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OF ANCIENTS AND MODERNS

The Sociopolitical Significance of Rousseau's Musical Caricatures

Sophie Bourgault

What the ancient music really was, it is not easy to determine; the whole is now become a matter of faith; but of this we are certain, that it was something with which mankind was extremely delighted.... And *so great was the sensibility of the ancient Greeks, and so accentuated and refined their language, that they seem to have been, in both respects, to the rest of the world, what the modern Italians are at present; for of these last, the language itself is music, and their ears are so polished and accustomed to sweet sounds, that they are rendered fastidious judges of melody, both by habit and education.*

—Charles Burney, *A General History of Music* (1776)¹

Eighteenth-century France witnessed several heated debates about the respective merits of French and Italian operatic music.² In the 1753 *Querelle des Bouffons*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau

¹ *A General History of Music*, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1935), 15; my italics.

² The *Querelle des Bouffons* (1752) was the most explicitly political quarrel: Rameau's music became the symbol for the despotism, artificiality and corruption of the French court. The catalyst behind this fight was the success harvested by an Italian troupe's performance of Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona*. See Denise Launay, *La Querelle des Bouffons* (Genève: Minkoff Reprint, 1973).

is credited with having given the most controversial and potent blow to the pro-French side with his *Lettre sur la musique française*. Purchasing a small piece of immortality in music encyclopedias along the way, Rousseau claimed in this infamous letter that that the French did not have *any* music. While the eighteenth-century music historian Charles Burney generously described this text as “perhaps the best piece of musical criticism ever written,”³ many contemporaries of Jean-Jacques rolled their eyes at the excessively polemical tone of the *Lettre* and refused to give much credit to the rant of an arrogant and misanthropic failed musician. “Qu’on lise l’ouvrage, l’on n’y trouve que des opinions extravagantes, des satyres amères, des sophismes insoutenables, des personnalités offensantes, des inconséquences marquées...c’est un furieux, un frénétique, un pédagogue bilieux.”⁴

While Rousseau himself acknowledged that his bile had been partially stimulated by his run-in with Jean-Philippe Rameau,⁵ I want to argue that Rousseau’s caricatures of Italian and French music were not mere polemics, but rather, carefully articulated, coherent and powerful resources in his indictment of modern bourgeois society. Rousseau also increased the strength and legitimacy of his Italian caricature by drawing implicit parallels between ancient Greek and modern Italian music. It is not a mere coincidence that Rousseau selected these two specific peoples to hold as mirrors to corrupt Frenchmen: the musical practices of both antiquity and eighteenth-century Italy were commonly praised by Enlightenment *litterati*, and therefore offered great philosophical authority and capital. Rousseau exploited this capital more than any other *philosophe*—almost to the limits of good taste, credibility and logic.⁶

This paper will identify the similarities in Rousseau’s idyllic praises of the Greek and Italian musical “golden ages” and assess their significance. My intentions are twofold: first, I want to show that

³ Charles Burney, *Music, Men and Manners in France and Italy 1770* (London: Folio, 1969), xxiii. See also his *General History of Music*, 970.

⁴ Rousselet (ou Fréron), *Lettres sur la musique française en réponse à celle de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, in Launay, *La Querelle des Bouffons*, 772–73. The characterization of Rousseau as “failed musician” belongs to Rousselet.

⁵ *Correspondance Complète*, 2:113.

⁶ All references will be to *Oeuvres Complètes*, 5 vols., ed. B. Gagnebin and M. Raymond (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1959–1995). Roman numerals refer to the volume of the *Oeuvres* being cited, and the following abbreviations will refer to: *Essai sur l’origine des langues* (EOL); *Lettre à d’Alembert sur les spectacles* (LD); “L’origine de la mélodie” (OM); *Dictionnaire de musique* (DM); *Examen de deux principes avancés par M. Rameau* (*Examen*). Other texts will be cited in full.

Rousseau's caricatures are not merely about matters of musical style and taste. Rather, they concern themselves with important issues like the extent and meaningfulness of human freedom. More specifically, I argue that Rousseau's caricatures of Greek and Italian musical practices largely serve to expose the following interrelated ills of modern society: its lack of unity, simplicity, sincerity, spontaneity, liberty, and finally, equality. This paper shows these aspects of Rousseau's musical and sociopolitical critique (i.e., what the modern French lack) by approaching the question from its flipside: by highlighting what the ancient Greeks and modern Italians both *possess*. We will therefore simultaneously uncover central aspects of Rousseau's sociopolitical critique of modernity and sketch his musical ideal.

My other, more general intention is to ask: to what degree were modern Italian musical practices, for Rousseau, similar to those of the ancient Greeks? An implicit objective behind Rousseau's caricatures may have been to uncover how much of the (musical) golden age could be found in Italy. In some ways, to ask "how Greek are the Italians" is to assess antiquity's presence in modernity. Or, in more explicit Rousseauian terms: how much of nature can be found in Italian culture? If Rousseau's entire oeuvre is concerned with finding a healthier coexistence of nature and culture, the Italians may embody an informative musical archetype. Before discussing the five traits of this archetype, I begin by giving a brief outline of Rousseau's melodic golden age.

* "Remontons à l'origine": Rousseau and Antiquity* *

Rousseau puts forward in his *Essai sur l'origine des langues* what is essentially a musical version of his *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*: ancient Greece is hailed as the golden age, and the musico-linguistic history of men is depicted as one of utter degeneration. The *Essai* marries history

⁷ For treatments of Rousseau and antiquity, see for instance Yves Touchefeu's *L'Antiquité et le christianisme dans la pensée de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Oxford: SVEC, 1999), Chantal Grell's *Le dix-huitième siècle et l'antiquité en France 1680–1789* (Oxford: SVEC, 1995), Judith Shklar, "Two Models: Sparta and the Age of Gold," *Political Science Quarterly* 81: 1 (March 1966), and R. A. Leigh, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Myth of Antiquity in the Eighteenth Century," in R. R. Bolgar, ed., *Classical Influences on Western Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

and ontology: its account of musical facts is meant to reveal “the nature of things.”⁸ By locating the common origin of music and language in the melodic expression of passions rather than in *physical* needs, Rousseau at once defines the nature of music and confronts the venerated Rameau. This confrontation is carried out by demonstrating that melody and the voice *preceded* harmony and instrumental music, and that the power of music cannot be accounted for on the basis of physico-mechanical explanations, but only on the basis of *socio-cultural* ones. And yet, physical explanations are not entirely dismissed from the Rousseauian story: climate is identified as the source of linguistic variations around the world.⁹ While the Southern languages are the offspring of the passions, Northern languages are the progeny of physical needs. While Northern man first screamed, gruffly, “*Help me,*” the eloquent man of the South began by singing “*Love Me*” (EOL, V:408). If languages are shaped by the specific purposes they serve, they are *all* societal goods: savage man does not speak.

The Rousseauian genealogy substitutes for the biblical myth of the Fall a musical version of the “myth of antiquity”: Eden was populated not by Adam and Eve, but by singing Greeks.

À peine les premières étincelles de génie celeste eurent-elles embrasé les coeurs *que les peuples assemblés se mirent à chanter d'un ton sublime les Dieux* qu'engendroient leur imagination échauffée, les héros dont ils déploroient la perte, et les vertus que leurs vices naissans rendoient nécessaires; tous leurs sentimens étoient des Transports, les rustiques sons d'une flute à trois trous suffisoient pour les mettre hors d'eux mêmes. (OM, V:334)

The tasting of an apple is not chiefly to be blamed for human corruption but rather, a growing appetite for harmony, grammar, philosophy, and sophisticated instruments.

⁸ See Marie-Elisabeth Duchez, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau historien de la musique,” in H. Dufourt and J. M. Fauquet, eds., *La Musique du Théorique au Politique* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1991), 42–48, to which I am particularly indebted in this paper.

⁹ For a good discussion of climatic explanations in Rousseau, see John T. Scott’s “Climate, causation, and the power of music in Montesquieu and Rousseau,” in C. Dauphin, ed., *Musique et langage chez Rousseau* (Oxford: SVEC, 2004).

The replacement of the biblical tradition by the classical tradition is obviously not something novel to Rousseau, nor to the eighteenth century—Machiavelli's writings readily come to mind. In its musical version, the myth of antiquity in fact goes as far back as to Plato and Boethius, who both spoke of a certain "Golden Age" and mourned the later degeneration of Greek music. That being said, the French *philosophes* seem to have been the first to wage such an unforgiving war against the biblical tradition.¹⁰ The *philosophes* felt an unprecedented sense of kinship with antiquity's heroes—one can think of Diderot's infatuation with Socrates or of Rousseau's youthful enthusiasm: "Sans cesse occupé de Rome et d'Athènes, vivant pour ainsi dire avec les grands hommes, né moi-même citoyen d'une république... je me croyais Grec ou Romain; je devenais le personnage dont je lisais la vie" (*Confessions*, I:9).

