

MODERNIST COMPOSERS AND THE CONCEPT OF GENIUS

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Abstract — Résumé

It can be claimed that Modernist composers in some respects inherited the 19th century concept of an artist-creator whose ability to conceive a work of art was considered as an almost god-like power. The cultivation of the genius idea as viewed in this article will be understood as a concept that originated in the late 18th century, blossomed in the 19th century and had an enormous impact on how the role of the composer was perceived by composers of the age of Modernism, who — as already mentioned — partly inherited this way of thinking. I will argue that although early 20th century composers tried to

distance themselves from the whole 19th century idea of composer-genius, they were unable to cut off completely the influence of the notion. What is more, the tradition of super individuals who did not subordinate themselves to the criteria of style — the musicological approach popularised by one of the founding fathers of the discipline, Guido Adler in his 1911 book *Der Still in der Musik* — stuck with most Modernist composers, who probably even unintentionally followed that track.

Key words: Modernism; composers; concept of genius.

It can be claimed that Modernist composers in some respects inherited the 19th century concept of an artist-creator whose ability to conceive a work of art was considered as an almost god-like power. Contemporary sociologists of music such as Walter Salmen and Henry Raynord observe that, in the Romantic period, the great composer or composer of genius notion was not the only, although per-

haps the dominant, mode of functioning of composers. Consequently the cultivation of the genius idea as viewed in this article will be understood as a concept that originated in the late 18th century, blossomed in the 19th century and had an enormous impact on how the role of the composer was perceived by composers of the age of Modernism, who — as already mentioned — partly inherited this way of thinking. I will argue that, although early 20th century composers tried to distance themselves from the whole idea of composer-genius of the 19th century, they were unable to cut off completely the influence of the notion. What is more, the tradition of super individuals who did not subordinate themselves to the criteria of style — the musicological approach popularised by one of the founding fathers of the discipline, Guido Adler in his 1911 book *Der Still in der Musik*¹ — stuck with most Modernist composers, who probably even unintentionally followed that track.

The Notion of Genius

In fact, it has been since the 18th century that this feature of humankind enabling certain individuals to create new pieces of art has been of interest among various intellectuals and has been closely examined. The notion of genius — that is, a person whose artistic abilities allowed him not only to produce original compositions but also to set new boundaries for art in general — was discussed by such authors as J. Addison, J. B. Dubos, Ch. Batteaux or I. Kant. The entry »genius« written by J. F. Marmontel appeared in the Enlightenment's most venturesome attempt to codify the contemporary state of knowledge, namely Denis Diderot's *Encyclopaedia* (1751-72). Throughout the 19th century, the term genius was applied in reference to various artists — sometimes not even particularly famous or acclaimed. It happened so, however, because the word genius simply connoted the presence of the talent of a particular kind.

Dwelling upon the phenomenon of genius, originated among intellectuals, philosophers and artists, soon affected other scholars. The father of modern criminology, Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), tried to grasp the idea of genius in terms of psychology. He claimed in his treatise *Genio e follia*² from 1864 (with many reprints in augmented forms, also in English³) that genius was a state of hereditary insanity. The elusive nature of genius prompted many such descriptions of genius that determined its unidentifiable nature. A close connection between genius and psychological instability was underlined by generations of artists to come: American

¹ Guido ADLER, *Der Still in der Musik*, Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1911.

² Cesare LOMBROSO, *Genio e follia*, Pavia 1864.

³ See C. LOMBROSO, *L'uomo di genio in rapporto alla psichiatria*, 1889 (English translation, *Man of Genius*, London 1891).

composer, pianist, author and comedian — Oscar Levant (1906-72) supposedly said: »There's a fine line between genius and insanity. I have erased this line.«⁴

Genius in Music

The notion of genius in reference to composers was discussed as early as in 1768 by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Dictionnaire de musique*,⁵ where the author referred his readers to their personal experience of what genius might be. Although escaping unanimous categorization, the composer-genius was a very popular theme in the 19th century.

