

The Enlightenment

On music and a higher sense of universal order

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “On What is Independent of Sense and Matter” (1702): Tapping into our mental faculties [i.e., musicking] achieves oneness with the universe and makes us “resemble God in a small way, as much through our knowledge of order as through the order we ourselves can give to things within our grasp, in imitation of the order God gives the universe. It is also in this that our virtue and perfection consists.”

Leibniz, *La monadologie* (1714): The best musical works are “a perpetual living mirror of the Universe”

J.S. Bach: music is “everything that creates harmony, that is, order. And in this sense it is used by those who assert that the whole universe is music.”

What is art? What is music?

Johann Abraham Birnbaum, “Defense of Bach” (1738): “The essential aims of true art are to imitate nature, and, where necessary, to aid it. If art imitates nature, the indisputably the natural element must everywhere shine through in works of art. Accordingly it is impossible that art should take away the natural element from those things in which it imitates nature—including music. If art aids nature, then its aim is to preserve it, and to improve its condition; certainly not to destroy it. Many things are delivered to us by nature in the most misshapen states, which however, acquire the most beautiful appearance when they have been formed by art. Thus art lends nature a beauty it lacks, and increases the beauty it possesses. Now, the greater the art is—that is, the more industriously and painstakingly it works at the improvement of nature—the more brilliantly shines the beauty thus brought into being.”

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790): In order for something to be called “art”, it must be “beautiful”

Music and science

Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute* (1752): “He who does not possess sufficient natural gifts for academic study probably has even fewer gifts for music. Yet if someone who gives himself to academic studies has sufficient talent for music, and devotes just as much industry to it as to the former, he not only has an advantage over other musicians, but can also be of greater service, to music in general than others...Whoever is aware of how much influence mathematics and the other sciences, such as philosophy, poetry, and oratory, have upon music, will have to own not only that music has a greater compass than many imagine, but also that the evident lack of knowledge about the above-mentioned sciences among the majority of professional musicians is a great obstacle to further advancement, and the reason why music has not yet been brought to a more perfect state.”

On equality

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1769): “When I listen to a string quartet, it makes me feel as if I am eavesdropping on a conversation between four intelligent people.”

United States *Declaration of Independence* (1776): “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, —That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

On hard work and industriousness

Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” (1784): “Enlightenment is man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another... its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another... Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a portion of mankind... remains under a lifelong tutelage, and why it is so easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians.”

J.S. Bach, attrib. in *The Harmonicon* (June 1823): “I was obliged to be industrious; whoever is equally industrious will succeed equally well.”

On cultural superiority

Johann Nikolaus Forkel, *A General History of Music*, Volume I, Section 3. (1788-1801): Although tone—or rather, as it must be called at this juncture, sound—is only the means by which music is made perceptible, in primitive, uncultivated nations it is generally taken for the thing itself. Indeed they consider every individual sound to be music. Consider pure sound in its various modifications: loud, soft, sharp and rough, gentle, dark, muffled, thick, thin, and so on. Furthermore, consider how in these various modifications sound is capable of affecting the hearing, and therefore the feelings of human beings. Then there is little reason to be surprised that the pleasure sound can already stimulate in itself may come to be considered a pleasure that arises from actual music. In his primal condition man is a passive creature; his soul has not yet been put into action. Sense impressions are thus still the only impressions that he can receive; he is not yet capable of other impressions, in which his intellect first must make a comparison, and derive from the observation of a proportion or a symmetry a feeling of pleasure. These sense impressions must be all the more intense and stirring the less the intellect is cultivated, and capable itself of being engaged.

This explains why we find in all wild and uncivilized nations such great pleasure taken in the clamor of noisy instruments—in drums, for example, and rattles, in blaring trumpets, and extremely loud, ferocious shrieks. Nature has established a wholly unmediated union between the heart and the hearing of human beings; all passions are communicated through their proper tones, which stir in the heart of the hearer the very passional sensation from which they resulted. This relation of unmediated perception between tone, hearing, and the heart is the same in all peoples, the most savage as well as the most civilized, with this one difference: the more savage the people, the more it remains merely sensuous and poor in mental representations, the more powerful are its sensations and its organs of sense. Thus in the primal state the pure tone, taken for itself alone as an expression of the passions, must be crude and vigorous, and entirely in keeping with the power of these sense organs.