Now, the *musical* myth of antiquity is particularly mythical because ancient music did not leave many traces behind—unlike for instance architecture, whose remnants could actually be touched and studied by Enlightenment scientists. Rousseau did not lament, but rather cherished, this relative lack of concrete information about Greek music, and in fact sought to shelter it from the scalpel of the *hommes de science* John Wallis and Pierre-Jean Burette—two leading authorities on Hellenic music at the time. More specifically, Rousseau was critical of the idea of reproducing with *modern means* something akin to Greek music, and he condemned those who scoffed at the pseudo-magical effects of antiquity's music (DM, V:923). Burette and Wallis had both "rationally" explained away the effects of Greek music: while the former considered them as purely the effect of novelty, the latter argued that they had simply been overstated. Rousseau believed neither of these interpretations. Kircher and Burette's "translation" of two fragments of ancient music into modern notation raised immediate objections in Rousseau's mind:

Mais qui osera juger de l'ancienne Musique sur de tels échantillons?...qu'ils réfléchissent qu'un Italien est juge incompetent d'un Air françois, qu'un François n'entend rien

¹⁰ Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Random House, 1968), particularly book 1, chapter 1.

du tout à la Mélodie italienne; puis qu'il ose compare les tems et les lieux, et qu'il prononce s'il ose. (DM, V:924)

Calling for a sensitivity to cultural context, Rousseau told his readers that only an ancient ear and heart could genuinely feel the effects of ancient music, and that moderns were, besides, too proud to appreciate them.

But this is not to suggest that Rousseau saw his discussion of Greek music as praise of "musical magic" or mythology: in "L'origine de la mélodie," he notes that his historical account is backed up by facts, and he wants his study of Greek music to be useful to moderns (V:332–33). Rousseau was *not* completely uninterested in history: his intensive research efforts at the *Bibliothèque du Roi* and his remarkable knowledge of Greek music testify to his concern with *both* "conjectural" and "documented" history.¹¹ Yet, one may concede that obtaining definite, historically based information did not ultimately matter to Rousseau—he believed that he could assess how much of "nature" lived on in certain peoples or practices without needing to trace with full historical confidence their entire stories. His aim was not so much to build reliable erudition as to improve musical and sociopolitical practices. Rousseau's Greek golden age is hence at once mythological and historical, at once irretrievable and retrievable.¹² And this, of course, inevitably results in a difficult tension within Rousseau's musical thought.

Peter Gay writes that what sets Enlightenment classicists apart from earlier devotees is that they predominantly used antiquity "*not against kings but against clerics.*"¹³ And yet, with his own appeal to antiquity, Rousseau clearly sought to oppose "kings." As we will see, his musical criticisms contain a remarkable political resonance: the targets of his writings on music are not simply musicians, materialist philosophers and wealthy nobles, but also monarchs and their *coterie*. Rousseau often directed his wrath at all *géomètres* and *hommes galants* who smugly saw French music as the pinnacle of perfection: herein lies part of his role in altering Western attitudes toward music from other epochs

¹¹ See Duchez, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau historien."

¹² See Robinson, "Rousseau, Music and the Ancients." For the irretrievability of the golden age, see chapter 18 of the EOL.

¹³ Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 45n (my italics).

and places. Rousseau challenged universalist theories by stressing the variety of music systems and the "cultural conditioning of the human ear":¹⁴ "Il faut à l'Italien des airs italiens, au Turc il faudroit des airs Turcs. Chacun n'est affecté que des accens qui lui sont familiers."¹⁵ But readers ought not to see here indications of a committed musical cosmopolitanism. Rousseau's "exoticism" had a limited purpose: the interest he took in the Persians or the Chinese certainly did not derive from a desire to promote tourism or the purchase of Persian instruments, but above all to shatter the pomposity of the moderns. While Rousseau engraved an *Air Chinois* in his dictionary, he undoubtedly believed that the ancient Greeks were more worthy of our respect than the Chinese.¹⁶ The tension between Rousseau's cultural "particularism" and his *universal* criticism of modern bourgeois alienation is striking but certainly not inexplicable. Such a tension seems to be the outgrowth of the greater Rousseauian tension, between his ideals of *citoyen* and that of *l'homme*.

If Nietzsche declared a century later that "the Greeks can surely not be overvalued,"¹⁷ some Enlightenment writers (e.g., Diderot) counseled all *gens de lettres* to abstain from pedantic and blind worshipping of the Greeks. Such warnings were also formulated and heeded in the young discipline of music history. Forkel's *General History of Music*, for instance, speaks of Greek music as the mere "adolescent phase" of the art, and it celebrates modern polyphonic development as "the best proper use of the whole wealth of art."¹⁸ Rousseau stands out among Enlightenment intellectuals in his complete rejection of polyphony and in his brash characterization of the history of music as degenerative. Even someone as sympathetic to Rousseau as Charles Burney thought that the voices of "the musical Grumblers and Croakers of antiquity" (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, and Plutarch), did not merit so much contemporary attention and respect. After all, the modern Italians "have greatly surpassed not only their forefathers the ancient Romans, but

¹⁴ Duchez, "Modernité du discours de Jean-Jacques Rousseau sur la musique," in R. A. Leigh, ed., *Rousseau after Two Hundred Years*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 272.

¹⁵ EOL, V:418.

¹⁶ For example, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, III:11.

¹⁷ Nietzsche, early notebook, cited in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, M. Cowan, ed., (New York: Regnery Gateway, 1987), 1.

¹⁸ Enrico Fubini, *Music and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Europe: A Source Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 230.

even the Greeks themselves.”¹⁹ Besides, Burney notes, too many hungry artists require reverence and patronage for scholars to spend time and resources lamenting the loss of Greek music—“respect for the dead should not annihilate all kindness for the living.”²⁰ But Rousseau’s immense respect for the Greeks does not, in fact, make him indifferent to the living, nor posit him entirely “against modern arts.” He does not counsel moderns to trade in contemporary instruments for the *aulos* any more than he wants them to go live with the bears. Jean-Jacques was too madly in love with the modern Italian muse to fancy antiquity exclusively. He loved both, which seemed reasonable to him given that Greek and Italian music had sufficient commonalities to make them a fine pair.

* Of Unity and Simplicity: Music and Nature *

The perfect unity of artistic *means* (verse, music and gesture) could be seen as the chief reason behind Rousseau’s nearly unconditional praise of the Greeks: they possessed a true music of “totality.” Having at their disposal an incredible range of musico-linguistic accents and rhythmic possibilities, the Greeks were able to do what no one else after them could: to sing and speak *simultaneously*.

Chez les Grecs, toute la Poésie étoit en Récitatif, parce que la Langue étant mélodieuse, il suffisoit d’y ajouter la Cadence du Mètre et la Récitation soutenue, pour rendre cette Récitation tout-à-fait musicale....Les Grecs pouvoient chanter en parlant; mais chez nous il faut parler ou chanter; on ne sauroit faire à la fois l’un et l’autre. (DM, V:1008)

Their music was thus essentially a genuine *récitatif*—and modern ones are all but poor versions of it (putting aside the very significant exception of the Italian recitative). Yet, Rousseau believed that composers could recapture a certain Greek spirit if they followed his principle of “unity of melody” (DM, V:1143). As with the political solution he prescribed in the unity of the general will, Rousseau hoped

¹⁹ Burney, *A General History of Music*, 1:339, 382.

²⁰ Burney, 1025.

that a better understanding of the original melodic unity could help moderns achieve a partial resolution of their inner (musical) split.

Among Rousseau's reasons for praising unity and simplicity is his claim that nature operates on the same principles. And we know that what is closer to nature is, almost always, deemed best by Rousseau. One finds, in the idea of *unité de mélodie*, an explicit rule about musical composition, if not an actual ethical principle: "il faut, en un mot, que le tout ensemble ne porte à la fois qu'une mélodie à l'oreille et qu'une idée à l'esprit" (LMF, V:305). Thanks to both its dramatic and melodic unity, the original (Greek) music had commanding effects over men; the first legislators were also outstanding musicians and orators (DM, V:915). Thus, one of the great questions preoccupying Rousseau is whether we can, somehow, (re)create that original unity of music and word, (re)unite the muses and the law. Or, as he would put it: can we make language sing, and music speak, once more?²¹ One may draw a parallel between the modern split between singing and speaking, and the wider Rousseauian conflict between nature and culture. While nature sings, culture speaks—and modern individuals are divided, according to Rousseau, between these two modes of expression. Only in the Greek golden age (itself an incredible moment of simultaneous individuality and kinship), was speech song. Finding the means to recreate the unity of (natural) passion and (cultural) reason is therefore both a musical and a political task.