As commonly known, it was the 19th century European cultural tendency to assign a place of honour to music. The process of elevating music far above other forms of art began in the late 18th century and had a sound social and cultural grounding. Gradually, it was instrumental music (that had already by that time found its place in the general repertory) rather than vocal, which became treated in terms of an almost sacral kind of art. In the novel *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* published in 1797, and in the article »Symphonien« dated two years later, early Romantic intellectuals, namely Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck, attested to the high status of instrumental music, contributing much at the same time to the promotion of 'Absolute' music, though the actual term was coined half a century later.⁶ The ascribed 'purity' of instrumental music was hailed as its divine quality — the sacred aspect of music was mirrored in viewing it in almost religious terms. More than 100 years later, Busoni saw music as »a virgin art, without experience in life and suffering«.⁷ He said »Music was born free«.⁸ The Wackenroder-Tieck way of thinking and writing about music was adopted by other 18th and 19th century authors, just to mention Johann Nikolaus Forkel, who wrote about another musical genius 'discovered' in the Romantic period — J.S. Bach in 1802,⁹ or Johann Gottfried von Herder, who as early as in 1793 already demanded the sacral contemplation of music.¹⁰ The Ro-

⁴ See Oscar LEVANT, *A Smattering of Ignorance*, New York: Doubleday, 1940; *Memoirs of an Amnesiac*, New York: Putnam's, 1965; and *The Unimportance of Being Oscar*, New York: Putnam's, 1968.

⁵ Jean-Jacques ROUSSEAU, *Dictionnaire de musique*, Paris 1768.

⁶ See Daniel K.L. CHUA, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 3.

⁷ Ferruccio BUSONI, *Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music*, ca.1911; in: *Three Classics in the Aesthetic of Music*, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1962, 76.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁹ A.C.E. Kollmann is credited with having translated the book around 1820, although it is more probable that it was Hans Ferdinand Redlich who translated it even earlier — in 1808. See Johann Nicolaus FORKEL, *On Johann Sebastian Bach's Life, Genius and Works* in *The Bach Reader*, ed. Hans T. David & Arthur Mendel, New York: Norton, 1945.

¹⁰ See Carl DAHLHAUS, *Idee der absoluten Musik*, Kassel-Basel-Tours-London: Bärenreiter-Verlag Vötterle, 1978, 87.

mantics influenced by J. Goethe and F. Schiller's ideas developed the notion that art was the highest possible form of insight, close to the idea of religion. In 1799, Friedrich Schleiermacher, representing German Protestant theological tradition, although criticizing the state of contemporary art and arguing that art should serve religion while, comparing religion with music, later called it 'heilige'.¹¹ The concept of music playing an extremely important role in the garden of arts stayed with the 19th century thinkers: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's classification of arts assured music a status almost equal to that of poetry — the most romantic of all arts, according to the philosopher.¹² In 1911, Busoni was also close to the Hegelian vision of the arts — he wrote about sculpture relinquishing »the expression of the human pupil« and about architecture having »fundamental form« and about poetry as commanding »abstract thought«. ¹³ Busoni was obviously under the influence of the 19th century concept. In 1844, in the second volume of his monumental work *The World as Will and Representation*, Arthur Schopenhauer concluded that there was a special relation between music and will »because music does not, like all the other arts, exhibit the ideas or grades of the will's objectification, but directly the will itself«, reason enough for the philosopher to proclaim music as »a certainly independent art; in fact, it is the most powerful of all the arts, and therefore attains its ends entirely from its own resources«. ¹⁴

Tempting as it was, the idea of music as a powerful art was taken by Modernist composers with a pinch of salt. Sessions alluded to the so much cherished 19th century notion of music larger than life, saying in 1933 that it was necessary »for composers to rid their systems of certain poisons [...]« and »to become once more aware of music in its direct and sensuous aspects, to re-experience the simplest musical facts, in and for themselves, with a new freshness of sensation and perception«. ¹⁵

The Genius Composer

Considering the situation, throughout the 19th century, a person wishing to dedicate his life to music was mainly perceived in terms of not only being merely a talented artist, but also one who was quite often likely to gain an exceptionally high — again almost sacral — status. As Walter Salmen writes, musicians, be they

¹¹ See C. DAHLHAUS, *op. cit.*, 87.

¹² G. W. F. HEGEL, *Wykłady o estetyce*, trans. J. Grabowski and A. Landman, PWN, Warszawa 1964, 123-147.

¹³ Ferruccio BUSONI, *op. cit.*, 76.

¹⁴ Arthur SCHOPENHAUER, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.F. J. Payne, New York: Dover Publications, 1966, 448.

