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## Apollonian and Dionysian Elements in Baroque and Classical Keyboard Music: Spirit of Apollo or Dionysus?

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University of Redlands

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Senior Honours Project

**Apollonian and Dionysian Elements in Baroque and Classical  
Keyboard Music**  
*Spirit of Apollo or Dionysus?*

Faculty Sponsor:  
Professor Long

**Connor Licharz**

In an effort to create order in our lives, experiences, and the world around us, we work tirelessly to classify and group things together as best as we can. This mentality extends to music as well. We roughly group composers and pieces together into stylistic and time periods in order to aid our understanding of interpretation, performance practice, and influence. However, these boundaries are set long after each era and do not accurately reflect the true transitions that occurred. There were a number of composers who bridged the transition from baroque to classical and from classical to romantic who's music demonstrates the fluid nature of musical change. In this lecture, I will explore the timeless nature of certain elements of music which, though overshadowed and possibly less prominent in certain time periods, are still a present and driving force in both composition and performance.

For the remainder of this lecture, I will refer to the elements and styles typical of the Baroque and Classical, and Romantic eras also by the terms Apollonian and Dionysian respectively. In Greek mythology, the gods Apollo and Dionysus are both sons of Zeus. Apollo is the god of the sun, order, and rational thinking<sup>1</sup> while Dionysus is the god of wine and dance, chaos, and irrationality<sup>2</sup>. Hence why Apollo was thought to appeal to the logical, rational side of man, and Dionysus to the irrational, instinctual, and emotional side. Friedrich Nietzsche was one of the first to make a direct connection between the two gods in modern literature as it pertains to music and the arts.<sup>3</sup> Contrary to the popular belief that the gods' opposite characteristics made them rivals or literary opposites, the Greeks considered them connected and their stories intertwined. This idea of interconnectivity between perceived opposites is the central argument of the research for this lecture; music of the baroque and classical, and romantic era are not as different as they may appear on the surface. While Apollo may dominate the repertoire choices for this recital, the spirit of Dionysus and Dionysian values are still present and influenced the composers in various ways.

First and foremost, I believe it is important to define what is Classical and what is Romantic. Though this may appear to be a simple task at first glance, we immediately encounter problems when considering even the simplest question. That being: "who is asking?". The accessibility of music to the mainstream audience through developments in recording technology and in the more recent past, the availability of streaming services such as iTunes and Spotify, has caused our use of the words (especially "Classical") to become more generalised to incorporate far more separate musical genres. Under the "Classical" section of iTunes, one finds a mix of Beethoven, Durflé, Gershwin, Glass, Bach, and Mozart, as well as a host of playlists with titles

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<sup>1</sup> Easton. "The Dionysian and Apollonian Impulses in Antigone." Department of English, SUNY Geneseo. Accessed November 21, 2019. <https://www.geneseo.edu/~easton/humanities/Dionysus.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Cox, Christoph. "Nietzsche, Dionysus, and the Ontology of Music." In *A Companion to Nietzsche*, 495–513. Blackwell Publishing, 2006. <http://faculty.hampshire.edu/ccox/Cox.Nietzsche.Dionysus.Music.pdf>.

such as “Choral Chill”, “Melancholy Piano”, “Early Music”, and “Classical Music for Love”. When speaking with someone whose musical expertise does not surpass the need for basic distinctions such as these, this may be enough of a description. However, for the purpose of musical research, these categories offer little to no help in defining the time periods.

An alternative definition for what we refer to as “Classical music” is music that has stood the test of time to take its place among “The Classics”, or, as stated by Dr. Hugo Reimann in his ‘Dictionary of Music’ as:

*“[...]a term applied to a work of art against which the destroying hand of time has proved powerless. Since only in the course of time a work can be shown to possess this power of resistance, there are no living classics.”<sup>4</sup>*

This last sentence is important to our definition. “Since only in the course of time a work can be shown to possess this power of resistance, there are no living classics” clearly divides music into “past” and “present” without providing any other classifying characteristics. While this definition touches on some important points, it is still not quite the definition of classical that will serve as the main focus in this lecture.

The most useful definition for “Classical” and “Romantic” for the purposes of this lecture are one that sets boundaries between stylistic periods in the form of dates. The Classical period is said to have approximately begun in 1750, with the death of Johann Sebastian Bach, and ended with the death of Beethoven in 1827, a death which also served to mark the beginning of the Romantic period. However, as previously mentioned, these dates were set as guidelines many years after the fact. The simple truth is that the deaths of Bach and Beethoven did not immediately inspire a total shift in composition style and musical aesthetic. I would argue that no one alive at the time upon hearing of their deaths, thought to themselves: “Okay, we are doing things *this* way now!”. Even the composers who are now considered quintessential to their respective time periods often wrote music which can be hard to classify as belonging to any *one* period.