As we quickly learn in the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, the perfect Greek unity did not endure. After praising the extraordinary common origins of language and music, Rousseau moves on to discuss their split—their Fall.²² We discover that the loss of unity was caused by the following forces: the increasing calculation of intervals and the development of conventions; the growth of reason, logic and philosophy (which made language precise but artificial); the development of writing systems and grammar; the Greek loss of freedom to Rome and the usage of Latin; and finally, the Barbarian invasions of Rome.²³ Over centuries, the "natural" expressiveness of the

²¹ *Lettre à M. Burney et Fragmens d'observations sur l'Alceste de Gluck*, V:445.

²² For another eighteenth-century account, see John Brown's 1763 *A Dissertation on the Rise, Union, Power, the Progressions, Separations and Corruptions, of Poetry and Music* (Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers, 1972).

²³ EOL, V:424–26, and 384.

original musical language thus gave way to linguistic precision, logic and articulation. In short, the triumph of grammarians and philosophers over poets entailed the overthrow of passion to reason (V:384).

The musical misfortunes that accelerated in late Roman days called for compensation: harmony and polyphony would be created to make-up for the loss in *natural* expressivity. But this is poor compensation in Rousseau's view: music cannot carry out its moral function with chords—nature does not speak harmonically and neither does the human voice:

En quittant l'accent oral et s'attachant aux seules institutions harmoniques la musique devient plus bruyante à l'oreille et moins douce au coeur. Elle a déjà cessé de parler, bientôt elle ne chantera plus et alors avec tous ses accords et toute son harmonie elle ne fera plus aucun effet sur nous. (EOL, V:422)

While harmony can increase the power of melodies, it cannot "sing"; it cannot touch and mobilize citizens. A "barbarian and Gothic invention," harmony is *artificial* and *arbitrary*, being based on man-made rules and calculations rather than human nature and the voice (DM, V:850-51).

There is some irony to the fact that Rousseau, the enemy of systems, conventions and rules, wrote a lengthy *dictionary* of music, filled with theories and principles. Yet, we know that Rousseau's oeuvre confronts the Enlightenment by using its own tools, and that the *citoyen de Genève* does not think that escaping conventionality is ever an option. His theory does not seek to discard the musical goods acquired by modernity, but his Greek and Italian caricatures are meant to show readers that there is no *absolute* need for harmony or modern theory. Like the civic dogmas of his social contract, the rules of music-making ought to be simple, few, precise and without superfluous commentary.

The traits of unity and simplicity are not only critical to his Greek infatuation, but are also at the heart of the "musical illumination" he claims to have experienced during his stay in Venice as secretary to the French ambassador.²⁴ While Rousseau asserts in some places that *all*

²⁴ There was probably no such "illumination." While Rousseau's *Confessions* present us with a sudden and complete "conversion" to Italian music, his early writings suggest that he was far from being perfectly loyal to the Italian muse when he quit his job in Venice in 1744. See his *Lettre sur l'opéra italien et français* in OC V.

modern languages are unmusical, he suggests elsewhere that Italian is the closest approximation to a musical language *à la Grecque*. Rousseau can claim both because, as we noted above, his *Essai* offers two distinctive accounts of the origins of languages. The Italians, by virtue of being a people of the South, can appeal to a greater degree of “natural” musicality on the basis of the climatic distinction in Rousseau’s story. The Great Musical Fall is a European-wide event, but the Italian Fall was less severe, thanks to Italy’s climatic advantage.

Some Enlightenment thinkers even toyed with the idea that parts of Italy may *not have fallen at all*, that remnants of ancient tragedy may have survived almost intact in well-sheltered places like Venice. For instance, John Brown thought that it was not a mere coincidence that opera first appeared in Venice and that the Venetian carnivals showed an amazing amount of similarity to the Roman Saturnalias.²⁵ Rousseau thought that the superiority of the Italians was clearly observable in the remarkable simplicity and unity of Pergolesi’s work—“un modèle de chant, d’unité de mélodie, de dialogue et de goût” (LMF, V:311). What is not so clear, however, is whether Pergolesi—or any other Italian composer for that matter—achieved this unity *intentionally*. After all, Rousseau saw himself as the first modern composer to have deliberately put into practice the principle of unity of melody—whereas the Italians have only been using it “instinctively.”²⁶

Rousseau appeals to the closer proximity of the Italians both to the Greeks and to nature to demonstrate that French music is unworthy of the name “music.”²⁷ During the *Querelle des bouffons*, French musicians expressed their resentment toward this “unfair advantage” granted to Italian music—that is, of being linked to the authority of the ancients. The musicians of the Paris opéra pleaded with all *géomètres* to evaluate French and Italian music on their *own* terms and to stop drawing parallels (like Rousseau was doing) between Greek and Italian music.²⁸ The French orchestra had numerous occasions for exasperation: appealing to the Greeks or at least to the authority of “nature” were

²⁵ *A Dissertation on the Rise*, 170.

²⁶ DM, V:1146. It would be consistent for Rousseau to claim that the Italians have an *unreflective* creative process, since he contrasts the spontaneity of Italian creations with the heavily knowledge-based French ones (see section below).

²⁷ In *Emile*, he writes: “...Emile prendra plus de goût pour les livres des anciens que pour les nôtres; par cela seul qu’étant les premiers, les anciens sont les plus près de la nature” (IV:676).

²⁸ See De Rulhière, “Jugement de l’orchestre de l’opéra,” in Launay, *La Querelle des Bouffons*, 442.

quite common strategies in eighteenth-century quarrels. Most pamphlets were indeed primarily devoted to discussing which music (more specifically, which *language*) was the most "natural." While at the beginning of the eighteenth century, French operatic music was widely acknowledged as more natural, five decades later this position was reversed: Italian music was now nature's true child.

One could partially explain this reversal by the changing meaning of the word "nature" in the eighteenth century. For the neoclassical mentality, the word nature had been used above all to refer to the nature of *things*, and the role of art was envisioned as an *artificial* and enhancing imitation of "*la belle nature*." According to the emerging romantic perspective, in contrast, what truly mattered was *human* nature and the task of art was not only to imitate but above all to *express* human emotions.²⁹ While French music seems to have been regarded as a suitable incarnation of the neoclassical outlook, Italian music seems to have corresponded better to romantic aesthetics. One can observe some aspects of this shift in Rousseau's musical writings. In an early letter on opera, he writes that Italian music lacks natural simplicity (V:255); overly filled with cadences and ornaments, it is too baroque. Less than a decade later, Rousseau almost entirely reverses his views: in his *Lettre sur la Musique Française*, he denounces French music for its lack of "natural simplicity." This shift may partially reveal the impact of the clash with Rameau, but perhaps also Rousseau's awareness that musical taste was changing.

Regardless of the predominant impetus behind it, Rousseau's turnaround is significant given that his famous *Lettre* was read all over Europe and regarded as the decisive blow to the pro-French side.³⁰ Rousseau lent additional legitimacy to Italian operatic music. He might also, inadvertently, have given extra "dignity" to its female singers—at the expense of the French. Since its birth in the seventeenth century, Italian opera had regularly been denounced for its licentious character.

²⁹ See Catherine Kintzler, *Jean-Philippe Rameau, splendeur et naufrage de l'esthétique du plaisir à l'âge classique* (Paris: Minerve, 1998) and M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Norton, 1958). For a different interpretation, see John Neubauer's *The Emancipation of Music from Language: Departure from Mimesis in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

³⁰ The evidence used by scholars to bolster their claim that Rousseau's *Lettre* was the final blow is that no other pro-Italian pamphlet was written after it and that none of the encyclopaedists felt the need to stand up for Rousseau when he was vilified for it. See A.-R. Oliver, *The Encyclopédistes as Critics of Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947).

In his 1639 report to the French court, André Maugars noted that while the French weakness was one of excessive modesty, the Italian was one of unsavoury excess,³¹ and the pro-Italian François Ragueneau similarly acknowledged, in 1702, that French music was more natural.³² Jacques Bonnet's 1715 *Histoire de la musique et ses effets* compared French music to a beautiful woman whose simple beauty allows her to conquer the hearts of all men by her mere presence. By contrast, Italian music was equated by Bonnet with an old dissolute coquette wearing too much make-up.³³ When we reach the mid-eighteenth-century and read Rousseau's caricatures, Italian music is *neither* a whore nor a lady. Mirroring Rousseau's ideal women, Italian music is now considered modest and unaffected, and, like Julie, neither beautiful nor ugly. Whereas Lecerf de la Viéville had been outraged in 1704 by the horrifying facial gestures of Italian women, Rousseau pointed the criticism back against the French: "On voit les Actrices presque en convulsion, arracher avec violence ces glapissements de leurs poudres... les vaisseaux gonflés, l'estomac pantelant; on ne sait lequel est le plus désagréablement affecté de l'oeil ou de l'oreille" (*Julie*, II:285). At the beginning of the century, the Italians were out of breath and lacked elegance and morals—by the 1750s, Italian women suddenly found their lungs and their dignity, while French women lost theirs. Italian music could not have had a better salesman than Rousseau.

