

Eduard Hanslick: On Beauty in Music Translated by Gustav Cohen (1891)

CHAPTER I AESTHETICS AS FOUNDED ON FEELINGS

... Poetry, sculpture, and painting are, in point of well-grounded aesthetic treatment, far in advance of music. Few writers on these subjects still labor under the delusion that from a general metaphysical conception of beauty (a conception which necessarily varies with the art) the aesthetic principles of any specific art can be deduced. Formerly, the aesthetic principles of the various arts were supposed to be governed by some supreme metaphysical principle of general aesthetics. Now, however, the conviction is daily growing that each individual art can be understood only by studying its technical limits and its inherent nature. "Systems" are gradually being supplanted by "researches" founded on the thesis that the laws of beauty for each art are inseparably associated with the individuality of the art and the nature of its medium.

In the aesthetics of rhetoric, sculpture, and painting, no less than in art criticism—the practical application of the foregoing sciences—rule has already been laid down that aesthetic investigations must above all consider the beautiful object, and not the perceiving subject. ...

Music, we are told, cannot, like poetry, entertain the mind with definite conceptions; nor yet the eye, like sculpture and painting, with visible forms. Hence, it is argued, its object must be to work on the feelings. "Music has to do with feelings." This expression, "has to do," is highly characteristic of all works on musical aesthetics. But what the nature of the link is that connects music with the emotions, or certain pieces of music with certain emotions; by what laws of nature it is governed; what the canons of art are that determine its form—all these questions are left in complete darkness by the very people who have "to do" with them. Only when one's eyes have become somewhat accustomed to this obscurity does it become manifest that the emotions play a double part in music, as currently understood.

On the one hand it is said that the aim and object of music is to excite emotions, i.e., pleasurable emotions; on the other hand, the emotions are said to be the subject matter which musical works are intended to illustrate.

Both propositions are alike in this, that one is as false as the other.

The refutation of the first of these propositions, which forms the introduction to most manuals of music, must not detain us long. The

Explanations and Questions

Hanslick proposes that a one-size-fits-all theory of art will not provide insight into the individual arts

Each art form succeeds in different ways

What is true of the object differs from what is true of our responses to it

The common view assigns two different roles to emotion

excite = cause

Both are mistakes

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beautiful, strictly speaking, aims at nothing, since it is nothing but a form which, though available for many purposes according to its nature, has, as such, no aim beyond itself. If the contemplation of something beautiful arouses pleasurable feelings, this effect is distinct from the beautiful as such. I may, indeed, place a beautiful object before an observer with the avowed purpose of giving him pleasure, but this purpose in no way affects the beauty of the object. The beautiful is and remains beautiful though it arouse no emotion whatever, and though there be no one to look at it. In other words, although the beautiful exists for the gratification of an observer, it is independent of him.

In this sense music, too, has no aim (object), and the mere fact that this particular art is so closely bound up with our feelings by no means justifies the assumption that its aesthetic principles depend on this union.

In order to examine this relation critically we must, in the first place, scrupulously distinguish between the terms "feeling" and "sensation," although in ordinary parlance no objection need be raised to their indiscriminate use.

"Sensation" is the act of perceiving some sensible quality, such as a sound or a color, whereas "feeling" is the consciousness of some psychical activity, i.e., a state of satisfaction or discomfort.

If I note (perceive) with my senses the odor or taste of some object, or its form, color, or sound, I call this state of consciousness "my sensation" of these qualities; but if sadness, hope, cheerfulness, or hatred appreciably raise me above or depress me below the habitual level of mental activity, I am said to "feel."

The beautiful, first of all, affects our senses. This, however, is not peculiar to the beautiful alone, but is common to all phenomena whatsoever. Sensation, the beginning and condition of all aesthetic enjoyment, is the source of feeling in its widest sense, and this fact presupposes some relation, and often a highly complex one, between the two. No art is required to produce a sensation; a single sound or color may suffice. ... What [many] writers intend to convey, therefore, is that the [function] of music is to arouse our feelings, and to fill our hearts with piety, love, joy, or sadness.

In point of fact, however, this is the aim neither of music nor of any other art. An art aims, above all, at producing something beautiful which affects not our feelings but the organ of pure contemplation, our **imagination**.

It is rather curious that musicians and the older writers on aesthetics take into account only the contrast of "feeling" and "intellect," quite oblivious of the fact that the main point at issue lies halfway between the horns of

Beauty is related to FORM, which lacks intrinsic purpose

The effect of pleasure is a by-product, not a purpose, of beautiful artifacts

In this respect, musical excellence is like any other beauty

A technical distinction between feeling and sensation

For example, the taste of chocolate is a sensation. Liking it is feeling.

