

On the Musically Beautiful and “Absolute Music”

Sanna Pederson, Professor of Musicology, University of Oklahoma

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There is no doubt that Eduard Hanslick's *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* of 1854 made a big impact on the world of musical aesthetics. Twenty-five years after its publication, *Dwight's Journal of Music* referred to “the sensational and epoch-making pamphlet *On the Beautiful in Music*, a real controversial piece of writing, which like a flash of lightning pierced the mists which had gathered around the scientific treatment of musical aesthetics, without, however, fully scattering them.”¹ For Heinrich Ehrlich in 1881, “Hanslick's masterly, systematic explanation appeared like a meteor.”² Around the same time, H. A. Köstlin described how the work “fell like a burning bomb, which through clear and concise argumentation once and for all refuted the opinion that music expresses and represents feelings. But one does not give up such a cherished error easily. No wonder that such a storm was raised against the bold newcomer.”³ But for Friedrich von Hausegger, an enemy of Hanslick's theory, the book “acted like a bomb exploding in its own camp. Replies, rejoinders and denunciations rained down with as much consequence of a battle against one's own shadow.”⁴

Although the work was a flash point in musical aesthetics, absolute music was not one of the catchwords associated with it.⁵ The phrase most often cited was “tonally moving forms,” and the figures of speech most frequently brought up were of music being like a kaleidoscope or an arabesque.⁶ The reason for this is that Hanslick used the term only once in his book.⁷

“It can never be said that music can do what instrumental music cannot, because only instrumental music is pure, absolute music.”

„Was die Instrumentalmusik nicht kann, von dem darf nie gesagt werden, die Musik könne es; denn nur sie ist die reine absolute Tonkunst.“

Despite this, it is a common assumption that Hanslick is the main spokesperson for absolute music. Carl Dahlhaus in his book *Die Idee der absoluten Musik*, first published in 1978, cites this sentence from *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* and refers all subsequent uses of the term back to Hanslick.⁸ In his 1994 article on absolute music in the revised *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Wilhelm Seidel does the same thing.⁹ This is also the case

for English-language reference works, such as the recent editions of the *Harvard Dictionary of Music* and Roger Scruton's article on absolute music that appeared in both the Sixth and Seventh editions of the *Grove Dictionary*.¹⁰ In his books on music aesthetics, Peter Kivy has repeatedly stated that his key term, "music alone," is equivalent to Hanslick's term absolute music. Dahlhaus does distinguish between the term and the idea of absolute music, but claims that even though he didn't use the term, Hanslick promoted the idea of absolute music. I suggest that by looking at the many ways the term was used, we can see that there were also many ideas of absolute music.

According to my research, which has been aided by increasingly complete full-text searchable digital databases, Hanslick did not come to be associated with the term until towards the end of the nineteenth century. It was mainly associated with Wagner, who coined the term and used it extensively as a negative concept in his Zurich writings around 1850. Around 1880, polemics about Liszt's concept of program music generated "absolute music" to designate program music's opposite. But just as absolute music was becoming firmly linked to Hanslick and Brahms, around 1900, Wagnerian writers hijacked the term to refer to Bruckner. In a remarkable twisting of words and facts, Wagnerians rewrote Wagner's rejection of absolute music in order to legitimate the symphonies of Bruckner. It appears to me that late twentieth-century usage of the term conflates the meanings associated with the Wagnerians and with Hanslick, and consequently what was considered absolute music. By teasing out the different ways the term has been used, I hope to clear up some of the massive confusion surrounding absolute music, Hanslick, and the music aesthetics of his time.

1. Wagner.

In the beginning, absolute music was not used in conjunction with Hanslick because it was associated with Wagner. As is generally known, the phrase "absolute music" first appears as a term in Wagner's 1846 *Faust*-inspired program to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, where he describes the fourth movement as leaving the borders of absolute music with the introduction of words. In Wagner's subsequent "revolutionary" Zurich writings around 1850, absolute music becomes a term of abuse. Music is called absolute when it is unto itself, without being connected to any of the other arts. From the standpoint of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, it is therefore limited and inadequate, and of use only as part of the total work of art.

