. Part of this capacity in Germans came from their ability, unique among the nationalities of Europe, thought Marx, to cultivate «an equitable recognition of things foreign», which remained «the honor of our people». But an «equitable recognition» went both ways for Marx;

53 BAMZ 2, 35 (24 August 1825), 283; Marx, Musik des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, 10.
54 BAMZ 2, 3 (19 January 1825), 23 [translation my own]. Cited also in Pederson, «A.B. Marx and Berlin Concert Life», 91.
55 BAMZ 1, 12 (15 March 1824), 108.
56 BAMZ 2, 3 (19 January 1825), 23.
57 BAMZ 3, 45 (8 November 1826), 358.
59 BAMZ 2, 21 (25 May 1825), 168.
the people of Europe also ought to recognize the greatness of German music. In the lazy listening habits of people, Marx saw a vicious circle of incomprehension that threatened to stifle progress in musical life. If people, Germans or otherwise, only listened to Italian operatic music, which Marx considered a dead end in historical development, they would always regard music as merely entertaining. Just as melodic-polyphonic music had been of meager intellectual value, so too, Marx thought, «was nearly all French and a great portion of our own national melodies, of nearly all Italian and French opera music, of most of our instrumental music, and particularly of our «drawing room compositions,» which are as shallow and devoid of character as that «society» under whose patronage they luxuriate and multiply».  

The search for deeper meaning in music would fail unless people listened to and played the best music, which lay largely but not entirely within a German tradition culminating in Beethoven. To appreciate the most important music was hard work, requiring education. Over the course of his life, Marx produced a number of texts meant to educate the general public toward just such musical appreciation. Not arbitrarily, the most important audience for his writings outside of German-speaking countries developed in England, beginning in the 1840s. Interest in Marx’s pedagogy in the United Kingdom reflected a broader movement «to bring vitality and progress» to a near by non-existent musical education in schools and to rectify what was perceived as a corrigible ignorance about the musical «sciences» among the public as a whole. The determination of a few continentally-inclined English musical leaders to alter England’s reputation as the «land without music» led them to seek out – mainly, though not exclusively – German music, musicians, and musical scholars. In such a context, Marx played second fiddle to Felix Mendelssohn, who by the time Marx’s work became known in England had become the dominant representative of the European musical tradition in England. That Marx was a friend of Mendelssohn (much less so than in the 1820s) was known to Marx’s English sponsors and was not insignificant. For instance, one of his several translators and early supporters was Natalia Macfarren, née Clarina Thalia Andrae, the German-born wife of the English composer and friend of Felix Mendelssohn, George Macfarren. Marx’s views about musical seriousness and moral improvement matched well the Victorian sensibilities of the most avid promoters of continental music in England. As Macfarren wrote in the preface to her 1855 English translation of Marx’s Musik des neunzehnten Jahrhundert, «that music is a moral and intellectual demonstration, capable of exercising an ennobling influence on mankind, is undeniable», yet all

60 Marx, Musik des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, 44.
the «talent and energy» devoted to it had had «but a superficial and devious result, which by no means satisfies the hopes that are fixed on this art as a means of happiness and civilisation.» Marx’s book, she asserted, «will point out the cause of this insufficiency, and show how the void can be filled up» and thus «must be welcome to every one who has any share in art».

Among the latter, Alfred Novello (1810–1896), the founder of a publishing house whose cheap editions of choral works were almost single-handedly responsible for the explosive growth of choral singing in Victorian England, was the crucial figure. Besides the cheap editions, in 1844 Novello took over a short-lived periodical called Mainzer's Musical Times and Singing Circular, founded by the traveling German musical pedagogue and priest Joseph Mainzer. Under Novello’s direction, The Musical Times quickly expanded its reach, from covering «important musical performances» and «minor events» especially «with a view to what may be interesting to Choral Societies and Singing Classes» to concerning itself with all aspects of musical life, including, increasingly, music education. A figure like A. B. Marx, in whom an outspoken dedication to social and self-improvement through music combined with an accessible, teutonically opinionated style, suited Novello’s purposes well. In 1854, Novello decided to launch a new publishing venture, Novello’s Library for the Diffusion of Musical Knowledge, in which he proposed «to reprint a variety of standard Treatises on the Art of Music, written by the most esteemed English and Foreign Masters, at prices which will place them within the means of every student». Marx’s General Musical Instruction, a translation of his 1839 Allgemeine Musiklehre: ein Hülfsbuch für Lehrer und Lernende in jedem Zweige musikalischer Unterweisung, was the second installment in the series, coming out a month after Novello’s English edition of Cherubini’s famous treatise on counterpoint and fugue.

Novello also published excerpts from Marx’s book in The Musical Times, choosing parts of the final chapter in which Marx held forth on the benefits of song («man’s own true peculiar music»), singing groups (by which individuals «will feel themselves more intimately connected with society»), and piano instruction. Marx’s advice on the latter was unequivocal:

«Sebastian Bach and Handel, Joseph Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven – these are the artists to whom we owe the greatest and most numerous works of art for the pianoforte, [...] and upon the highest, the vast preponderance in estimation of


65 The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular 6 (January 15, 1855), 154.
these five named artists, there is not the slightest question among those who 
have the least tincture of art.»

How decisive Marx’s instructions were in convincing the English that the main 
«condition for good pianoforte teaching» was «that the works of those five 
eminent men shall be considered as the distinguished and governing lessons in 
the instruction» cannot be determined, though some combination of imported 
German wisdom and native English inclination gave English musical life a 
decidedly German sound. Whether that was as beneficial to the English as it was to 
all the German musicians who found employment there is another question, 
though Marx would certainly have said that it was. As he asserted in this, his most 
widely read book in the English-speaking world, it was «not the possession 
of great artists, nor of great works of art, which insures to a nation or to its gifted 
individuals [...] the full enjoyment and the highest pleasures of art» but rather «a 
true artistic education», of the sort he believed he could provide.