Let us continue here by first determining what the basic assumptions of each respective period are. In the journal article ‘*Classical*’ and ‘*Romantic*’, T.L. Martin describes eight qualities which are opposite in “Classical” and “Romantic” music, including the statements:

“‘Classical’ prefers form; ‘romantic’ colour.”

“‘Classical’ seeks unity; ‘romantic’ variety.”

“‘Classical’ is more interested in the whole, ‘romantic’ in the parts or details.”

“‘Classical’ enjoys repose; ‘romantic’ seeks movement.”

“‘Classical’ loves the familiar; ‘romantic’ prefers the strange.”

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<sup>4</sup> Froggatt, Arthur T. "The Antithesis of Classical." *The Musical Times* 72, no. 1064 (January 1931): 898–99. <https://doi.org/10.2307/916708>.

“‘Classical’ is content with tranquility; ‘romantic’ demands excitement.”<sup>5</sup>

These statements, while highly generalised, do offer an outline of the preferred aesthetics of each of the periods in question. It is important to note that the use of words such as “prefers”, “seeks”, and “more interested in” prevent Martin’s claims from being defining rules, and instead serve to account for the stylistic variation that is so interesting and unique to each period.<sup>(6:12)</sup> These changes through time are an important element to remember.

To each of the time periods, our school systems have also attached a relatively basic selection of musical elements: timber, melody, harmony, and rhythm. This approach of teaching music in neat categories fits perfectly into our current school curriculum. However, the actual music making (performing and composing) process is a much more holistic and intuitive process.<sup>6</sup> While some music might fit nicely within these categories, music that bridges transitional periods might better be explained, as Robert A. Cuietta suggests in his article *The Musical Elements - Who Said They’re Right?*, using descriptions such as flow, energy, motion, fabric, and colour.<sup>7</sup>

The first piece on the program was *Prelude no. 2 in d-minor* from the collection *Eight Little Preludes and Fugues for Organ* formerly attributed to J.S. Bach, but now thought to be written by his student, Johann Ludwig Krebs. These eight pieces were likely originally intended as educational musical literature meant to teach students to play the "traditional" styles of the time. Next to the question of the composer, there is even a question of the intended instrument for the composition. Many of the originally written ornaments such as rolled chords and repeated notes are not idiomatic for the organ, but rather are techniques used on the pedal clavichord and pedal harpsichord.<sup>8</sup> Though this piece was composed deep in the baroque era, a time we associate with rigidity, strict form, and structure, it is clear that there is still *more* to the piece than just that. Music belonging to what we now know as the Baroque era was first described as “baroque” such by the French. Baroque is a French word meaning “irregular”<sup>9</sup> and was used as a derogatory term to define the wild, flamboyant, and in their eyes, grotesque music. Our modern perception of Baroque music has been so skewed in the direction of 'form over emotion' that many, if not most, of the performances we come into contact with take the excitement out of the

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<sup>5</sup> Martin, T. L. "'Classical' and 'Romantic'." *The Musical Times* 73, no. 1068 (1932): 117-19. Accessed January 22, 2020. doi:10.2307/914425.

<sup>6</sup> Cutietta, Robert A. "The Musical Elements Who Said They’re Right?" *Music Educators Journal* 79, no. 9 (May 1993): 48–53. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3398635>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Arnold, Corliss Richard. *Organ Literature: Historical Survey*. n.p.: Scarecrow Press. p. 101. ISBN 9780810846975, n.d..

<sup>9</sup> Harper, Douglas. "Baroque." *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Accessed March 4, 2020. <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=Baroque>.

music. Even in this piece, which was composed with special focus on form and control, there are sections where the real freedom and interpretive possibility of baroque music shines through. The same goes for the next piece: *Prelude and Fugue no. 1 in C-major* from the same collection. This prelude and fugue are more restrained than the d-minor prelude, but still there are moments of freedom. Listen for places where there are longer repetitive sequences and hear the ways in which the composer makes slight alterations to allow the performer the liberty to infuse the music with their own musical interpretations. Apollonian elements dominate these two pieces, but are in no way the sole source of musical language. The strict form of the fugue is a means by which Bach uses a wide range of colours, expression, and Dionysian elements. Conversely, Bach also uses colour, expression, and Dionysian elements as tools to heighten the effect of the fugue's structure.

The next piece on the program is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Fantasie* in d-minor. Like J.S. Bach, W.A. Mozart is a defining composer of his musical era and, though most people know he was revolutionary in *some* way, they would find it difficult to pinpoint exactly why. He is widely known as the child prodigy, but it was when he entered his late teens/early twenties that he truly began to break musical ground. The *Fantasie* is a prime example of Mozart's forward-thinking musical mind. Because the original manuscript for the piece has long since been lost, it is impossible to give an exact date of composition, though it is believed to have been written in the last few years of his life.<sup>10</sup> The piece is divided into three main sections:

The first section is built off of arpeggiated chords. It is slow, contemplative and has no clear melodic line or direction.