The term was rarely used after the early 1850s, and when it was, it was in Wagner's sense. As late as 1877, for instance, the Czech professor Ottokar Hostinsky published *Das Musikalisch-Schöne und das Gesamtkunstwerk vom Standpunkte der Formalen Aesthetik*, which considered Wagner and Hanslick together with the aim of finding points of compatibility.¹¹ Hostinsky did not present the problem as being that Wagner and Hanslick had different definitions or opinions about absolute music. He used the term in describing Wagner's position, but not Hanslick's. Hostinsky came to the conclusion that

Wagner was correct and the highest form of music was when it is combined with other arts. He expressed mystification as to why Hanslick would seem to just repeat Wagner's observation that instrumental music is pure absolute music. Hostinsky understood this as a negative characterization, not a good argument in favor of instrumental music.¹²

2. Absolute versus Program music.

In Germany, absolute music started appearing around 1880 as part of the opposition to Liszt's concept of program music. Since absolute music also continued to be used in a Wagnerian way, it was not always clear whether this term was meant to designate instrumental music as opposed to opera, or instrumental music without a program as opposed to with a program. Things were also confusing in that Wagner and Liszt were allies, but program music was instrumental music and therefore questionable in Wagner's view.

There are many further ways in which the term was used at this time. Sometimes it designates the symphony, other times the formal features of a work; yet other times it is referred to as being a classic or a classical work. One reason for the multiple meanings is that Wagner himself was not clear in the first place. All of these things (except program music) are implied by Wagner's first use with regard to Beethoven's Ninth, which as absolute music is instrumental music, but also more specifically a symphony, a work of the "classical" period, with movements in the traditional forms.

The term absolute music came to be explicitly linked to Hanslick by the late 1880s. For instance, in his book on music aesthetics from 1896, the writer C. R. Hennig repeatedly misquoted Hanslick as saying "the content of **absolute** music is tonally moving forms".¹³ But in an earlier book from 1888, he had Hanslick declaring that "the content of **instrumental** music" is "tonally moving forms, a kind of arabesque set in motion."¹⁴

3. Hanslick's use of absolute music in his criticism

I have found two occasions on which Hanslick used the term in his criticism: once in 1874 with regard to Schumann's opera *Genoveva*, and once in 1899 with regard to Dvôrák and Brahms. Although there may very well be other examples that I have not yet found, I can say that there are many, many occasions where he could have used it, but did not. Hanslick most often opposes program music with "reine instrumentale Musik."¹⁵ This is what he uses in his review of Brahms's *Schicksalslied* in 1872, for instance.

Commenting on the unusual instrumental ending of this choral work, Hanslick says:

In a touching, completely understandable way, Brahms finishes this train of thought through pure instrumental music, without annexing a single word. Instrumental music appears here to supplement and complete it and expresses that which can no longer be grasped in words: a remarkable counterpart to the reverse sequence in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.¹⁶

Absolute music would have been a completely appropriate term for this opposition to music with words, since Beethoven's Ninth was the work that inspired Wagner to invent the term and would have reinforced his point that the *Schicksalslied* did the reverse of the Ninth, by leaving words for absolute music. However, Hanslick uses "pure instrumental music."

In the first case that I have found where Hanslick does actually use the term, it is in Wagner's sense. In 1874, Hanslick took a quite negative view of a revival of Schumann's only opera, *Genoveva*. As part of his argument that Schumann and Germans in general were not suited to the operatic genre, he remarked: "The vocal parts of *Genoveva* reveal that Schumann was mainly accustomed to think in instrumental, absolute music, which when stripped of text, often sounds like parts of a quartet or a symphony."¹⁷ This observation could have come directly from Wagner, who was critical of Schumann's operatic instincts. Absolute music is not used here in a particularly positive way.