¹⁵ Roger SESSIONS, *Music Crisis* (1933); in: *Roger Sessions on Music*, Princeton University Press, 1979, 41.

composers or performers in the 19th century »could take the role of a prophesying priest, even a god-like one«¹⁶ simply by virtue of their genius. The 18th century models of genius inspired the early 19th century writers, poets or critics so much that they managed to influence the general public, who quickly adopted the concept of the artist's superiority with the entailing consequences. As early as in 1781, Johann Friedrich Reichardt claimed on the first page of *Musikalische Kunstmagazine*¹⁷ that an artist should be a prophet of his art. This demand was later adopted and repeated by composers themselves, for example, C.M. von Weber,¹⁸ who in his 1818 reviews would often repeat in reference to composers that »genius is something universal, and whoever possesses it can exercise it in any and every form. [...] — the form it takes is a matter of chance or circumstances«. ¹⁹ Robert Schumann frequently used the term genius in reference to his fellow composers, as well as famous precedents like Mozart or Beethoven. He characterized the contemporary geniuses as »powerful, noble natures«. ²⁰

As a result of the concept of the superiority of the artist, the qualities of the artist were closely connected with those of alienation and separation from mundane problems. M. Woźna-Stankiewicz characterizes the 19th century artist as someone »independent and original«. ²¹ The artist became the destined one — often writing for the future and aware of his task. Freed from the social constraints of court dependency, composers were believed to have a 'mission' to accomplish — dedicating themselves to »esoteric idealism«; ²² they cherished the image of a lonely, isolated and suffering 'martyr' who is »a law unto himself«, as Modest Musorgski once remarked. ²³ This notion would be picked up by Modernist composers, but in a different, rather critical light.

The idea of the isolation of great composers — the natural consequence of Beethoven's legacy of emancipation — accompanied most Modernist composers. The isolation, the not always self-undertaken distancing from society, became a kind of bitter source of solace in the 19th century, a kind of privilege an artist could cherish. Luciano Berio noted that »The composer became, like the poet and the painter, an 'artist' whose ideals and whose world-view appeared to disdain the artisan bric-a-brac of professional musicians«. ²⁴

¹⁶ Walter SALMEN, Social Obligations of the Emancipated Musician in the 19th Century; in: Walter Salmen (ed.), *The Social Status of the Professional Musician from The Middle Ages to the 19th Century*, New York: Pendragon Press, 1983, 267.

¹⁷ Published in Berlin till 1791.

¹⁸ See W. SALMEN, *op. cit.*, 267.

¹⁹ Carl Maria von WEBER, *Writings on Music*, transl. Martin Cooper, ed. John Warrack, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 270 and 363.

²⁰ Robert SCHUMANN, *On Music and Musicians*, London: Dennis Dobson, 1947, 74.

²¹ Małgorzata WOŹNA-STANKIEWICZ, *Recepcja muzyki francuskiej w Polsce (The Reception of French Music in Poland)*, Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 2003, 20.

²² W. SALMEN, *op. cit.*, 274.

²³ See *ibid.*, 270.

²⁴ Luciano BERIO, *Two Interviews*, London: Marion Boyars, 1981, 18.

Composers knew they were expected to alienate themselves from ordinary citizens and flock with other artists, thus creating the image of the artistic bohemian. Krenek ridiculed that image of composers, calling them long-haired and pointing to the 19th century roots of such style »so familiar from the 19th century portraits of virtuosos«. ²⁵ In this way, he not only confirms the impact that the Romantic imagination of the role of artists had on the Modernists, he also prompts the forms of the 19th century promotion of that image that had this enormous impact — in this case, visual presentation. What is more, Krenek uses the term 'moonlight attitude' to describe the Romantic idealization of artists, indirectly referring the readers of his article to the title of one of the most popular of Beethoven's sonatas! The Romantic image of a composer escaping into esoteric brooding created in Krenek's text entitled *The Ivory Tower* and dated 1944, seems dismissed by the author who states: «The artist, sitting up in his ivory tower late at night (sic! again — probably that is how the whole attitude is also called a 'moonlight' one — AGP) and contemplating the state of this world, finds it not good.« ²⁶ That attitude on the part of an aristocratic intellectual retiring from the turmoil of every day life and choosing to stay unaffected by it — so rooted in the 19th century vision of who an artist should be, surprisingly turns out to be a value for Krenek. He eventually characterizes the metaphoric 'Ivory Tower' as a »very handsome, elegant edifice, erected by the best architects, well aired, as is constantly permeated by the thought of the best minds of man-kind, bomb-proof and unaffected by blackouts, as it shines in a light that is invisible to the sharks of the air, and the powers of darkness shall not prevail against it. It is quiet, clean, and offers a magnificent view of the lowlands all around.« ²⁷ Thus, the ultimate conclusion is that the composer's place in society is unique, he remains a Romantic solitary figure. Krenek's text reveals and confirms other absolutely spectacular 19th century influence on the way of thinking adopted by Modernist composers — as Krenek himself confessed, he had borrowed the term 'Ivory Tower' from the writings by the French Romantic poet and critic, Ch. Augustin Sainte-Beuve. Closer examination of the articles by the latter reveals his tendency to call the outstanding literary individuals of his times, such as Victor Hugo or Honoré de Balzac, a genius. ²⁸ The Romantic way of perceiving artists as geniuses with all the entailing consequences deeply infiltrated the minds of future generations of composers.