We "sense" sounds and we "feel" emotions

The standard view says that musical sensations will predictably produce felt emotions

Hanslick's response: beauty primarily involves IMAGINATION

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this supposed dilemma. A musical composition originates in the composer's imagination and is intended for the imagination of the listener. Our imagination, it is true, does not merely contemplate the beautiful, but contemplates it with intelligence—the object being, as it were, mentally inspected and criticized. Our judgment, however, is formed so rapidly that we are unconscious of the separate acts involved in the process, whence the delusion arises that what in reality depends upon a complex train of reasoning is merely an act of intuition. ...

Does imaginative thought involve intelligence and understanding? Does it always involve emotion?

In the pure act of listening we enjoy the music alone and do not think of importing into it any extraneous matter. But the tendency to allow our feelings to be aroused implies something extraneous to the music. An exclusive activity of the intellect, resulting from the contemplation of the beautiful, involves not an aesthetic but a **logical** relation, while a predominant action of the feelings brings us onto still more slippery ground, implying, as it does, a **pathological** relation.

Logical relations are different from pathological ones

... If music, therefore, is to be treated as an art, it is not our feelings but our imagination which must supply the aesthetic tests. ...

Feelings are pathological

Yet musicians are less prone to believe that all arts must be uniformly gauged by our feelings than that this principle is true of music alone. It is this very power and tendency of music to arouse in the listener any given emotion which, they think, distinguishes this art from all the others.

Many musicians emphasize pathology instead of form: Is this true?

As on a previous occasion we were unable to accept the doctrine that it is the aim of art in general to produce any such effect, we are now equally unable to regard it as the specific aim of music to do so. Grant that the true organ with which the beautiful is apprehended is the imagination, and it follows that all arts are likely to affect the feelings indirectly. ...Do not Raphael's Madonnas fill us with piety, and do not Poussin's landscapes awaken in us an irresistible desire to roam about in the world? ... We thus see that all other arts, too, affect us with considerable force. The inherent peculiarities assumed to distinguish music from the other arts would depend, therefore, upon the degree of intensity of this force. The attempt, however, thus to solve the problem is not only highly unscientific but is, moreover, of no avail, because the decision whether one is more deeply affected by a symphony by Mozart, a tragedy by Shakespeare, a poem by Uhland, or a rondo by Hummel must depend, after all, on the individual himself. Those again who hold that music affects our feelings "directly," whereas the other arts do so only through the medium of ideas, express the same error in other words. For we have already seen that the excitation of feelings by the beautiful in music is but one of its indirect effects, our imagination only being directly affected. Musical dissertations constantly recall the analogy which undoubtedly exists between music and architecture, but what architect in his senses ever conceived the **aim** of architecture to be the excitation of feelings, or the feelings the subject matter of his art?

Paintings feature forms (logical relations) that inspire the imagination and, indirectly, our feelings

Music stirs emotion more strongly...

but only indirectly, by first affecting the imagination

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A poet or painter would hardly persuade himself that when he has ascertained the "feelings" his landscape or drama awakens, he has obtained a rationale of the beauties contained in it. He will seek to discover the source of the irresistible power which makes us enjoy the work in this particular form and in no other.

Artists concentrate on what they can directly control

Independently of the fact that our feelings can never become the basis of aesthetic laws, there are many cogent reasons why we should not trust to the feelings aroused by music. As a consequence of our mental constitution, words, titles, and other conventional associations (in sacred, military, and operatic music more especially) give to our feelings and thoughts a direction which we often falsely ascribe to the character of the music itself. For, in reality, there is no causal nexus between a musical composition and the feelings it may excite, as the latter vary with our experience and impressibility. The present generation often wonder how their forefathers could imagine that just this arrangement of sounds adequately represented just this feeling. We need but instance the effects which works by Mozart, Beethoven, and Weber produced when they were new as compared with their effects on us. How many compositions by Mozart were thought by his contemporaries to be the most perfect expressions of passion, warmth, and vigor of which music is capable! The placidity and moral sunshine of Haydn's symphonies were placed in contrast with the violent bursts of passion, the internal strife, the bitter and acute grief embodied in Mozart's music. Twenty or thirty years later, precisely the same comparison was made between Beethoven and Mozart. Mozart, the emblem of supreme and transcendent passion, was replaced by Beethoven, while he himself was promoted to the Olympic classicality of Haydn. Every observant musician will, in the course of his own life, experience analogous changes of taste. The musical merit of the many compositions which at one time made so deep an impression, and the aesthetic enjoyment which their originality and beauty still yield, are not altered in the least by this dissimilar effect on the feelings at different periods. Thus, there is no invariable and inevitable nexus between musical works and certain states of mind; the connection being, on the contrary, of a far more transient kind than in any other art.