The second case, twenty-five years later, in which Hanslick used the term in connection with Brahms and Dvořák, is very different. The subject of his review was a concert in December 1899 by the Vienna Philharmonic, conducted by Gustav Mahler, featuring Strauss's "Aus Italien" and Dvořák's symphonic poem "Die Waldtaube." This concert apparently caused Hanslick to have a minor meltdown. After a description of the basis of Dvořák's work in the story of the Waldtaube or wild dove, Hanslick burst out:

Dvořák is too much of a real musician to be tempted by aesthetic experiments, journeys of discovery to the limits of art. What has lured him away from the realm of absolute music, of which he is first in command since Brahms's death (*Heimgang*), is evidently the emulation of different kinds of voices from nature. That Dvořák does marvelously, incomparably. The surging waves in his "Water Goblin," the crying child in the "Noon Witch," the humming of "The Spinning Wheel"! The "Wild Dove" excites us as well and keeps us spellbound through its magical sounds and realistic traits, that for all their boldness never touch on the ugly. Thankful, indeed all too receptive to the attractions of Dvořák's music, I still cannot be silent about the dangers of his most recent tendency. Dvořák does not need to go begging to the poetic arts (and what poetry!) for his music. His rich musical inventiveness doesn't need any loan, any crutch, any instruction manual. But if he feels the need for a change from wordless instrumental music to real likenesses, then there is a door standing wide open inviting him: opera.¹⁸

Besides distinguishing between absolute and program music, Hanslick uses the term in a mainly evaluative way: Dvořák is a "real" musician who doesn't need the assistance of poetry, but has been tempted and put in danger.¹⁹ His reference to Dvořák as the foremost composer of absolute music was not unique; other sources from this time period did the same, as they tried to make sense of Dvořák's switch from symphonies to symphonic poems.²⁰ What Hanslick didn't approve of specifically was the use of music

to imitate “natural” sounds such as waves and crying, even though he says he finds them wonderful. Later in the review, he complained also about program music’s aim of telling a story. He lamented that that “The Wild Dove” became musically unintelligible without the program toward the end with the cooing of the dove of the title.

In another instance, in a review from 1898 of a performance of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Sherherezhade*, Hanslick objected to music that followed the story “measure for measure,” citing the composer’s earlier works *Sadko* and *Antar*. He joked that the reason there was no program printed for *Sherherezhade* was that the four stories from the *1001 Knights* that were the basis of the four movements would have taken up far too much room to be printed on a concert program. Actually, this joke allowed him to misrepresent the work, since there was no indication that the stories being told were supposed to be replicated in detail in the music: titles for the four movements were all that were given. In any case, as support for his stance, Hanslick called upon a recently published book, *Die Symphonie nach Beethoven*, by Felix Weingartner. Admitting that this “Zukunftsmusiker” was a most unexpected ally, Hanslick claimed nevertheless that Weingartner was in perfect accord with the views he had expressed forty years earlier in *Vom musikalisch-Schönen* and still maintained.

Weingartner insists “that music is an art that *can never through concepts* speak to us; that its majesty is stripped when an artist foists concepts on it, when it is supposed to explain to us in the way that words do; that it is debased when it is slavishly bound, measure for measure, to a program.” Music can recall the *mood, the emotional disposition* that initiates a sequence (*Vorgang*) in us, but cannot describe the sequence itself. Weingartner rightly defends only those superscriptions through which the fantasy is significantly aroused, not half-heartedly bound.²¹

These comments raise another factor contributing to the confusion about Hanslick and absolute music. In this *Sherherezhade* review at the end of the century, Hanslick allowed that music could conjure up mood, but not a sequence of events. He further conceded that “a simple title that activates our imagination in a certain direction without stifling it is one thing, and a detailed program is another.” Goldmark’s “Ländliche Hochzeit,” Strauss’s “Aus Italien,” and Dvořák’s “Aus der neuen Welt” leave the listener enough freedom, he specified, but not Dvořák’s most recent symphonic poems.²² Even though Hanslick claimed he never wavered from the views he expressed in *Vom musikalisch-Schönen*, this later attitude toward extra-musical elements seems to represent a relaxation of his rules and possibly of what he considered absolute music.²³