Still they would, as Honegger did, protest against ivory tower attitudes: »I simply state that the act of devoting oneself to the art of music does not demand that one delude oneself as to the future, or take refuge in an ivory tower«. ²⁹ Al-

²⁵ Ernst KRENEK, *Exploring Music*, London: Calder and Boyars, 1966, 158.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

²⁸ See Charles A. SAINTE-BEUVE, *Portraits of Men*, transl. Forsyth Edevein, Freeport, New York: Books For Libraries Press, 1972.

²⁹ Arthur HONEGGER, *I Am a Composer*, (transl. Wilson O. Clough) London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1966, 16.

ready in 1944 Krenek postulated »bringing to an end the proverbial loneliness of the Ivory Tower«.³⁰ Consequently an artist associated with the Ivory Tower »loathes the turmoil prevailing elsewhere«³¹ and »is blamed for his egoistic, esoteric brooding and is also suspected of what has become known as escapism«.³² Surprisingly then, Krenek puts forward a defence of the ivory tower composer: »What one needs, is faith, love, time and concentration«.³³

For Modernists, the most painful part of that splendid isolation was the lack of contact with the public, and the lack of appreciation often connected with it. As M. Woźna-Stankiewicz rightly observes »one of the leitmotifs connected with the reflection on the reception of the genius's works was the belief that his greatness was usually underestimated by his contemporaries«.³⁴ Modernists did not absolutely abandon that perspective. Anton Webern bitterly described the mechanism of isolation: »It's always the same; mediocrities are over-valued and great men are rejected«.³⁵ Hindemith remarked that it had always been so with geniuses: »The great geniuses lived and died unrecognized«³⁶ and consequently their work was conceived for future generations. »The creator of the surviving and significant works may not be recognized in his own time«.³⁷ However, the disdain for the mob so characteristic for Romantic period artists and composers gradually vanished and its place was overtaken by the awareness of the Modernist composers, who realized the nonsense of this situation and the lack of future for this kind of attitude. Roberto Gerhard, while commenting on the contemporary musical situation and the situation of composers in particular, wrote that a composer »not knowing for whom he writes, not being able to pretend to please anybody in particular, he has decided, rightly or wrongly, to please himself. One can see only too clearly how this gradual loosening of his social attachments favours the composer's emancipation from every kind of traditional convention«.³⁸

The Emergence of Public Concert Life

The eagerness of the 19th century middle classes to conform to the new rules of perceiving artists, as well as their readiness to participate in new musical rituals, stemmed from their changing, in fact increasing, social status. In order to es-

³⁰ E. KRENEK, *op. cit.*, 165.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

³² *Ibid.*, 159.

³³ *Ibid.*, 164.

³⁴ M. WOŹNA-STANKIEWICZ, *op. cit.*, 69.

³⁵ Anton WEBERN, *The Path to the New Music*, Universal London, 1963, 14.

³⁶ Paul HINDEMITH, *A Composer's World. Horizons and Limitations*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952, 218.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 184.

³⁸ Roberto GERHARD, *Gerhard on Music*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000, 28.

establish their own position within society, the majority of wealthy city dwellers was prone to participate in public musical life treated as a symbol of higher social rank — the notion inherited from the previous centuries.

