

Reicha, Antoine: Sur la musique comme art purement sentimental (1810-13)

The Department of Music of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France holds, in its archive of manuscripts in French, two versions of the same text entitled "[Sur la musique comme art purement sentimental](#)" (Rés. F 145, sketch; Rés. F 146, fair copy). This is more a philosophical essay than a treatise on music. The document, whose writing can be placed between 1809 and 1813, i.e. shortly after Antoine (Anton) Reicha settled in Paris in 1808, remained unpublished until 2011. The manuscript F 146 comprises 91 pages of text presented in one column with references to marginal notes, prolonged by 24 pages of 72 additional notes. A third manuscript (Rés. F 147) brings together a dozen plates of music examples. Since the captions given these examples show a quite limited mastery of French, the main text must have been carefully edited. The title page of F 146 names François Fayolle, collaborator of Alexandre Choron, as publisher of the work; this would make him the editor, as he was also the promoter of Reicha's music in Paris. Fayolle would publish Reicha's [Traité de mélodie](#) in 1814, but with the fall of the Empire had to relocate to London where he would remain until 1829. This might explain the abandonment of the essay, still mentioned in the *Traité de mélodie* (pg. 60), to which it itself refers (pg. 28).

Sur la musique comme art purement sentimental therefore constitutes Reicha's first long text in French, ultimately a "forgotten" one. Unique in Reicha's production for its philosophical concerns, it perhaps represents a transition from the writings of the foregoing Vienna period (1802-8), written in German and themselves long unpublished. In addition to the title, the vocabulary of the subtitle crossed out on the flyleaf of F 146 ("with Philosophical and Critical Remarks on the Moral Operations of Our Being") confirms Reicha's penchant for speculation.

In the essay, Reicha sought to draw the attention of French artists to the achievements of the Viennese musical sensibility, which he links to the recent invention of aesthetics in German philosophy. The text, whose very title is a postulate, rethinks the nature of imitation in music, declamation and singing in French opera, melodic structure, and the status of instrumental music. But alongside these remarks, sometimes derived from the quarrel of the Gluckists and Piccinnists, Reicha demonstrates the expressive superiority of the First Vienna School. The extent of the social transformation begun by the Revolution and continued by the Empire suggests to him ideas on teaching, legislation on music, and music's place in civic education and the exercise of power. Animated by a certain sometimes slightly naive idealism, Reicha reincorporates popular music, extols military bands, and defends a system expanded to include the cultures neglected under the *ancien régime*.

Today, this essay testifies to the outlook on the future of music seen from a moment at which Haydn had just died, Beethoven was passing through a crisis, and Schubert was just beginning to compose, while in Paris Méhul was experiencing fortune's ups and downs. Implicitly, Paris becomes a laboratory for the exaltation of ideas, the affirmation of audacity, and creative liberty.

The psychology of this composer, theorist, and pedagogue here manifests itself in a paradoxical mixture of visionary progressivism and fealty to principles, an end point that elucidates the still poorly understood influence of his teaching.

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