4. A new kind of Absolute Music

Metaphysical aesthetics were a crucial part of Wagner’s impact at the end of the 19th century. At the time he used the term absolute music, in his Zurich writings, he was relying on the anti-metaphysical, anti-Hegelian rhetoric of Ludwig Feuerbach. But, as is well known, in his later writings he borrowed instead parts of Schopenhauer’s

metaphysics of music. Wagner himself did not use the term absolute music during this later phase, certainly because he had already used it as a term of abuse. It fell to his disciples to recast absolute music in a positive light. They did this by combining Schopenhauer's musical metaphysics with the Hegelian metaphysics of the Absolute, a combination that added up to metaphysical Absolute music. This combination was philosophically egregious in two ways: first, because the Schopenhauer who exalted music to the highest status was a critic of Hegel, in particular of his concept of the Absolute. Schopenhauer never would have used the term Absolute with regard to music. Second, in Hegel's presentation of the Absolute, music falls short because it lacked clear rational thought. Therefore Hegel also would never have used the term absolute music.

Most writers on music surely realized the term was philosophically problematic and avoided it. However, Wagnerians considered Wagner to be a legitimate philosopher in his own right. If Wagner had "tweaked" Schopenhauer to fit his purposes better, then that was an improvement. Wagner's disciples dedicated themselves to carrying out the implications of his music and writings, which included some "tweaking" of their own. In 1893, for instance, Friederich von Hausegger's "Richard Wagner und Schopenhauer" claimed to find Schopenhauer's theories manifesting themselves in all of Wagner's works, including those that came before Wagner had even heard of Schopenhauer. But why come up with a new definition for a term instead of just a new term? The only reason I can think of is that the term had exactly the kind of grand philosophical resonance that these writers were looking to confer on Wagner and Bruckner. The term was too valuable to be left to the enemies.

In 1905, the German music critic and theorist Rudolf Louis blatantly maneuvered absolute music into the Wagnerian camp with his book on Bruckner.²⁴ Louis acknowledged that Bruckner had allied himself with program music. But this, he claimed, was only a pose. Bruckner had only wanted to appear modern and progressive by claiming to write program music. In reality, program music was completely foreign to him.

He considered program music—perhaps precisely *because* its realm had to remain closed to him on account of the whole disposition of his general spiritual as well as musical personality—for something more prestigious and with more stature, so to speak, or at least more interesting and "modern" than absolute music. With his trepidation and modesty he could not completely suppress the fear that he was behind the times with his pure, self-made music, and that had the effect now and then of waking in him the wish to appear what he wasn't, or to wear a label for show that in no way conformed to the essence of his art.²⁵

Louis then admitted that it didn't seem quite to make sense that this truest admirer of Wagner would write absolute instrumental music:

It is a strange irony that the historical mission had to fall to the most significant musical disciple of Wagner, to prove through his example that the Wagnerian view of the dying out of the symphonic form with Beethoven had actually been incorrect, that absolute instrumental music, according indeed to the old classical schemas, is very well possible if only the artist has strength enough to fill these forms with living content.²⁶

Louis may have been the first to call Bruckner's symphonies absolute music; the music theorist and Bruckner scholar August Halm followed soon thereafter. His younger friend, the theorist Ernst Kurth, also declared Bruckner the greatest composer of absolute music in his book on the composer from 1925. Their emphasis on Bruckner is indicative of how their understanding of absolute music had moved away from Hanslick's tonally moving forms or from refuting Liszt's poetic idea of program music. And both Halm and Kurth acknowledged that they had redefined absolute music.²⁷ In his 1928 essay, "Programm Musik und absolute Musik," Halm defined absolute music at points as instrumental music and at points as music that is directed at God rather than at people. Kurth put it pithily: "Hence we can see clearly that the word 'absolute' has a double meaning. In a technical sense, it means dissolved from song; in a spiritual sense, dissolved from man."²⁸ Music dissolved from song is instrumental music; dissolved from man is metaphysical music.

Despite this indication of two definitions, recent discussions of absolute music conflate Hanslick with Halm and Kurth. For both Dahlhaus in his book and Seidel in his *MGG* article, Halm and Kurth are the only other names besides Hanslick's that are explicitly linked to the term. Just the fact that Hanslick abhorred Bruckner indicates that something is very wrong with this conflation.