The second section stands in contrast to the first, primarily because it has a clear melody and a clear accompaniment. Though this melody/accompaniment style of writing is a distinctly classical feature, the traditional 'classical' elements are soon subverted by the chromatic movement and freedom of tempo in the development of the piece's themes. Long sequence-based runs are interspersed among the melodic and chromatic oriented sections and are based off the chromaticism used in the sequences just prior.

The final section is again, completely different. The style of this section is that which we are used to in Mozart's music: The tempo picks up to a marked allegretto and the music becomes lighter and, almost most importantly, the key changes to D-major. It is almost as though Mozart suddenly remembered he was writing in the classical era and needed to give the audience something light and happy to grasp onto. The final 10 measures of the piece are, in fact, not originally Mozart's composition. His manuscript ends with the imperfect cadence and it was most likely Ernst Eberhard Müller who composed the final measures.

This piece doubtlessly embodies the spirit of Dionysus and Dionysian musical values because of the stark contrasts between each of its movements. However, there is clearly an underlying

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<sup>10</sup> Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus. *Fantasie d-Moll*. Edited by Hans Kann. Forward by: Ulrich Leisinger Vienna: Wiener Urtext, 2003.

structure to the piece, and Mozart expertly uses it to explore the range, colour, and emotional possibility of the music.

The fourth piece is an interesting bridge between the ‘Classical’ and the ‘Romantic’. Mozart’s piano sonata in C-major is another staple among ‘Classical’ repertoire. It follows the traditional sonata form exactly and expresses all of the musical values of the Enlightenment. The universal nature of music and pleasure were highly important elements of the time, and the sonata structure finds its roots in these values. Only recently have our performance practices begun to include multiple performances of the the same piece. Historically, a piece would have been composed and then performed only a handful of times before audiences would move on to the next and newest compositions. The increase of historicalisation and museumification of repertoire is a very recent trend. Even more recent, is the vastness of opportunity to listen to music outside of the traditional live performance setting. Because audiences only had live performances to become acquainted with a piece, a strict form with repeated sections was appreciated in the past as it helped build familiarity with the music. The musical literacy of the average audience member was much higher than that of today, and they could easily orient themselves within the musical structure of a piece. They could often predict the direction and shape of the music based on their knowledge of the form.

Norwegian composer, Edvard Grieg, composed a piano secondo part to a total of four Mozart sonatas. Grieg himself said that his aim was to “impart to several of Mozart's sonatas a tonal effect appealing to our modern ears”.<sup>11</sup> In composing these four pieces, Grieg not only left us wonderful music, but also opened a window into the aesthetic preferences and expectations of late 19th century European audiences.<sup>12</sup> In the first movement, the secondo piano part provides harmonic support as well as various countermelodies. The second movement secondo part boasts rich harmonies which fill out the lower register of the piano while supporting the original Mozart melody. Finally, in the third movement, the additional part drives the musical motion forward with syncopated rhythms, large chords, and a small cadenza reminiscent of those found in the larger concerto form.

The addition of this second part surrounds the originally rather strict, yet delicate sonata in a lush blanket of sound typical of the ‘romantic’ era. This piece very clearly proves that *form* does not come at the cost of *spirit*. The true beauty in this arrangement is that Grieg not only adds his own musical and emotional material, but does so in a way that extracts previously unheard emotional and musical brilliance from the Mozart original. Grieg is, in a sense, creating a gateway to discovering the Dionysian spirit of a piece often used to exemplify true Apollonian character.

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<sup>11</sup> Finch, H. “Mozart, Arr Grieg Piano Sonatas.” Gramophone. Accessed March 6, 2020. <https://www.gramophone.co.uk/review/mozart-arr-grieg-piano-sonatas>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Ludwig van Beethoven's Piano sonata, Nr.14 in C-sharp-minor (Op.27 Nr.2), *Sonata Quasi uni Fantasia*, distinctly contrasts most of the music composed around the same time. In his so-called *Moonlight Sonata*, Beethoven clearly breaks away from the strict sonata form. The first movement is a slow, near improvisatory movement filled with subtle harmonic changes that support an unmistakable, delicate, and simple melody. The second movement is a short, lively minuet and trio rather than the traditional slow movement. The third movement is fast, marked *presto agitato*, and follows traditional sonata form.<sup>13</sup> It is, however, the first movement which is the most intriguing for this analysis.