By insisting that music must be tied to the voice, words and feelings to deserve its name, Rousseau gave it an exceptionally *human* face—and quite a loquacious mouth. As a conversation, music is contingent not only on eloquent expression, but also on proper reception. As we saw in this section, the latter depended, in Rousseau's view, on the simplicity and unity of the means used. If a wise performer knows how to obtain the attention of listeners, there is no need to compensate with intricate ornaments or screaming. Similarly, if political founders have the undivided attention of citizens, force (or noise) is unnecessary, and the listening act itself will embody the community's pledge to its shared rules and practices. Like the distinguished

³¹ André Maugars, *Response faite à un Curieux sur le sentiment de la Musique d'Italie*, 1639 (Genève: Éditions Minkoff, 1993), §27.

³² *Parallèle des Italiens et des Français en ce qui regarde la musique et les opéras* (Genève: Minkoff Reprint, 1976), 30 and 40.

³³ In Bourdelot and Bonnet, *Histoire de la musique et de ses effets* (Graz: Akademischen Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1966, band 2), 300, 294–95.

Herodotus, the able singer and statesman will be heard in public places without forcing his or her voice—something that most moderns seem unable to do: “Hérodote lisoit son histoire aux peuples de la Grèce assemblés en plein air et tout retentissoit d’applaudissement. Aujourd’hui l’academicien qui lit un mémoire un jour d’assemblée publique est à peine entendu au bout de la salle” (EOL, V:429). As Rousseau notes elsewhere, “Il ne s’agit pas de tout dire, mais de se faire entendre suffisamment” (*Examen*, V:362). The French say a lot (if not too much), and yet not a word is understood—whereas the Greeks and Italians said and say little, and yet every utterance is caught.

* Making Music Speak: The Accents and Rhythm of Sincerity *

Throughout his life, Rousseau sought to denounce the lies and hypocrisy of others, but also to absolve himself of his own. His *Confessions* partially read like the diatribe of a man who needs to justify the betrayals and deceit of his past, a man who hopes that honesty could dampen the pain of his remorse. But Rousseau’s interest in sincerity goes far beyond therapy: for him, sincerity is an essential prerequisite for agency and meaningful relationships. “Pour être quelque chose, pour être soi-même et toujours un, il faut agir comme on parle” (*Emile*, IV:250). As Starobinski’s well-known interpretation puts it, Rousseau’s ideal community is one of *transparent* hearts—a place where individuals are capable of honest discourse and where their deeds are always in line with their words.³⁴ In short, Jean-Jacques was, in Pierre Burgelin’s words, “l’apôtre de la sincérité absolue.”³⁵

Rousseau’s plea for sincerity can be felt throughout his musical writings as well. He puts all “insincere music” on trial and, unsurprisingly, Rameau and French music are among the chief culprits. Rousseau denounces the untruthfulness of Rameau’s *musique savante* by contrasting it to the sincere music of the Greeks and Italians. As we saw above, the essence of music lies, for Rousseau, in the expression of passions via a simple and *intelligible* melody. One of the numerous

³⁴ Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, la transparence et l’obstacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

³⁵ See Pierre Burgelin, *La philosophie de l’existence de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris: Vrin, 1973), 297.

(democratic) accusations laid against Rameau is that complex harmony is only accessible to the trained ear (DM, V:851). The melody of a *sincere* speaker, on the contrary, does not require any training on the part of the listener—only sensibility and an open heart.

The greater accessibility of Greek and Italian music flows from their imitative character—that is, their ability to “speak” by imitating the accents of the passions: “La mélodie en imitant les inflexions de la voix exprime les plaintes, les cris de douleur ou de joye.... Elle imite les accens des langues, et les tours affectés dans chaque idiome à certains mouvemens de l’ame; *elle n’imite pas seulement, elle parle*” (EOL, V:416; my italics). Music is for Rousseau more than the imitation of the soul’s agitation: it is, to use Neubauer’s expression, a *speaking* “mimesis of the inner life.”³⁶ The exact connection between the sincerity of the composer/singer and his music is as follows: while a melody must necessarily originate from within (and thus be sincere), harmony can be entirely written from without—without causing any ripple to the soul of the composer. Counterpoint and harmony require thought and knowledge, but only melody requires feelings. Given that human beings started by feeling rather than reasoning, Greek music (closest to the origin) was still largely untainted by the potential for deceit and sophistries that grammar, elaborate language and calculation later gave men and composers.

Rousseau hence relates the authenticity of human expression to the musicality of a language—and what primarily determines this musicality are accents (DM, V:885). The latter basically refer to modifications in pitch or duration of vocal sounds when humans are experiencing passions. Since the source of musico-linguistic accents is emotional, vocal accents are, in turn, the only way for music to imitate and express sentiments (DM, V:918). Vocal accents are thus, as Herder would later suggest, the “gateway to the soul.”³⁷ They are the peculiar “art” of speaking to the ear and the heart without actually articulating words. Rousseau insists that French *grammatical* accents have nothing in common with the (Greek) authentic accents (EOL, V:390). While the

³⁶ Neubauer, *The Emancipation of Music*, 101.

³⁷ See J. G. Herder, *Essay on the Origin of Language*, trans. A. Gode and J. Moran (New York: Ungar, 1966), 142. Rousseau writes: “Les plus beaux accords...peuvent plaire aux sens. Mais les accents de la voix passent jusqu’à l’âme, car ils sont l’expression naturelle des passions et, en les peignant, ils les excitent” (*Examen*, V:358).

Italian language cannot claim this authenticity either, it is, relative to other European languages, the most musical and accentuated of all (EOL, V:392). Whereas Italian music is always defined by Rousseau as a music that is highly imitative of the passions, French music rarely receives this honor: “La Musique Française ne sçait ni peindre ni parler” (LMF, V:316). Given that French music cannot “speak” and cannot appeal to morality, its only other option, we learn, is to please the ear or arouse, more generally, the human body—instead of the soul.

The second source of musical sincerity is rhythm. The considerable significance Rousseau assigns to rhythm and measure (words he uses almost interchangeably) emerges in his *Dictionnaire*: we learn that while a melody has no meaning on its own, rhythm does (DM, V:884).³⁸ “La Mélodie n’est rien par elle-même; c’est la mesure qui la détermine, et il n’y a point de Chant sans le Tens.” In his entry “Tens,” Rousseau further elaborates on the self-sufficiency and meaningfulness of *tempo*: “Le Tens est l’ame du Chant...[il] a sa force en lui-même...et peut subsister sans la diversité des Sons” (V:1112). Even drums can speak. Once again, the ancient Greeks are given the first prize in rhythmic achievements—the Italians closely following behind. Thanks to their linguistic/rhythmic richness and the precision of measure in their music, the Italians have a comprehensive palette for the expression of sentiments—a range that the French cannot even conceive of (LMF, V:303). Unlike the French who must *artificially* induce a sense of measure with the beating of the conductor’s stick, the Italians are deemed *instinctively* capable of something akin to the sublime rhythmic concord of the Greeks: “c’est ici l’une des différences spécifiques de la Musique Française à l’Italienne. En Italie la Mesure est l’ame de la Musique; c’est la Mesure bien sentie qui lui donne cet accent qui la rend si charmante” (DM, V:663).

What is significant here is that for Rousseau, there is a subtle correlation between the French’s poor sense of rhythm (i.e., their inability to play together) and their political alienation. Largely because their ears are not sensitive enough to subtle variations in accents and rhythms, they cannot be moved by true eloquence. Just as France’s orchestras require the loud beating of measure to induce some sense of togetherness in its members, the French can only be (artificially) assembled by a political *baton* (EOL, V:428). By contrast, modern Italians

³⁸ In Alain Cernuschi’s view, Rousseau’s entire musical *problématique* could be summarized as a temporal one. See *Penser la musique dans l’Encyclopédie* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2002), 578.

still possess a remarkable sensibility for the gestures and voice of orators—as is revealed, according to Rousseau, by their body language and behavior on a daily basis (EOL, V:376).