Already in the second half of the 18th century the custom of public concerts was born. The richer members of the Vienna aristocracy would keep their own *Hauskappellen* in order to prove their own high social rank. When, as a result of political changes in the early 19th century as well as declining fortunes, the need for maintaining prestige by sponsoring a private orchestra ceased, accordingly — as Tia De Nora proved — their existence was no longer justified.³⁹ Nevertheless, the social patterns already established in the late 18th century were adopted by the 19th century upper middle class, mainly in big European towns without opera houses.⁴⁰

Challenging the Importance of Music

Romantic thought inspired Modernist composers in their view of the place of music among other forms of art. Ned Rorem's comparison of music and architecture bears resemblance to Goethe's famous comparison of music to frozen architecture. Rorem, however, concludes that »music [...] inhabits an opposite pole from architecture«⁴¹ as architecture fulfils functional purposes and »music serves no purpose beyond itself«.⁴² He also makes some indirect references to Hegel's classification of arts by incorporating prose and painting into his understanding of arts and assigning them the place between music and architecture. The 19th century philosophical legacy is revealed in the belief of some composers in art, and music in particular, as a form of fulfilling humanity.

Alfredo Casella confessed that he never had doubt as to the fact that without art the human race would be bound to suffer and, in this light, for him »music has been my only reason for existence and has been the determining factor behind my every action«.⁴³ Casella's outlook on music had been dictated by the 19th century legacy, cherishing the idea of music possessing the attributes similar to those of religion. Casella confessed in a pathetic manner that »this blind faith of mine in art has always been my true religion«.⁴⁴

Despite that highly spiritual and elevated tone adopted by some composers while talking about the place of music in their lives, Modernists seemed to have

³⁹ Tia DE NORA, *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius: Musical Politics in Vienna, 1792-1803*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995, 331-32.

⁴⁰ Henry RAYNOR, *Music and Society since 1815*, London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1976, 40.

⁴¹ Ned ROREM, *Critical Affairs. A Composer's Journal*, New York: George Braziller, 1970, 25.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴³ Alfredo CASELLA, *Music in My Time*, trans. Spencer Norton, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955, 235.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

retained no illusions as to the fact that music does not hold the dominant role in the materialistic world attributed to it by Romantics. Following Maslow's theory of needs, Ernst Krenek wrote in 1930 that »music is not something that a person absolutely needs, to keep alive, but a definite luxury article«.⁴⁵

The Growth in Musician Status

Nineteenth century concert life assured the growth of both the number of musicians and — indirectly — their status. The concerts proliferated as the middle classes aspired to adapt new social and cultural roles in the 19th century. The stability of the economic situation provided the bourgeoisie with the means for improvement of their standards of living in the 19th century, and music was still believed to be »a primary medium for acquiring and demonstrating prestige«.⁴⁶ Consequently, mainly after the Napoleonic Wars, the social organization of musical life entered the phase of steady growth and crystallization of modern customs of public and private music performances. These forms were »accompanied by a giddy social atmosphere in the expanding audience, with eager trips to concert halls and passionate support of the performers and musical styles«.⁴⁷ In order to assure the social distinction, the bourgeoisie began creating their own venues for the exchange of political views, establishing their own social status and assuring dominance in the sphere of social, political or cultural influence. The ideal place for this purpose — the salon — became an important site of all these activities. The bourgeois salon was modelled upon the aristocratic way of life and, consequently, in order to challenge it, the bourgeoisie wished to sustain or rather to convince others of their high standard of living that introduced some forms of domestic musical life. This way the salon became — as M. Chanan writes — »the locus where music became a commodity...«.⁴⁸ An additional motive for creating new music was provided and, at the same time, the demand assured the production. The production — consequently — involved not only performers (whose status grew in the 19th century, to mention only the enormous popularity of virtuosos) but also composers. The huge increase in the number of musicians in the 19th century became a fact. In a word, this new situation (open, public concerts as well as private, salon performances) stimulated the music market and solved the problem most composers of early 19th century faced, that is, as Henry Raynor aptly put it: »How was the composer, whose secondary gifts as executant or conductor were

⁴⁵ E. KRENEK, *op. cit.*, 36.

⁴⁶ T. DE NORA, *op. cit.*, 332.

⁴⁷ Michael CHANAN, *Musica Practica. The Social Practice of Western Music from Georgian Chant to Postmodernism*, London-New York: Verso, 1994, 138.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

less developed than his creative ability, to find the audience which, by its approval of his work, gave him both his social function and the power to earn his living?⁴⁹ On the other hand, it created a new musical audience already accustomed to the new attitude to music and musicians, often seeking justification for the current state of affairs in the role attributed to one composer — Ludwig van Beethoven.

The Role of Beethoven ...