In Conclusion: The term absolute music has had different definitions from the beginning, because it was never totally clear what Wagner meant by absolute music, whether it was instrumental music, the symphony, music of the past, or all of the above. Absolute music was only tangentially associated with Hanslick until the end of the century. Apparently even then it was weakly defined enough to be co-opted and redefined by Wagner's followers. Most importantly for Hanslick: this evidence shows that absolute music is misleading shorthand for Hanslick's aesthetic stance. By recognizing that he didn't use it and that the term could mean several different things, we recognize that both his views and the aesthetics of the time are too complicated to be summed up in a catchy phrase.

¹ “Dr. Edward Hanslick,” *Dwight’s Journal of Music* (July 20, 1878): 270 (their source is identified as the *New York Musik-Zeitung*).

² “Hanslick’s meisterliche systematische Darlegung erschien wie ein Meteor.” Heinrich Ehrlich, *Die Musik-Aesthetik in Ihrer Entwicklung von Kant bis auf die Gegenwart* (F.E.C. Leuckart, 1881).

³ Heinrich Adolf Köstlin, *Tonkunst. Einführung in die Aesthetik der Musik* (Stuttgart: J. Engelhorn, 1879), 258-259.

⁴ “Aussprüche dieser Art wirkten wie eine in eigenen Lager verplatzte Bombe. Es regnete Entgegnungen, Erwiderungen und Verketzerungen, jeoch mit dem Erfolge eines Kampfes gegen den eigenen Schatten.” Friedrich von Hausegger, *Gedanken eines Schauenden. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (München: Verlagsanstalt F. Bruckmann A. G., 1903).

⁵ For more on the history of the term, see Sanna Pederson, “Defining the Term ‘Absolute Music Historically,’” *Music & Letters* 90.2 (2009).

⁶ “Spiel tönend bewegter Formen.” Wilhelm Langhans, *Die Musikgeschichte in Zwölf Vorträgen* (F. E. C. Leuckart, 1879). Moriz Carriere, *Aesthetik*, Zweiter Teil: Die bildende kunst. Die Musik. Die Poesie, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1885) doesn’t use absolute music, but see p. 353: “Hanslick dagegen sagt: ‘Tönend bewegte Formen sind einzig und allein Inhalt und Gegenstand der Musik.’” See also p. 354: “Hanslick entwickelt sich weiter und vergleicht die Musik der Arabeske und dem Kaleidoskop.”

⁷ Cf. Klaus Kropfinger: “The term ‘absolute music’ is generally associated with the ‘autonomy of art’ in Hanslick’s sense, for it was Hanslick who proclaimed ‘form animated by sounds’ [*tönend bewegte Form*] to be the essence of music. In fact, however, he wrote only of ‘pure, absolute musical art’ [*Tonkunst*]; his book on *The Beautiful in Music* never actually uses the phrase ‘absolute music.’” Kropfinger, *Wagner and Beethoven: Richard Wagner’s reception of Beethoven*, trans. Peter Palmer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 114. There is one other place where he uses “absolute” but not “absolute Musik”: “Die Ideen, welche der Komponist darstellt, sind vor allem und zuerst rein musikalische. Seiner Phantasie erscheint eine bestimmte schöne Melodie. Sie soll nichts anderes sein als sie selbst. Wie aber jede konkrete Erscheinung auf ihren höheren Gattungsbegriff, auf die sie zunächst erfüllende Idee hinweist, und so fort immer höher und höher bis zur absoluten Idee, so geschieht es auch mit den musikalischen Ideen.“ Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen. Ein Beitrag*

zur *Revision der Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, 21 ed. (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1989), p. 25.