Some may find it puzzling to see that, in his musical writings, Rousseau posits a *necessary* connection between eloquence and sincerity, and rarely doubts the honesty and virtue of Greek orators. After all, in his *Discours sur les Arts et les Sciences* and *Lettre à D'Alembert*, Rousseau unmistakably associates the art of oratory with corruption.³⁹ It may be said that Rousseau is not completely unaware of this tension: the oratory that he celebrates in his musical writings is that taking place in a city bathed in an original musical goodness that makes possible *sincere* oratory. Rousseau knows that this moment of sincere oratory is short-lived: his narrative of the Great Musical Fall makes it clear that as soon as Athens was filled with luxury and philosophers, no music and no eloquence could be of any help for virtue.⁴⁰ After all, the spreading of sophistry and grammar opened the door to a manipulation and a cleverness that are deeply antithetical to honest public speaking.

That said, in his romanticization of this brief moment in antiquity, Rousseau may have uncritically overstated the honesty of its orators. He certainly overstated the sincerity and integrity of Italian singers and composers at the expense of the French—whom he denounced not only for their dishonesty, but also their self-interestedness (V: 365). Rousseau's vilification of the French did not stop here; as we will see below, he also criticized their servile submission to written culture and to convention.

* The Murdering of Imagination and Spontaneity *

Ces Musiciens Italiens ne concertent jamais, mais chantent tous leurs parties à l'improviste; & ce que je trouve de plus admirable, c'est qu'ils ne manquent jamais.

—André Maugars, *Réponse faite à un Curieux sur le sentiment de la Musique d'Italie*⁴¹

³⁹ For example, OC III:14.

⁴⁰ See EOL and the first section of this paper. In his *Discours sur les Arts et les Sciences*, Rousseau implicitly acknowledges that oratory is of little use in a corrupt city: "Toute l'éloquence de Démosthène ne put jamais ranimer un corps que le luxe et les Arts avoient enervé." III:10.

⁴¹ Maugars, *Réponse faite à un Curieux*, 9 (I have made a few adjustments to the spelling here).

André Maugars's *curieux* was the Cardinal Richelieu—who sent the violinist to Italy in 1638 to report on the state of their famous music. Maugars's answer to Richelieu is revealing because it is an early formulation of what will become a cliché in the eighteenth century (particularly in the works of Rousseau); that the Italians have a quasi-divine ability to play and create spontaneously. They need no rehearsal, no science, and certainly not paper. Many travelers' accounts in the eighteenth century reiterate the idea that the Italians are simply "born for music." Rousseau therefore appeals to a significant body of authority when he claims that Italian music is more spontaneous than French music and closer to nature. Yet, it was not sufficient for Rousseau merely to praise the naturalness of the Italians: he wanted his caricatures to reveal, once again, the greater social ills of European urban communities like Paris. Rousseau used his attack on written music (and more generally, on *written culture*) to denounce modernity's obsession with systems and knowledge, and its constant murdering of human imagination and sincerity. While a spontaneous oral creation cannot lie, a calculated and written piece of music can. Rousseau associates science and interval calculation with partiality, deceit and interest (*Examen*, V:365-66).

We noted above that the development of writing was identified by Rousseau as a chief cause behind the death of Greek musical eloquence. While writing made language more precise, it also killed its original force. The excellence of Greek culture serves as a perfect illustration of the power of the *spoken* word: Homer did not write, *he sang*. And here Rousseau makes an explicit parallel between the musical/oral culture of the Greeks and that of the Italians—by comparing Greek rhapsodies to Venetian barcarolles. Rousseau claims that since the *Illiad*, only Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* has been sung in the incomparable Homeric way (V:389). He later adds that the abundant usage of gestures and the earnest acting of modern Italians are also reminiscent of ancient naturalness (V:376).

The Greeks' precious spontaneity was kept alive as long as they disregarded theory and notation forms. While Rousseau is forced to acknowledge that antiquity must have had *some* musical science, he insists that this knowledge had only been used for the construction and

tuning of instruments.⁴² Rousseau's critique of musical science and notation systems is, once again, driven by the belief that these are obstacles to direct and genuine communication. Modern Europeans should not be overly proud of their elaborate notation techniques—these are but a testimony of their degeneration (DM, V:851 and 932–42). While the Italians use some of these decadent musical tools, they are not—unlike the French—slavishly dependent on them.

Les Italiens méprisent les chiffres; la Partition même leur est peu nécessaire : la promptitude et la finesse de leur oreille y supplée, et ils accompagnent fort bien sans tout cet appareil. Mais ce n'est qu'à leur disposition naturelle qu'ils sont redevables de cette facilité, et les autres Peuples, qui ne sont pas nés comme eux pour la Musique, trouvent à la pratique de l'Accompagnement des obstacles presque insurmontables. (DM, V:618)

Rousseau included himself among those for whom learning accompaniment was an excruciatingly tedious process; his *Confessions* are peppered with gloomy comments about his troubles writing harmony and reading music.

Rousseau was impressed not only by the Italians' astonishing ability to read at sight, but also by their capacity to improvise—to interpret freely and to (re)create music impulsively. In his *Dictionnaire*, he claims that only the Italians can take advantage of the liberty offered by final cadenzas, the French being hopeless improvisers: "La Musique Française, surtout la vocale, qui est extrêmement servile, ne laisse au Chanteur aucune pareille liberté, dont même il seroit fort embarrassé de faire usage" (DM, V:681). For Rousseau, spontaneity and genius typically live in warm climates; they thrive in cultures where conventions do not weigh too heavily on the imagination. It is quite telling that none of the great composers and geniuses lauded by Rousseau in his *Dictionnaire* is French—all but one are Italian.⁴³ The tension between

⁴² OM, V:335. Despite his oft-repeated thesis that "the Greeks had no harmony," Rousseau was troubled until his death by the possibility that this might not be true. When Burney visited Rousseau in 1770, he found him eager, if not anxious, to discuss this matter. Rousseau also brought the matter up in his late 1776 *Lettre à M. Burney* (see OC V).

⁴³ See DM, "Compositeur" and "Génie" (OC V).

genius and knowledge comes forth clearly when Rousseau comments on the "dull Rameau," who has "plus d'habileté que de fécondité, plus de savoir que de génie; ou du moins un génie étouffé par trop de sçavoir" (*Lettre à Grimm*, V:272).

Like the Greeks and the Italians, citizens of remote and rural communities, by virtue of being closer to nature, still largely possess the gift of spontaneity. Unlike rich Parisian girls, country children need no tutor to learn music. They simply learn it "naturally":

La plupart jouent de la flute, plusieurs ont un peu de musique et chantent juste. Ces arts ne leur sont point enseignés par des maîtres, mais leur passent, pour ainsi dire, par tradition. De ceux que j'ai vus savoir la musique, l'un me disoit l'avoir apprise de son père, un autre de sa tante...*quelques-uns croyoient l'avoir toujours suë.*⁴⁴

What these children perform is not the latest German sonata—but no parents, Rousseau insists, should be wicked enough to impose such instrumental madness on their children.

Rousseau explicitly counsels in his *Emile* that music should never become a science, nor be taken too seriously—it must always remain a game (IV:407). The French are the living proof that too much reasoning about music kills artistic creativity and pleasure. Unlike the Italians who simply make music, the French prefer writing about it and dissecting it: "Ils aiment mieux railler qu'applaudir; le plaisir de la critique les dédommage de l'ennui du spectacle; et il leur est plus agréable de s'en moquer quand ils n'y sont plus, que de s'y plaire tandis qu'ils y sont" (*Julie*, II:289). As a true Italian, Julie's music teacher Reggiano does not think about what is to be done: he simply does it (II:134). Rousseau's grumbling about the French obsession with science and criticism was echoed across the channel by Burney, who also deplored the fact that one could have an excessively analytical spirit towards such an "innocent luxury": "I have seen French and German soi-disant connoisseurs listen to the most exquisite musical performance with the same sans-froid as an anatomist attends a dissection. It is all analysis,

⁴⁴ *Julie*, my italics. In his *Lettre à d'Alembert* (V:55), Rousseau writes: "Dans une petite ville, on trouve, proportion gardée, moins d'activité...mais plus d'esprits originaux, plus d'industrie inventive, plus de choses vraiment neuves; parce qu'on y est moins imitateur."

calculation, and parallel; they are to be wise, not pleased" (*A General History*, 982).