And despite bouts of pessimism, he continued to believe that all people, 
regardless of nationality, could become active, responsible participants in this new 
age of nations. Responsibility, as far as Marx was concerned, meant seriousness, in 
particular the effort to understand art at a deeper level. As the years went by and he 
was repeatedly disappointed by the failure of his own very earnest, very mediocre 
compositions as well as by the continuing limbo in which German national affairs 
seemed to hang, Marx indulged in fewer, rather than more, diatribes against the 
French. Increasingly, he turned to a Mazzinian rhetoric, seemingly outdated even 
as he deployed it, of nations coming together, each developing toward freedom and 
self-determination. His major declaration of his musical and artistic principles 
came in 1855, with the publication of Musik des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts und ihre 
Pflege, which he published, as he dramatically put it, «under the thunders of 
cannon, which roll, like the deep voice of prophecy, from Sebastopol even to the 
extreme edges of Europe». Music, the «most timid of all arts», seemed irrelevant 
to such martial times, but Marx intended to show its centrality to the present, when 
mankind has «stepped into the heritage of the last century, that is, the in-
dependent, self-conscious life of the people as nations». This heritage, he argued, 
«means universal brotherhood and the fraternization of all mankind in right, in 
liberty, in light, and in love». 

In the end, Marx pinned his hopes on some final achievement of German 
unity, despite the disappointments of 1848–1849. In his memoirs, published in 
1865, he wrote gloomily about his «complete helplessness» in the face of the 
world’s indifference to his mission. Yet in a typically Marxian abrupt about-face to

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66 Professor A. B. Marx, The Musical Times 7 (July 1, 1855), 59–60; 7 (15 July, 1855), 75–76; 7 (1 August, 1855), 86.
67 Marx, General Musical Instruction, 114–115.
68 Marx, Music of the Nineteenth Century, preface.
mystical optimism, he declared, «but only on the outside!» Some «inner fruit» of all his work would someday come into being, «if only in the invisible treasures of the spirit». He continued: «If one day German opera is ever to achieve a fully satisfactory fulfillment, if the oratorio is ever in our times (in which the church has expanded to embrace a world stage) again to possess complete truthfulness, as it had in the music of Sebastian Bach’s St. Matthew Passion», then Germany must follow the path of Italy, where people had «finally won the freedom to develop their nationality and with it their moral and artistic powers.» Only under such circumstances the arts could flourish.69

Still, the «present condition of nations, and more particularly of our German nation» suggested to Marx that «a new spirit of higher self-consciousness, of greater independence, of brotherly union and energetic moral energy» had been «awakened». This spirit, he concluded «may indeed be stunned, restrained, misled, calumniated, or denied, but cannot be annihilated».70 That Marx should have adopted such a determinedly internationalist tone at the end of his life suggests the difficulties of regarding even the most overtly German of music critics as someone engaged in the business either of cutting off Germany from the rest of the musical world or, even worse, asserting German musical superiority over the music of every other nation. Particularism of the Marxian variety allowed him to achieve a kind of universality, since all nations were part of the greater whole of humanity, and people could actively assert their membership in human society through their own national culture and its dissemination abroad. All nationalists, in that sense, sought to get beyond the nation, and Marx was no exception.

5. Epilogue

In his autobiographical essay, «Against National Culture», Kwame Anthony Appiah writes about something he calls «rooted cosmopolitanism» as a kind of dream for a future beyond national hostilities. The «cosmopolitan patriot» is someone who can imagine a world in which a person is «attached to a home of her own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different, places that are home to other, different, people». Such a «rooted cosmopolitan» would also enjoy travel, while accepting the «citizen’s responsibility to nurture the culture and the politics of their homes».71 Although A. B. Marx certainly would not have used the word «cosmopolitan» or «Weltbürger» in such a way, Appiah’s description captures something of his view of the world of nations. Marx, not unlike Robert Schumann and any number of other mid-century musical

70 Marx, Musik des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, 94.
nationalists, lived suspended between the old and the new, avatar of a kind of national identity that allowed him, and others like him, to sustain in musical life the kinds of soft boundaries that seemed increasingly untenable in the life of the state. Anachronistic though this application of 21st century cultural theory to 19th century nationalists may seem, any larger effort to explain how European musical culture did not simply break up into warring national camps in the course of the century will surely founder if we do not acknowledge the existence of this middle, ultimately vulnerable, ground.
Der Internationalismus des Nationalismus: Adolf Bernhard Marx und die deutsche Musik in der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts


L’internationalisme du nationalisme. Adolf Bernhard Marx et la musique allemande au milieu du 19ème siècle

Le 19e siècle hérita d’un discours antérieur sur les différences nationales qui renvoyait aux caractéristiques des peuples et le transforma en une conception de la nationalité entendue comme expérience vécue, transformation qui devint cruciale pour l’essor de la vie politique, sociale, économique et surtout culturelle. La nationalité devint ainsi un facteur central au cours du 19e siècle, y compris dans le domaine de la musique où les critiques et les journalistes, dans la presse locale comme dans la presse spécialisée, contribuèrent à nationaliser la vie musicale. La canonisation de compositeurs qui pour la plupart étaient morts comme les représentants de la tradition nationale allait de pair avec le développement d’un discours à propos du style national, de ses relations avec la musique folklorique et de son incarnation dans les performances de virtuoses célèbres. L’article analyse l’œuvre exemplaire du journaliste musical le plus important du monde germanophone du 19e siècle, Adolf Bernhard Marx qui influença largement la conception européenne des rapports entre nation et musique.

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