In musicological tradition, Beethoven is credited with the radical change in the status of composers. Even more than Mozart, Beethoven symbolised an emancipated composer independent of the court hierarchy; he denied the concept of a composer servant working for his master, often asked to undertake several jobs, sometimes unconnected with musicianship, or expected to perform on an instrument, conduct an orchestra, teach and finally compose. Although Mozart broke with this tradition, it was Beethoven whose proud behaviour became associated with the independence of a composer. It was Beethoven who, in accordance with the tendency, dedicated himself mainly to instrumental music, which overtook the dominant role of vocal music; he composed instrumental music that gained almost sacral status in the eyes of early Romantic poets and intellectuals. As a result of the already mentioned social and intellectual currents, Beethoven became a symbol of the new period. The promotion of this composer and his music entailed the growing recognition of both the man and his work.

Beethoven became the archetype of the composer —and even more broadly, the musician in general — in the 19th century. In asserting for Beethoven — the composer of their choice — the status of ‘the great composer’ and promoting him in this entourage, Beethoven’s patrons — mainly aristocratic ones — were not without ulterior motives: they managed to sustain their role as cultural leaders, who not only possessed good taste, but, while acting as real connoisseurs, could also still define the boundaries of what good, great music was and thus dictate what should be considered as fashionable and desirable — and what not. As a result of *their attitude* the image of the ‘great composer’ was being constructed at the same time. The process of creating the ideology of the ‘great composer’ began.⁵⁰ The myth of a genius-artist was not born, as some authors pathetically write⁵¹ — it was socially constructed in order to support not the artists themselves, but their patrons.

Beethoven’s place in the newly established concert life was asserted and became unquestionable: his compositions were the most commonly performed. For example, the Vienna Society of the Friends of Music included almost all of

⁴⁹ H. RAYNOR, *op. cit.*, 15.

⁵⁰ Peter J. MARTIN, *Sounds and Society*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995, 231.

⁵¹ See M. WOŹNA-STANKIEWICZ, *op. cit.*, 20.

Beethoven's symphonies in the programmes of their concerts held between 1817 and the year of Beethoven's death — 1827. In fact, the concerts largely featured Beethoven's works (a total number of twenty-seven), followed by those of Mozart (a total number of seventeen).⁵²

Admiration for Beethoven was widespread among early 19th century intellectuals like Raphael Georg Kiesewetter (1773-1850) or E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822), whose appreciation for Beethoven's compositions resulted in reviews of his works contributing much to the dissemination of knowledge about Beethoven and — most importantly — building up the image of the great composer. In 1813, E.T.A. Hoffmann used such words as 'divine' or 'consecration' while writing about Beethoven's instrumental music.

Throughout the 19th century both public opinion and composers themselves eagerly adhered to the concept of Beethoven's genius, as if this confirmed their own status and beliefs closely connected with the role of the composer. As mentioned above, Ludwig Börne's enthusiastic writing about meeting a young musician called Berlioz confirmed his genius qualities by stating that »Beethoven is inside him.«⁵³ While discussing the subject of expression in music, Robert Schumann quoted Beethoven as the highest authority.⁵⁴ George Bizet is supposed to have said: »Beethoven is not human, he is a god.«⁵⁵

... and Visual Reinforcement

As Richard Leppert argues, the mythic Beethoven imagination was also represented in terms of the impact his music had on listeners.⁵⁶ In Albert Graefle's (1808-89) painting entitled *Beethoven's Intimates* the composer himself is seen from behind his pianoforte, whereas his four companions are portrayed individually while reacting to the music, »posed uniquely«, revealing thus their intimate manner of self-abnegation in face of the power of Beethoven's music. The looks of a genius composer played an important role: on encountering Hector Berlioz, the poet Ludwig Börne wrote in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* that Berlioz indeed »looks like a genius«⁵⁷ whatever that would mean — presumably different things to different people. Nevertheless, the genius must have had an outstanding appearance that would distinguish him in the crowd.

⁵² See Kurt BLAUKOPF, *Musical Life in a Changing Society*, Portland: Amadeus Press, 1982, 66.

⁵³ Ludwig BÖRNE in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 1835, No. 18, p. 102; See M. WOŻNA-STANKIEWICZ, *op. cit.*, 68.

⁵⁴ Robert SCHUMANN, *On Music and Musicians*, London: Dennis Dobson, 1947, 71.

⁵⁵ W. SALMEN, *op. cit.*, 269.