In Rousseau's view the Italians do not behave like anatomists—they would rather simply give birth to music, *unreflectively*. Like the ancients, Italians can create entire pieces at once and with a perfect unity. Rousseau summarizes the quasi-divine creative ability of these two peoples in his dictionary entry "Prima Intenzione" (which, we are told, needs no French translation, since Frenchmen would not know what to do with it):

Un morceau *di Prima intenzione*, est celui qui s'est formé tout d'un coup entier et avec toutes ses Parties dans l'esprit du Compositeur, comme Pallas sortit toute armée du cerveau de Jupiter. Les morceaux *di Prima intenzione* sont de ces rares coups de génie, dont toutes les idées sont si étroitement liées qu'elles n'en font, pour ainsi dire qu'une seule, et n'ont pu se présenter à l'esprit l'une sans l'autre. Ils sont semblables à ces périodes de Cicéron longues, mais éloquentes, dont le sens, suspendu pendant toute leur durée, n'est déterminé qu'au dernier mot, et qui, par conséquent, n'ont formé qu'une seule pensée dans l'esprit de l'Auteur... Ces sortes d'opérations de l'entendement... ne se conçoivent que par les génies capables de les produire. (DM, V:994–95)

Somewhat reminiscent of the "unité de mélodie" principle, this unique type of operation of the mind can thus only be understood by exceptionally gifted individuals. That Rousseau includes himself among those precious few is clear not only from the confidence of his dictionary entry on the subject matter, but also from a passage in his *Confessions* where he claims to have composed several pieces with *di prima intenzione* (I:293–94). In the same passage, Rousseau bemoans the fact that these manifestations of his genius were not immortalized on paper. But had they been written down, Rousseau would most likely have dismissed them as inadequate renderings of his imagination. Just as the score he obtained in Venice was unable to recreate the musical paradise he found himself in when he woke up at the opera (*Confessions*, I:314), his own written pieces of music were never as good as...in his head. He seems to have believed that ink and paper can never give a fair

account of the exceptional products of the mind—especially when these creations are in Greek or Italian.

If paper deceives in the recording of Italian music, books are also generally regarded as superfluous for learning. As St-Preux notes, understanding Italian music is the easiest thing in the world. "...le plaisir ne s'arrêtait point à l'oreille, il pénétrait jusqu'à l'âme; l'exécution coulait sans effort avec une facilité charmante" (*Julie*, V:134). One may have noted the tension between Rousseau's celebration of spontaneity in music and his praise of unity/unison. After all, a *uniform* performance would ostensibly require a certain monitoring from above, if not some substantial "self-repression." Rousseau (naively) seems to presuppose that the spontaneous self-expression of Italian performers never works against their concord, but somehow, instinctively guides them towards a common goal. Such intuitive concord is said to be possible in Italy because its citizens are, once again, not as corrupt as in France.

In Rousseau's *Dictionnaire*, we learn that the Italian spontaneous output is one of sheer abundance and constant novelty. "En Italie...chaque fois qu'on remet au Théâtre un Opéra, c'est toujours de nouvelle Musique...[en France] la même Musique dure des siècles" (DM, V:1152).⁴⁵ Such a caricature of quasi-divine Italian spontaneity may strike readers as hyperbolic. His portrayals certainly nourished the "Myth of Italy," as Sylvie Many convincingly shows.⁴⁶ And yet, Rousseau's praise of Italian abundance was not the mere product of his Romanesque imagination or polemical intent: between 1700 and 1743, more than 432 operas were created in Venice alone, and probably as many in Naples.⁴⁷ Both cities, to use a music historian's fitting quip, "assembled operas like they previously erected churches."⁴⁸

While Rousseau failed to see that the zenith of Italian music had already passed, he correctly noticed that France was the European country resisting most stubbornly the contagious infatuation with Italian music. Indeed, the French court is said to have been the only one in Europe where Italian-style *opera seria* did not dominate—where it was,

⁴⁵ Raguenet also notes in his *Parallele des Italiens et des Français* (64): "En Italie au contraire, les génies sont inépuisables et infinis par la quantité et la diversité des airs."

⁴⁶ Many, *La Musique à Venise et l'imaginaire français des Lumières* (Paris: BNF, 1996).

⁴⁷ See *Histoire de la musique occidentale*, B. and J. Massin, ed. (Paris: Fayard), 377; and Grace O'Brien, *The Golden Age of Italian Music* (Westport: Hyperion Press, 1979).

⁴⁸ *Histoire de la musique*, 377.

in fact, prohibited.⁴⁹ The fear of “cultural invasion” of the French was not entirely unreasonable: the seventeenth (and to a large extent the eighteenth century) was, musically speaking, “the century of the Italians.”⁵⁰ Europe was “invaded” not only by Italian music, but also by Italian *musicians*, who occupied key posts in European courts. This Italian musical supremacy led some *gens de lettres*, including Rousseau, to explain part of the heated nature of eighteenth century musical quarrels in terms of hurt French pride.

Tous les talens ne sont pas donnés aux mêmes hommes; et en général le François paroît être de tous les peuples de l'Europe celui qui a le moins d'aptitude à la musique...les Anglois en ont aussi peu; mais la différence est que ceux-ci le savent et ne s'en soucient guere, au lieu que les François renonceroient à mille justes droits, et passeroient condamnation sur toute autre chose, plutôt que de convenir qu'ils ne sont pas les premiers musiciens du monde. (*Julie*, II:286)

That the French throne resisted an Italianization of its most overtly political art-form is perhaps not surprising. Neither is the fact that the *philosophes* were, in turn, particularly attracted to music criticism—since it was both a safe and potent way to challenge political authority. Rousseau was certainly not the first to decry the despotic monopoly of the *Académie Royale de musique* and to relate such despotism to that of the King. Complaints and warnings about Lully's privilege were voiced by both musicians and *littérati* almost as soon as Louis XIV granted it.⁵¹ Rousseau was far from alone, therefore, in drawing a connection between France's resistance to Italian music and its conservative monarchy (*Julie*, II:282). Jean Le Rond D'Alembert's *De la liberté de la musique* also decried the musical censorship of the Ancien Régime.

Je m'étonne...que dans un siècle ou tant de plumes se sont exercées sur la liberté du commerce, sur la liberté des

⁴⁹ This “prohibition” only really affected *operatic* Italian music. See Many, *La musique à Venise*.

⁵⁰ *Histoire de la musique*, 361.

⁵¹ A contemporary of Rousseau observed that Lully's despotic reign (and his success) is largely to be blamed for the relative stagnation and “resistance” of France to Italian operatic music. See Charles Burney's *A General History of Music*, 964.

mariages, sur la liberté de la presse, sur la liberté des toiles peintes, personne n'ait encore écrit sur la LIBERTÉ DE LA MUSIQUE. Etre esclaves dans nos divertissemens, ce seroit, pour employer l'expression d'un Écrivain Philosophe, dégénérer non-seulement de la liberté, mais de la servitude même. 'Vous avez la vue bien courte, répondent nos grands Politiques; toutes les libertés se tiennent, & sont également dangereuses. La liberté de la Musique suppose celle de sentir, la liberté de sentir entraîne celle de penser, la liberté de penser celle d'agir, et la liberté d'agir est la ruine des États. Conservons donc l'Opéra tel qu'il est, si nous avons envie de conserver le Royaume ; & mettons un frein à la licence de chanter, si nous voulons pas que celle de parler la suive bientôt.⁵²

Eighteenth-century pamphlets were not, then, mere trivial musings on what Burney famously called "an innocent luxury": Rameau's criticisms of the *Encyclopédie's* music articles were read by Rousseau and D'Alembert as an attack on freedom itself.⁵³

* Of Liberty and Unanimity: Rousseau's Musical Legislator *

The association made between Italian opera and freedom was, of all music squabbles, most explicit during the highly political *Bouffons* quarrel. One can read in the *Confessions* a revealing depiction of the two "sides" of this dispute: in the pro-French corner of the King, Rousseau saw *les grands*, the rich, the powerful, and women. In the pro-Italian corner, men of pride, enthusiasm, genius and vigour assembled around the Queen. These true men of taste had nothing in common with the dusty old supporters of the elderly Rameau and of a dying monarchy (I:384). As d'Alembert wrote, "One can hardly believe it, but it is quite

⁵² Jean Le Rond D'Alembert, *De la liberté de la musique* (1752) in *Mélanges de littérature, d'histoire et de philosophie*, 1759, t.IV, 545.

⁵³ For a discussion of the encyclopedists as "destroyers of the French tradition" and threatening musical critics, see James H. Johnson "The Encyclopedists and the *Querelle des Bouffons*: Reason and the Enlightenment of Sentiment," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 10 (May 1986).

true that in the Dictionary of certain people, 'Buffoniste,' 'republican,' 'Frondeur,' and 'atheist' (I failed to mention 'materialist') are synonymous terms.⁵⁴ Selecting as their hero the young composer Pergolesi, the *coin de la reine* was particularly thrilled about the Italian *intermezzi* and saw it as a radical challenge to the old tradition and its supporters. One can thus see how the cause of freedom became fused with that of Italian music, and why Rousseau was most enthusiastic about having Pergolesi's *Serva Padrona* engraved at his own expense.