⁸Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁹„Hanslick erklärt sie dagegen zum Inbegriff der Musik. „Was die Instrumentalmusik nicht kann, von dem darf nie gesagt werden, die Musik könne es; denn nur sie ist die reine absolute Tonkunst“ (Ausg. 1990, S. 52). Die Bedeutung, die er dem Terminus gibt, erweist sich als langlebig. Im allgemeinen versteht man bis heute darunter eine Komposition, deren Mittel, deren Form und Gehalt ‚rein‘ musikalisch sind, die also, um ihr Dasein und ihren Sinn zu begründen, keiner außermusikalischen Stütze bedarf.“ Wilhelm Seidel, "Absolute Musik," in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Kassel et al.: Bärenreiter, 1994)., 22.

¹⁰ Roger Scruton, "Absolute music," in *The new Grove dictionary of music and musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie (New York: Grove, 2000), 36-37.

¹¹ Ottokar Hostinsky, *Das Musikalisch-Schöne und das Gesamtkunstwerk vom Standpunkte der Formalen Aesthetik* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1877).

¹² “That ultimately music [Tonkunst] cannot act as absolute music in the Gesamtkunstwerk is self evident and even its most enthusiastic admirer will not need to fret over it. It is all the stranger that Hanslick accuses opera of this in Wagner's sense, when he even repeats with emphasis that only instrumental music is ‘pure, absolute music.’” “Dass schliesslich die Tonkunst im Gesamtkunstwerk nicht als absolute Musik wirken kann, ist selbstverständlich und wird auch ihren begeistertsten Verehrer nicht zu grämen brauchen. Es ist um so befremdlicher, dass HANSLICK dies der Oper im Sinne Wagner's zum Vorwurf macht, als er ja selbst wiederholt mit Nachdruck betont, nur die Instrumentalmusik sei ‚die reine, absolute Tonkunst‘, man werde stets einräumen müssen, ‚dass der Begriff "Tonkunst" in einem auf Textworte componirten Musikstück nicht rein aufgeht‘, u.s.w. Es ist also ganz in der Ordnung, wenn die Vocalmusik nicht als ‘reine Kunst’, sondern vielmehr als ‚Kunstverein‘ wirkt und demgemäss auch theoretisch behandelt wird.” Ibid., 147.

¹³ “Der Inhalt der absoluten Musik sind tönend bewegte Formen.“ C. R. Hennig, *Die Aesthetik der Tonkunst* (Leipzig: J. A. Barth, 1896). 97.

¹⁴ “Der Inhalt der Instrumentalmusik“ is „tönend bewegte Formen, eine Art in Bewegung gesetzter Arabesken.“ C. R. Hennig, *Beethoven's Neunte Symphonie. Eine Analyse* (Leipzig: F.E.C. Leuckart, C. Sander, 1888).19. What Hanslick wrote was: „Der Inhalt

der Musik sind *tönend bewegte Formen*.“ Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen. Ein Beitrag zur Revision der Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, 21 ed. (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1989), 59.

¹⁵ On Strauss, *Don Juan*: p. 178: “Aber die Tendenz ist doch dieselbe: die reine Instrumental-Musik als bloßes Mittel zur Schilderung bestimmter Vorgänge zu benützen, mit musikalischen Mitteln nicht zu musizieren, sondern zu dichten und zu malen.” Eduard Hanslick, *Fünf Jahre Musik, 1891-1895*, Die Moderne Oper 7, 1896, pp. 178-79.

On Ole Olsen: “Herr Ole Olsen ging bei seiner Composition von einem doppelt schweren Irrthume aus: fürs erste, daß reine Instrumental-Musik einen bestimmten realen Vorgang darstellen könne; sodann, daß eine an sich mittelmäßige oder widerwärtige Musik uns dadurch schön und bedeutend werde, daß man uns vorsagt, sie bedeute den Asgaardreien oder sonst eine erbauliche Historie.” Eduard Hanslick, *Concerte, Componisten und Virtuosen der letzten fünfzehn Jahre, 1870-1885*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Litteratur, 1886), 344.

In 1881 Hanslick on the Brahms Second Piano Concerto: “Reine Instrumental-Musik läßt sich nicht nacherzählen, und je gewissenhafter man es versucht, desto deutlicher wird uns die Unmöglichkeit, eine bestimmte Musik in den engen Ring einer Beschreibung oder eines Bildes einzufangen.” Eduard Hanslick, *Concerte, Componisten und Virtuosen der letzten fünfzehn Jahre, 1870-1885*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Litteratur, 1886), 300.