The next clue to just how different this first movement is from almost anything else written at the time is in a small line of text directly above the score. Here, Beethoven notes: "*Si deve suonare tutto questo pezzo delicatissimamente e sense sordino*", which translates to "You have to play this whole piece very delicately and without muting". "Without muting" are the key words. This does not mean to play the whole piece without the left pedal, the *una corda* pedal. Rather, this instructs the performer to play the entire piece without clearing the sustain pedal. Beethoven clearly requests a specific sound and tone colour, a request which can also be found in a small handful of his other pieces. Modern pianists are, however, faced with the challenge that our sustain pedal is radically different from that on the pianos used in Beethoven's time in that the notes ring significantly longer on modern instruments. In order to still mimic the originally intended sound, the pianist must play the whole movement with the pedal depressed only about one third of the way down. By doing this, the harmonies wash together and the overtones are strengthened, creating a thick<sup>14</sup> cushion of sound over which the funeral-march-like melody can be heard.

The Sonata is best known as the *Moonlight Sonata* but was not, as most often assumed, named such by Beethoven himself. Rather, it was German poet Heinrich Rellstab who likened the first movement to moonlight glinting off of Lake Lucerne.<sup>15</sup> In original sketches of this sonata, one can find that Beethoven copied the scene of the death of the Commendatore in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. He transposed the triplet accompaniment pattern into C-sharp minor and added the now famous melody on top. The piece is much less a depiction of natural beauty than it is a funeral procession.<sup>16</sup>

This piece is most definitely an example of 'romantic', Dionysian mentality within the 'classical'/Apollonian structure. In one of his Beethoven Sonata lectures, pianist András Schiff

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<sup>13</sup> Beethoven, Ludwig van. Klaviersonate Nr. 14 cis-moll. Edited by Bertha Antonia Wallner. München: G. Henle Verlag, 1952/1980.

<sup>14</sup> Schiff, András. "András Schiff Beethoven Lecture-Recitals." *András Schiff Beethoven Lecture-Recitals*. 2004. <https://wigmore-hall.org.uk/podcasts/andras-schiff-beethoven-lecture-recitals>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

said: “This movement is very difficult to define [...] because it is not a sonata movement, not in sonata form. It is almost like a Bach prelude with these organ pedal notes.”<sup>17</sup> Beethoven broke away from all norms to create such an emotionally raw piece, but still includes elements of a strong classical nature.

The final piece of the set is *Toccata in G* from *Douze Pièces pour Orgue* by Théodore Dubois. Dubois is one of the lesser known French composers of the 19th and 20th centuries. Though he composed extensively, he is best known for his texts on music theory and compositions, many of which are still studied today.<sup>18</sup>

The *Toccata* is a spry allegro in the neo-classical style. The two A sections are fast, driven forward by rapid sixteenth note passages. The musical material for these sections is very clearly inspired by, and in the style of music from the ‘classical’ and ‘baroque’ eras. The pedal tones in the right hand melody are reminiscent of Bach toccatas, specifically the famous D-minor toccata. These traditional figures stand in contrast with the French Romantic organ registration which dominated late 20th century French organ music. Thick mixtures and French reeds make up the majority of the sound, thickening the fabric of the music. The low pedal notes punctuate and help accent the off-beat chords leading into cadences. The middle, B section changes keys to B-major and the tone and colour shift as well. Divergent from the fast sections surrounding it, this section features chorale-like elements. The necessity of finger substitutions, softer reed registration, and long legato phrases are typical of French organ music of the time. These legato passages are interspaced with material which references the thematic elements of the A section.

After the repeat of the A section, the music swells and, almost impossibly, increases in intensity. Dubois marks the final measures “*toute la force*”, “with all the strength”. The ‘final’ cadence is then followed by an extension which moves upward chromatically in the left hand and concludes with two forceful chords.<sup>19</sup> Dubois makes a conscious effort to place these two very unique styles in direct contrast with one another. The ‘old’ styles offer a chance for Dubois (and the organist) to showcase one facet of their technical ability while the ‘new’, French styles allow the organist to take the interpretation beyond that which a strict and more moderated Bach toccata and fugue could.

The musical selections analysed here are only a handful of the many instances where composers bridge the gap between musical eras and styles with their work. Composers of these transitional periods helped move musical development forward. Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven all seem to look forward in time in their use of musical elements to express Dionysian values while

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> “Thodore Dubois.” ArkivMusic. Accessed March 8, 2020. [http://www.arkivmusic.com/classical/Name/Théodore-Dubois/Composer/93575-1#drilldown\\_overview](http://www.arkivmusic.com/classical/Name/Théodore-Dubois/Composer/93575-1#drilldown_overview).

<sup>19</sup> Dubois, Théodore. *Dauze Pièces pour Orgue: Toccata*. Edited by Pierre Gouin. Montréal: Les Éditions Outremontaises, 2007.

Dubois looks back on Apollonian values as a way to contrast his otherwise Dionysian elements. Hopefully this has been an insightful analysis of the nuances of this transitional music and the problems that arise with modern overgeneralisation of time periods and musical styles.