But the connection between freedom and music also works at another level in Rousseau's thought. For him, the freedom of a community depends on the musicality of its language because, as we have previously noted, musical languages (such as ancient Greek) offer exceptional orators the possibility of assembling men without force. Political institutions are thus dependent on the character of the national tongue: muted and inarticulate languages (e.g., French) are not suitable ones for freedom but rather, are only useful on the divans of the salons. French authorities hence only address citizens by writing—which is sensible given that there is nothing to say but to request their tax money: "on le dit avec des placards au coin des rues ou des soldats dans les maison; il ne faut assembler personne pour cela: au contraire, il faut tenir les sujets épars; c'est la première maxime de la politique moderne.... Il y a des langues favorables à la liberté; ce sont les langues sonores, prosodiques, harmonieuses" (EOL, V:428). These three adjectives are remarkably similar to those used by Rousseau to describe the Italian language in his *Lettre sur la musique française*.⁵⁵ While he states that ultimately no modern music has much in common with the Greek,⁵⁶ he nevertheless sees in Italy something akin to the ancient receptivity to orators. He notes that Greeks and Italians are both equally susceptible to fanaticism because they can actually hear what is being said in public places. Indeed, Frenchmen's lower vulnerability to charlatans or patriotic zeal is not to be explained by the fact that they *reason* better, but rather, by the mere fact that they cannot *hear* anything (EOL, V:429). There is, of course, a considerable difference between

⁵⁴ Cited in Johnson, "The Encyclopedists and the Querelle," 22.

⁵⁵ "Cette langue est douce, sonore, harmonieuse et accentuées plus qu'aucune autre, et ces quatre qualités sont précisément les plus convenables au chant" (LMF, V:297).

⁵⁶ EOL, chapter 18; the title itself is revealing: "Que le système musical des Grecs n'avoit aucun rapport au nôtre."

claiming that the Italians have a peculiar *responsiveness* to great orators, and that they actually have freedom. While the young Rousseau may have momentarily entertained the hope that Italy (and the republic of Venice particularly) would still possess some of the Spartan/republican liberty that he worshipped, his posting at the Venetian embassy soon shattered his hopes. Indeed, the scope of the republic's corruption could not but vanquish the lingering romantic images he had acquired from his childhood reading of Nani's *Histoire de Venise*.⁵⁷

While the Italians are not fully able to re-create the eloquence and liberty of the ancients, Rousseau still wishes to appeal to the latter to inspire his contemporaries: "Les lois et les chansons portoient les mêmes noms dans ces tems heureux; elles retentissoient à l'unisson dans toutes les voix, passoient avec le même plaisir dans tous les cœurs."⁵⁸ Such praise of musical unison readily lends itself to a political reading: the freedom of the ideal Rousseauian community, after all, flows from the unison of the general will. The *volonté générale* is not a mere aggregation of particular wills, but the united outcome of all wills. While perfect unanimity does not always precede the actual voicing of the general will, Rousseau seems to remain committed to the ideal of unanimity. Like each citizen, each note must be transported into the whole. This ideal comes forth not only in Rousseau's principle of unity of melody, but also in his praise of the synchronization of Italian performers—a concord that results not only from the expressiveness of their music but also from the fact that each player is *explicitly* an indivisible part of the whole. St.-Preux describes them:

Tous les concertants semblaient animés du même esprit...et je trouvai surtout un grand soulagement à ne sentir ni ces lourdes cadences, ni ces pénibles efforts de voix, ni cette contrainte que donne chez nous au musicien le perpétuel combat du chant et de la mesure. (*Julie*, II:133)

Other revealing passages of Rousseau's celebration of unanimity are those where he claims that "the only good or true harmony is unison," and where he pays tribute to the Greeks for having used only perfect

⁵⁷ III:407 and 453.

⁵⁸ OM, V:334. The musical legislator hence understands the human passions and the language of nature.

intervals and having ignored dissonance.⁵⁹ In short, Rousseau's ideal music should have, just like the *volonté générale*, a tuneful concord and only the minimum of dissonance required to create meaning.⁶⁰

Like dissonance, counterpoint ought to be used cautiously and tastefully—in music as in politics. After all, quartets and duos are irrational and against nature. Rousseau loved to show the absurdity of having multiple and disparate voices speaking at once, noting the impossibility of listening: “rien n'est moins naturel que de voir deux personnes se parler à la fois durant un certain tems...sans jamais s'écouter ni se répondre.” Attentive *listening* is a critical part of the Rousseauian musico-political experience. If there is nothing more “natural” (and nothing more politically intense) than for a community to sing in unison the same national tunes, can there be a greater political task than the legislation of the content and style of these tunes?

Rousseau clearly lures us into reading his legislator as a *musical* legislator—an interpretation shared by John T. Scott and Christopher Kelly.⁶¹ But the political potential for freedom Rousseau sees in musical eloquence presupposes the following: that ears be sufficiently sensitive to it, that the tongues of men be able to generate the sounds that assemble them, and that a people still be receptive enough to *shared* sociohistorical symbols. A musical legislator can only use the language and images that resonate in the ears and hearts of a specific people. One cannot simply “import” a music (or a language) to achieve authority. Given that most European nations have lost the musicality of their language and have defective ears, the hands of the Rousseauian musical legislator seem to be tied. And yet, Rousseau does not entirely give up on “musical modernity”:⁶² texts like his *Gouvernement de Pologne* suggests that a communion between men may be, in part, artificially (re)created. In fact, all this can be done quite cheaply: one does not need to hire famous performers, nor even have a stage. An open field—or a gondola—will do.

⁵⁹ DM, V:1141. See also V:849 and 1067.

⁶⁰ Some dissonance is necessary for the “horizontal” progression of music (DM, V:673–74).

⁶¹ John T. Scott, “Rousseau and the Melodious Language of Freedom,” *The Journal of Politics*, 59.3 (August 1997): 827; and Christopher Kelly, “To persuade without convincing: The Language of Rousseau’s Legislator,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 31.2 (May 1987).

⁶² For recent work that highlights Rousseau’s hope in musical modernity, see Julia Simon, “Rousseau and Aesthetic Modernity: Music’s Power of Redemption,” in *Eighteenth-Century Music* 2.2 (2005): 41–56.

* The Music of Communion,
Equality, and Open Space *

In a passage of his *Sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, Rousseau decries most succinctly the defaults of the modern theater: its exclusivity and its price, its appeal to women, its lack of a national character, its incapacity to edify citizens, and finally, the effeminate and vicious nature of its spectacles (III:958). Although French opera appealed to Rousseau upon his arrival in Paris, he later regarded it as the epitome of corrupted and corrupting modern entertainment. In his view, French theaters only increase the isolation of already isolated individuals—contrary to simple vocal music, which puts a balm on solitude (LD, V:16). Upon hearing vocal melodies, one cannot feel alone—after all, a song always signals another being.

La musique tient plus à l'art humain...elle rapproche plus l'homme de l'homme et nous donne toujours quelque idée de nos semblables....Les oiseaux sifflent, l'homme seul chante, et l'on ne peut entendre ni chant ni symphonie sans se dire à l'instant; un autre être sensible est ici. (EOL, V:421)

A human being can close her eyes, but not her ears. Herein lies the potential of music for the triggering of human bonding. The distinctive power of music is to be able to create, as John Neubauer succinctly puts it, a “presence in the condition of absence.”⁶³

Unlike the French, the Italians' music can be about human communion because they have succeeded in freeing their music from the polyphonic obscurantism of the Middle Ages. In both form and content, their music has been made more accessible and meaningful to the *average* human ear. According to Rousseau, the popularity of their *opera buffa* is a testimony of their success at recapturing a fragment of antiquity. Rather than putting on stage an awful (and expensive) mixture of gods, monarchs and fairies, the Italians opt for *ordinary*, plain characters. The Italians seem to have understood the irony and absurdity of the modern desire to put heroes on stage: “Les Anciens avoient des Heros, et mettoient des hommes sur leurs théâtres; nous, au

⁶³ Neubauer, *The Emancipation of Music*, 101.

contraire, nous n'y mettons que des Heros, et à peine avons-nous des hommes" (LD, V:16).

Cynthia Verba notes that French opera became identified in the mid-eighteenth century with "privilege and authority, while Italian comic opera was considered anti-establishment and egalitarian."⁶⁴ Contra the modest means used by the Italians, the extravagant ornaments of the French stage are but a poor imitation of ancient ways: "Sans pompe, sans luxe, sans appareil, tout y respiroit avec un charme secret de patriotisme qui les rendoit intéressantes, un certain esprit martial convenable à des hommes libres" (LD, V:123). While Rousseau's own *Le Devin du Village* would not try to re-create this martial/Spartan spirit with great fidelity, it was nevertheless inspired by the unaffectedness and populism of Pergolesi's *Serva padrona*—as Rousseau readily admits.⁶⁵ In fact, most of his compositions reveal a desire to follow "Greek principles," but not completely at the expense of modern musical practices. In his *Confessions*, Rousseau describes his *Muses Galantes* as a marriage of Tassoian vigour, Ovidian tenderness, and Greek dithyrambic gaiety (I, 294).