⁵⁶ Richard LEPPERT, *The Musician of the Imagination*; in : William Weber (ed.), *The Musician as Entrepreneur 1700-1914*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004, 38.

⁵⁷ L. BÖRNE, *ibid.*; See M. WOŻNA-STANKIEWICZ, *op. cit.*, 68.

The cult of composers of genius was reinforced by their visual representation in the form of the mask taken in life or — more commonly — in death. Although the tradition of mask-taking can be traced back to Roman times, it was only in the 19th century that it came to be used for musicians. Besides the face-masks of Beethoven, Mahler, Wagner and Hugo Wolf, Liszt's hands, for example, were also cast. R. Leppert suggests that this new custom helped greatly in establishing and promoting the 19th century art religion and the cult of genius composers as »the mask was a three dimensional replica [...] of Absolute Genius itself...«.⁵⁸ In other words, the mask stood for the ineffability of the composer's role, and although the elusive nature of genius escaped the possibility of its being captured, taking the mask presented the opportunity for embodying the »essence of the composer« and, accordingly, the masks were »valued precisely to the extent that they supposedly recorded«.⁵⁹ After 1835, the tendency of erecting monumental sculptures of Beethoven also appeared — these items of 'larger than life' evidence of Beethoven's cult stand for yet another form of his representation, contributing to the creation and sustaining of the almost mythical role this composer played in the 19th-century building of the image of genius.⁶⁰

Beethoven and Modernist Composers

Not surprisingly, the Modernist composers never doubted the position of Beethoven. British composers often mentioned Beethoven and — often between the lines — referred to his high status. Alan Bush put it bluntly: »The greatness of Beethoven has never been in question«⁶¹, and, while pondering on the topic of intellectuality among composers, Ned Rorem also admitted that it was Beethoven who »was also widely worshipped«⁶². For Anton Webern, the 'illustrious name' of Beethoven served as an ideal illustration of great composers, and whenever he mentioned great composers he immediately gave Beethoven as an example.⁶³ The situation was not, however, an idealistic one. The attitude towards Beethoven became much more ambivalent — Beethoven's reputation was not quite crystal-clear for all composers. As already mentioned, for example, Debussy's critical attitude towards Beethoven illustrates to the best extent the early 20th century tendency to re-examine Beethoven, regardless of his great legacy. In 1918, Jean Cocteau compared two geniuses acclaimed in the 19th century — J.S. Bach and Beethoven — strongly criticizing the latter's methods of composing. One of the entries included

⁵⁸ R. LEPPERT, *op. cit.*, 53.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶⁰ W. SALMEN, *op. cit.*, 269.

⁶¹ Alan BUSH, *In My Eighth Decade*, London: Kahn and Averill, 1980, 49.

⁶² N. ROREM, *op. cit.*, 20.

⁶³ A. WEBERN, *op. cit.*, 52.

in *Le coq et l'arlequin* — supposedly the 'Les Six' group manifesto — says: »Beethoven is tiring when he transforms/develops; Bach not, because Beethoven transforms/develops the form and Bach the idea. Most people think it is the other way round«. ⁶⁴ The spreading atmosphere around Beethoven prompted Percy Grainger to write more than a decade later: »I do not know a single composer who places Beethoven high among the great composer geniuses; though no thoughtful musician would deny his superlative gifts«. ⁶⁵ Even in this quotation, the acceptance of the 'great composer-genius' notion is striking. In that context, Grainger might be right writing that »perhaps it does not matter that Beethoven was — placed on an absurd pedestal for a time — provided this folly does not persist too long. And perhaps it does not matter that the leading musical minds of to-day are over-hostile to Beethoven«. ⁶⁶ Perhaps what counts is the living tradition of the genius in music — studying its essence and adopting a position towards that issue.

The awareness of what Beethoven did for composers accompanied most Modernist composers. Luciano Berio remarked that »...since Beethoven, all aspects of the creative process, even the most insignificant ones, have begun to acquire a price: the composer's manuscripts, the composer's glasses, the composer's post-cards, the composer's bed, his school report, his house, his chair, his habits and, naturally, his interviews«. ⁶⁷ By acknowledging the role of Beethoven in creating the 'price' for everything connected with the composer, Berio indirectly pointed to the idea of great composer, admired on the one hand but also misunderstood — the image created in the 19th century still remained very powerful in the 20th century.