¹⁶ “In ergreifender, allen verständlicher Weise vollzieht Brahms diesen Gedankengang durch reine Instrumental-Musik, ohne Hinzufügung eines einzigen Wortes. Die Instrumental-Musik tritt also hier ergänzend und vollendend hinzu und spricht aus, was sich in Worte nicht mehr fassen läßt: ein merkwürdiges Gegenstück zu dem umgekehrten Vorgang in Beethovens Neunter Symphonie.” Eduard Hanslick, *Concerte, Componisten und Virtuosen der letzten fünfzehn Jahre, 1870-1885*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Litteratur, 1886), 54.

¹⁷ “Daß Schumann vorwiegend gewöhnt war, instrumental, in absoluter Musik, zu denken, verrathen auch die Gesangsparteen in der Genovefa, welche vom Text abgezogen, oft klingen wie Stücke aus seinem Quartett oder einer Symphonie.” “Robert Schumann als Operncomponist,” in Eduard Hanslick, *Die Moderne Oper*, 4th ed. (Berlin: A. Hofmann & Co., 1880), 260.

¹⁸ “Die Ausdrucksfähigkeit der Instrumentalmusik hat sich seit Berlioz in früher nicht geahnter Weise gesteigert. Wenn man aber heutzutage vorgiebt, die reine Instrumentalmusik sei bereits fähig, alles mögliche auszudrücken, wozu dann die so emsig erläuternden Programme? Dvořák ist zu sehr echter Musiker, als daß ästhetische Experimente, Entdeckungsfahrten nach den Grenzen der Kunst ihn zu reizen vermöchten.

Was ihn weggelockt haben mag aus dem Reiche der absoluten Musik, dass er seit Brahms' Heimgang als Erster beherrscht, ist offenbar die Nachbildung der verschiedenen Naturstimmen. Darin schafft Dvořák ganz Unvergleichliches, Wunderbares. Das Wellen- und Wogenrauschen in seinem "Wassermann", das schreiende Kind in der "Mittagshexe", das Schnurren des "Spinnrädchens"! Auch die "Waldtaube" reizt und fesselt uns ununterbrochen durch ihren Klangzauber und realistische Züge, die bei aller Kühnheit nie ans Häßliche streifen. Dankbar, ja nur allzu sehr empfänglich für die Reize Dvořákscher Musik, konnte ich mir doch die Gefahren seiner neuesten Richtung nicht verhehlen. Dvořák hat es nicht nötig, für seine Musik bei der Dichtkunst (und welcher "Dichtkunst"!) betteln zu geben. Seine reiche musikalische Erfindung bedarf keiner Anleihe, keiner Krücke, keiner Gebrauchsanweisung; drängt es ihn aber, zur Abwechslung, heraus aus der wortlosen Instrumentalmusik zu realen Gestalten, dann steht ein weit offenes Thor einladend vor ihm: die Oper. "Concerte," *Neue Freie Presse*, Nr 12676, 5 December 1899, p. 1-2. Reprinted in Eduard Hanslick, *Aus neuer und neuester zeit, Die Moderne Oper* 9 (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Litteratur, 1900), 85-86.

¹⁹ Since then, the *Neue Freie Presse* had produced a steady stream of features on Brahms, but none of them connected Brahms to absolute music.

²⁰ The *Musikalisches Wochenblatt*, in its review of "The Noon Witch" performed in Vienna, called Dvořák the "composer claimed by the conservative critics for themselves as the most absolute of all living absolute musicians." ("von der conservativen Kritik als der absoluteste aller absoluten lebenden Musiker für sich in Anspruch genommene Componist." (no reference given!)) The *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (1901): 412-14, regarding the Waldtaube and doubting Dvořák's ability to write symphonic poems: "Dvořák is eben nur absoluter Musiker."