While one can draw a connection between mid-eighteenth-century populism and the rise of the *opera buffa*, the egalitarian subtext of these Italian comic operas obviously cannot be read as a call for the abolition of titles or an outright redistribution of wealth. Just as Rousseau's political ideal is not about absolute economic equality, his musical ideal does not actually seek to fully transcend human inequality. The music festivals he dreams of are inclusive, but not entirely indifferent to social distinctions. As he counsels in his *Sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, "Rien, s'il se peut, d'exclusif pour les Grands et les riches. Beaucoup de spectacles en plein air, où les rangs soient distingués avec soin, mais où tout le peuple prenne part également, comme chez les anciens" (III: 963).⁶⁶ The limits of Rousseau's musical egalitarianism are also manifest in the fact that he does not want to turn all citizens into *identical* singers of national anthems. Unequal artists we always were, and unequal we ought to

⁶⁴ Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment: Reconstruction of a Dialogue 1750–1764* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 13.

⁶⁵ I:383. For parallels Rousseau makes between Pergolesi and himself, see *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques* (I:683–84).

⁶⁶ My italics. Similarly, *Julie's* private fête in the backyards at Clarens unites servants and masters but, as Starobinski rightly observes, it only temporarily suspends class distinctions. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, la transparence et l'obstacle* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1957), 125.

remain. While Rousseau repeatedly denounces the erudition of the likes of Rameau and seeks more accessible music (both in form and content), he is not waging a war on enthusiasm and genius. Like taste, human talent is unequally distributed among men and women, and this disparity goes back to the first dances around the fountain.⁶⁷ Like vanity, showmanship may be an inevitable part of the social condition. Other egalitarian dimensions of Venetian musical practices that pleased Rousseau were the remarkable availability and inclusivity of its music: he saw Venice as a musical heaven open to all souls. While Rousseau clearly romanticized parts of his account, he may not have overstated the abundance of music on Venetian streets. As many historians have shown, the intimate fusion of social and musical life in Venice may have had no European equivalent at the time.⁶⁸ Music's overwhelming presence was exceptional in both quantitative and qualitative terms: in the eyes of enchanted tourists like Burney, even beggars were virtuosi.⁶⁹ Perhaps the most renowned "tourist attraction" (and what was made even more famous by Rousseau's *Confessions* and *Dictionnaire*) were the Venetian barcarolles sung by its *gens du peuple*, the gondoliers.⁷⁰

The democratic Rousseau praised Venice for giving free access to opera houses to its gondoliers, because the latter could, in turn, offer tourists and all residents *cheap* access to music. Unlike the exclusive Parisian theaters, which only accentuate social inequality by charging high admission fees, Venice offers many economical venues to enjoy music. The gondoliers also fascinated Rousseau because they seemed so similar to Greek rhapsodists:

N'oublions pas de remarquer à la gloire du Tasse, que la plupart des Gondoliers savent par coeur une grande partie de son poème de *La Jérusalem délivrée*, que plusieurs le savent tout entier, qu'ils passent les nuits d'été sur leurs barques à le chanter alternativement d'une barque à l'autre, que c'est assurément une belle Barcarolle que le Poème du Tasse, qu'Homere seul eut avant lui l'honneur d'être ainsi chanté, et

⁶⁷ For example, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* and *Emile*, IV:672.

⁶⁸ Patrick Barbier, *La Venise de Vivaldi. Musique et fêtes baroques* (Paris: Grasset, 2002), 11.

⁶⁹ See Burney, *Men, Music, and Manners*.

⁷⁰ The barcarolles are said to have reached their "peak" of popularity in Venice around 1740–1750—which is precisely the time period when Rousseau worked for the French ambassador. See Many, *La Musique à Venise*.

que nul autre Poëme Epique n'en a eu depuis un pareil. (DM, V:650)

But Rousseau's interest in the gondoliers' barcarolles is more than the product of his love for Tasso; in his view, the barcarolles are, as popular tunes, a living embodiment of the spirit of the people.

Quoique les Airs des *Barcarolles* soient faits pour le Peuple, et souvent composés par les Gondoliers mêmes, ils ont tant de mélodie et un accent si agréables qu'il n'y a pas de Musicien dans toute l'Italie qui ne se pique d'en savoir et d'en chanter... Les paroles de ces Chansons sont communément plus que naturelles, comme les conversations de ceux qui les chantent. (DM, V:650)

The barcarolles are thus "more than natural" and their "out-door" character also struck Rousseau as exceedingly Greek.

He was in fact so deeply seduced by the gondoliers' songs that he published, upon his return to Paris, a collection of them. The only eighteenth-century compilations of barcarolles we possess are those engraved by two foreigners: those of John Walsch in the 1740s and Rousseau in 1753.⁷¹ Unlike Walsch however, Rousseau decided not to cite the original sources in the old Venetian dialect. The words he offers readers in his *Canzoni di batello* are, rather, those of Metastasio and Rolli—two individuals far removed from the popular parlance of the gondoliers.⁷² There is thus something slightly unconvincing about Rousseau's characterization of the barcarolles as the "true spirit of the people" and about his belief that their beauty can only be appreciated in the Venetian dialect. Rousseau wanted to sell the *barcarolles* as an exotic and popular product—but he in fact watered down their exoticism. Still, Rousseau's sales pitch was successful: the *Confessions*' account of Venice and his dictionary entry "Barcarolles" left a significant mark on European literature.⁷³

⁷¹ Many, *La Musique à Venise*, 286.

⁷² Many, 286.

⁷³ See J. J. Eigeldinger, "Rousseau, Goethe et les barcarolles vénitienes," in *Annales Jean-Jacques Rousseau* 40 (1992): 153–84.

* Mediterraneanizing Music? *

This paper has highlighted several thèmes in Rousseau's musical thought that are foundational to his sociopolitical critique of modernity. We saw that the philosopher used his caricatures of the music of Greece and Italy as a tool to castigate his contemporaries' compartmentalization, dishonesty, servility, inequality, and submission to science and written culture. Rousseau's caricature of the Italians is, more broadly speaking, revealing on two other counts.

First, Rousseau's discussion of Italian music was sufficiently detailed and coherent to suggest that he wanted to offer readers concrete ways to alleviate modern musical ills. His Italian caricature was more than the fantastic divagation of a Romantic mind or a merely polemical attack on Rameau. While Rousseau believed that Italian music could not simply be exported, he was not actually so disillusioned with modern French music as to renounce searching for ways to "mediterraneanize" it. Moreover, he took French composers and theorists seriously enough to offer them a lengthy dictionary of music—hoping to guide their musical recovery. He also took the French public seriously enough to give it several of his own musical compositions, which he claimed followed his principles of unity, sincerity and simplicity. Therefore, one cannot read Rousseau's disparaging portrayal of French music as evidence that he had entirely despaired of ameliorating French bourgeois society. He was surely willing to give the idea of a musical renewal a few years of his intellectual life.⁷⁴

Second, because he did not restrict himself to exploiting antiquity, Rousseau clearly wanted to locate himself (and his musical ideal) in his own time. Indeed, he could have simply discussed Greek music in order to highlight modern ills—there was, after all, sufficient capital and authority already built by seventeenth century and Enlightenment classicism. It may have been significant to him that the Italians could actually serve as a *living* source of inspiration. The juxtaposition of his two musical caricatures suggests that Rousseau was unwilling to choose between the party of the ancients and that of the moderns—that he sought to find a "third way." One could argue that this nuanced

⁷⁴ Unlike Rameau, Rousseau saw himself as selflessly and impartially contributing to the progress of the Art. *Fragments détachés*, V:370. Compare with DM V:610.

position in the musical quarrel is but an extension of the two opposite ideals living in Rousseau's thought (so well described in Shklar's *Men and Citizens*): the Spartan, public ideal of citizens humming a national anthem to the sounds of drums, and the private, bourgeois ideal of Julie's drawing room filled by the sounds of Italian music. Yet, I have suggested that Rousseau did not entirely dismiss the possibility of *bridging* the two visions—of building on *both* ancient/Greek and modern/Italian insights. His reflections on music and his own life experience may have convinced him that one could dance with peasants after dinner, and later that evening sing some Italian *arias* with friends and *maman*. Perhaps, for exceptional men like Rousseau, it was possible not only to experience the best of both worlds but also, somehow, (re)unite them.