The awareness of the role of an artist in society accompanied many Modernist composers, causing them to think the problem over and thus produce their own outlook on it. Karlheinz Stockhausen noticed that »the artist has long been regarded as an individual who reflected the spirit of his time«. ⁶⁸ A noted American composer, Ned Rorem (1923), abruptly challenged the Romantic query that presupposed that an artist was someone special, different from the rest of the society. For Rorem »the artist is like everyone else, only more so« and yet although »the artist is just like anyone else — [...] no one is like the artist«. ⁶⁹ Aware of the 19th century concept of a composer of genius, he says that »geniuses do not hold genius in awe, nor even think in terms of genius, at least not of their own — [...]«. ⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Jean COCTEAU, *Kogut i arlekin. Zapiski wokół muzyki*, Kraków: C&D International Editors, transl. Andrzej Socha, 1995, 38 (»Beethoven est fastidieux, Bach pas, Beethoven fait du développement de forme et Bach du développement d'idée«). In English translation see: Jean COCTEAU, *Cock and Harlequin. Notes Concerning Music*, London: The Egoist Press, 1921, transl. Rollo H. Myers.

⁶⁵ Percy GRAINGER, *Grainger on Music*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 287.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ L. BERIO, *op. cit.*, 19.

⁶⁸ Karlheinz STOCKHAUSEN, *Stockhausen on Music*, London: Marion Boyars, 1991, 31.

⁶⁹ N. ROREM, *op. cit.*, 196-97.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

Who then was a composer in the eyes of the Modernist composer? A mere craftsman or an inspired genius? The answer to this question cannot be unanimous. However, it seems doubtless that the ideal of genius-composer was inherited by Modernist composers who — not accepting it entirely — tried in their numerous reflections on the role of the composer in society to negotiate their own, new position in the changing world.

Sažetak

SKLADATELJI MODERNE I POJAM GENIJA

Može se ustvrditi da su skladatelji Moderne na neki način naslijedili ideju 19. stoljeća o umjetniku stvaraocu čija se sposobnost začinjanja umjetničkog djela smatrala gotovo božanskom moći. Kao što je opće poznato, europska je kulturna tendencija 19. stoljeća bila pripisivanje počasnog mjesta glazbi; međutim, ideju glazbe kao moćne umjetnosti uzeli su skladatelji Moderne sa zrcem soli. Pa ipak, neke snažne romantičke ideje kao ona o izolaciji velikih skladatelja — što je bila prirodna posljedica Beethovenova naslijeđa emancipacije — pratile su većinu skladatelja Moderne. Skladatelji su osjećali da se od njih očekuje udaljavanje od običnih građana i okupljanje s drugim umjetnicima, te u posljedici stvaranje slike o umjetničkoj boemštini. Metaforička 'kula bjelokosna', shvaćena kao sjajna izoliranost (tzv. 'splendid isolation'), bila je s jedne strane negirana, ali — začuđujuće — branjena na drugoj strani.

Nadalje, često ismijavana romantička slika 'dugokosih skladatelja' utjecala je i na ideju skladatelja Moderne o slici skladatelja. Beethovenovo naslijeđe nije se otkrivalo samo u pripisivanju enormno visokog statusa skladatelju kao prijenosniku vrijednosti građanske klase, nego je njegova uloga bila još i pojačana od toga doba popularnim vizualnim predstavljanjem skladatelja (u obliku posmrtnih maska ili naslikanih portreta).

Izazov naslijeđu 19. stoljeća o skladatelju geniju u vrlo su velikoj mjeri predstavljala vlastita razmišljanja skladatelja Moderne o njihovom statusu u društvu. Izravne ili neizravne aluzije o toj stavci javljaju se u većem dijelu njihovih sjećanja, dnevnika i pisama. Teme s kojima se često bave uključuju pojam genija, genij i problem osrednjosti, nedostatak priznanja i ideju izoliranosti (ranije spomenuti stav o 'kuli bjelokosnoj').

Tko je dakle bio skladatelj u očima skladatelja Moderne? Puki obrtnik ili nadahnuti genij? Odgovor na ovo pitanje ne može biti jednodušan. Međutim, izgleda da je izvan sumnje da su ideal o geniju-skladatelju skladatelji Moderne naslijedili, ali ne usvojivši ga potpuno. Oni su u svojim brojnim refleksijama o ulozi skladatelja u društvu nastojali isposlovati svoj vlastiti nov položaj u svijetu koji se mijenjao.