²¹ "Weingartner beharrt dabei, 'daß die Musik eine Kunst ist, die *niemals durch Begriffe* zu uns sprechen kann; daß sie ihrer Hoheit entkleidet wird, wenn ein Künstler ihr Begriffe unterschiebt, die sie uns nach Art des Wortes erklären soll; daß sie erniedrigt wird, wenn er sie sklavisch von Tact zu Tact an ein Programm bindet. Die Musik vermag die *Stimmung, die seelische Disposition* wiederzugeben, die ein Vorgang in uns erzeugt, nicht aber den Vorgang selbst zu schildern.' Mit Recht vertheidigt Weingartner nur jene Ueberschriften, durch welche die Phantasie bedeutsam angeregt, aber nicht ängstlich gefesselt wird."

²² Ibid., p. 85.

²³ "Eine einfache Ueberschrift, die unsere Phantasie in bestimmter Richtung anregt, ohne sie zu knebeln, und etwas Anderes ein detaillirtes Programm....Je genauer er aber diesen

prosaischen Dienst thut, desto mehr fälscht er das Wesen der reinen Instrumentalmusik und erniedrigt ihre Würde.“ Hanslick on Scherherezade, *Neue Freie Presse*, 12021, 10 Feb. 1898, 1-3.

²⁴“Wenn daher z. B. Hanslick behauptete, daß Wagner’sche Musik überhaupt keine Musik sei, so beweist dieser Auspruch nur, daß Hanslick’sche Ästhetik eben keine Ästhetik ist. Wie der tendenziöse Historiker, der Publicist, sich vom wahren Geschichtsschreiber, der "seine ira et studio" an sein Werk geht, unterscheidet, so unterscheidet sich ‘Ästhetik als Wissenschaft’ von jüdischer Feuilleton-Ästhetik." Rudolf Louis, *Der Widerspruch in der Musik* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1893), 2.

²⁵ “Er hielt nämlich die Programmmusik—vielleicht gerade *weil* ihr Gebiet vermöge der ganzen Anlage seiner allgemein geistigen wie musikalischen Persönlichkeit (209) ihm verschlossen bleiben mußte—gleichsam für etwas Vornehmeres und Höherstehendes, oder doch zum mindesten Interessanteres und „Moderneres“ als die absolute Musik. Er konnte in seiner Bedenklichkeit und Bescheidenheit die Befürchtung nicht ganz unterdrücken, als ob er mit seinem reinen, auf sich selbst gestellten Musizieren eigentlich hinter der Zeit zurückgeblieben sei, und das mochte ab und zu wohl auch den Wunsch in ihm wecken, wenigstens zu scheinen, was er doch so ganz und gar nicht war oder eine Etikette zur Schau zu tragen, die dem Wesen seiner Kunst keineswegs entsprach.“ Rudolf Louis, *Anton Bruckner* (München und Leipzig: Georg Müller, 1905), 208-09.

²⁶ „Es liegt eine seltsame Ironie darin, daß dem bedeutendsten musikalischen Jünger des Bayreuther Meisters die geschichtliche Mission zufallen mußte, durch sein Beispiel zu erweisen, daß die Wagnersche Annahme von dem Absterben der Symphonieform mit Beethoven tatsächlich unrichtig gewesen war, daß absolute Instrumentalmusik, und dazu noch nach dem alten klassischen Schema, auch auf dem Boden der neuesten Tonkunst sehr wohl möglich ist wenn nur der Künstler Kraft genug hat, um diese Formen mit lebendigem Inhalt zu erfüllen.“ Louis, *Anton Bruckner*, 224-225.

²⁷ "(Klassische) absolute Musik bindet sich daher ans Geschlossene, an Formenrundung, die wie aus den engen Räumen der Kammerkunst belichtbar und überblickbar sein sollte. Ihr klangfest gewordenes Gefüge trug (...) Melodien, die wieder ans Singer zurückdachten (...) Die Kraftbewegungen (...) suchen nicht vom Kosmos und seinen Gesetzten auszugehen, sondern vom Menschen mit seinem Gleichmaßgefühl." Kurth, *Bruckner* (Anm. 6), 261.

²⁸ Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music* 40.