

Other musicians' reactions to Beethoven

E.T.A. Hoffman, "Beethoven's Instrumental Music" (1813)

Mozart and Haydn, the creators of our present instrumental music, were the first to show us the art in its full glory; the man who then looked on it with all his love and penetrated its innermost being is—Beethoven! The instrumental music of these three masters breathe a similar romantic spirit—this is due to their similar intimate understanding of the specific nature of the art; in the character of their compositions there is none the less a marked difference.

In Haydn's writing there prevails the expression of a serene and childlike personality. His symphonies lead us into vast green woodlands, into a merry, gaily colored throng of happy mortals...

Mozart leads us into the heart of the spirit realm. Fear takes us in its grasp, but without torturing us, so that it is more an intimation of the infinite...

Thus Beethoven's instrumental music opens up to us also the realm of the monstrous and the immeasurable. Burning flashes of light shoot through the deep night of this realm and we become aware of giant shadows that surge back and forth, driving us into narrower and narrower confines until they destroy *us*—but not the pain of that endless longing in which each joy that has climbed aloft in jubilant song sinks back and is swallowed up, and it is only in this pain, which consumes love, hope, and happiness but does not destroy them, which seeks to burst our breasts with a many-voices consonance of all the passions, that we live on, enchanted beholders of the supernatural!...

Haydn grasps romantically what is human in human life; he is more commensurable, more comprehensible for the majority.

Mozart calls rather for the superhuman, the wondrous element that abides in inner being.

Beethoven's music sets in motion the lever of fear, of awe, of horror, of suffering, and wakens just that infinite longing which is the essence of romanticism...

Can there be any work of Beethoven's that confirms all this to a higher degree than his indescribably profound, magnificent symphony in C minor [No. 5]? How this wonderful composition, in a climax that climbs on and on, leads the listener imperiously forward into the spirit world of the infinite!... No doubt the whole rushes like an ingenious rhapsody past many a man, but the soul of each thoughtful listener is assuredly stirred, deeply and intimately, by a feeling that is none other than that unutterable portentous longing, and until the final chord—indeed, even in the moments that follow it—he will be powerless to step out of that wondrous spirit realm where grief and joy embrace him in the form of sound. The internal structure of the movements, their execution, their instrumentation, the way in which they follow one another—everything contributes to a single end...

Richard Wagner, *The Art of Tone* (1849)

What inimitable art did Beethoven employ in his "C-minor Symphony," [No. 5], in order to steer his ship from the ocean of infinite yearning to the haven of fulfillment! He was able to raise the utterance of his music *almost* to a moral resolve, but not speak aloud that final world; and after every onset of the will, without a moral handhold, we feel tormented by the equal possibility of falling back again to suffering, as of being led to lasting victory. Nay, this falling-back must almost seem to us more "necessary" than the morally ungrounded triumph, which therefore—not being a necessary consummation, but a mere arbitrary gift of grace—has not the

power to lift us up and yield to us that “ethical” satisfaction which we demand as outcome of the yearning of the heart...

Hector Berlioz, *Beethoven* (pub. 1941)

One evening I hear Beethoven’s C-minor trio resounding... I fling open my door... Come in, come, and welcome, proud melody!... God! How noble and beautiful!... Where, then, did Beethoven discover these countless phrases, each more poetically characterized than the other, all of them different, all of them original, not even sharing that family air one recognizes in the works of great masters renowned for the fecundity? And what ingenious developments! What unforeseen motions!... How he soars, this indefatigable eagle! How he glides, poised in his harmonious heaven!... Now he plunges down, loses himself in it, rises, descends again, disappears... then he returns to his starting point, his eye glinting brighter, his wing beating more vigorously, disdainingly, quivering, inebriated with infinity...