With the passing of time, highly emotional music seems less emotional, yet no less beautiful. So value and emotional impact are distinct

Each person experiences changes in taste, so we can personally confirm that our responses are variable

It is manifest, therefore, that the effect of music on the emotions does not possess the attributes of inevitableness, exclusiveness, and uniformity that a phenomenon from which aesthetic principles are to be deduced ought to have.

To be the **aim** of music, the ability to cause emotions must meet 3 tests

... Music may, undoubtedly, awaken feelings of great joy or intense sorrow; but might not the same or a still greater effect be produced by the news that we have won the first prize in the lottery, or by the dangerous illness of a friend? So long as we refuse to include lottery tickets among the symphonies, or medical bulletins among the overtures, we must refrain from treating the emotions as an aesthetic monopoly of music in

Music fails the test of exclusiveness

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general or a certain piece of music in particular. Everything depends upon the specific *modus operandi* by means of which music evokes such feelings. ...

Herbart (in the ninth chapter of his *Encyclopaedia*), to the best of my knowledge, struck the first blow at the theory that the feelings are the foundation of musical aesthetics. After expressing his disapproval of the vague manner in which works of art are criticized, he goes on to say:

Interpreters of dreams and astrologers have for thousands of years persistently ignored the fact that people dream because they are asleep, and that the stars appear now in one part of the heavens and now in another because they are in motion. Similarly, there are even good musicians who still cling to the belief that music is capable of expressing definite feelings, as though the feelings which it accidentally arouses, and to express which music may for this very reason be employed, were the proximate cause of the rules of simple and double counterpoint. For these alone form the groundwork of music. What subject, we might ask, did the old masters mean to illustrate when they developed all the possible forms of the fugue? No subject at all. Their thoughts did not travel beyond the limits of the art, but penetrated deeply into its inmost recesses. He who adheres to meanings thereby betrays his dislike of the inner aspect of things and his love of mere outward appearance.

It is much to be regretted that Herbart refrained from prosecuting these occasional strictures in more detail, and that along with these brilliant flashes there go some rather questionable statements; at all events, we shall presently see that the views we have just quoted failed to gain the regard they so well merited.

[HANSLICK OFFERS EXAMPLES OF WHAT HE ATTACKS:]

... Neidhardt: "The ultimate aim of music is to rouse all the passions by means of sound and rhythm, rivaling the most eloquent oration." (Preface to *Temperatur*.) ...

J. Mosel defines music as "the art of expressing certain emotions through the medium of systematically combined sounds."...

C. F. Michaelis: "Music ... is the language of emotion," etc. (*Über den Geist der Tonkunst*, 2nd essay, 1800, p. 29.) ...

J. J. Engel: "A symphony, a sonata, etc., must be the representation of some passion developed in a variety of forms." (*Über musik. Malerei*, 1780, p. 29.) ...

J. W. Boehm: "Not to the intellect do the sweet strains of music appeal, but to our emotional faculty only." (*Analyse des Schönen der Musik*, Vienna, 1830, p. 62.) ...

Fermo Bellini: "Music is the art of expressing sentiments and passions through the medium of sound." (*Manuale di Musica*, Milano, Ricordi, 1853.)...

A. v. Dommer: "The object of music: music is to awaken our feelings, and

Hanslick praises and quotes Johann Herbart (1776-1841) as an important precedent of his view

Why seek remote causes when we have a more immediate one?

Great artists focus on developing what is within their control: the works they create

To "rouse" is to cause

What is it to "express" an emotion?

Is expression the same as representation?

An example of the idea that music directly causes emotion

Dommer sees imagination as secondary

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these, in their turn, are to raise up images in the mind." (*Elemente der Musik*, Leipzig, 1862, p. 174.)

CHAPTER II DOES MUSIC REPRESENT FEELINGS?

The proposition that the feelings are the subject which music has to represent is due partly to the theory according to which the ultimate aim of music is to excite feelings and partly to an amended form of this theory. ...

Some writers confuse causing emotions with representing them

The subject of a poem, a painting, or a statue may be expressed in words and reduced to ideas. We say, for instance, this picture represents a flower girl, this statue a gladiator, this poem one of Roland's exploits. Upon the more or less perfect embodiment of the particular subject in the artist's production depends our verdict respecting the beauty of the work of art.

Assumption: Representations are beautiful to the degree that they are accurate

The whole gamut of human feelings has with almost complete unanimity been proclaimed to be the subject of music, since the emotions were thought to be in antithesis to the definiteness of intellectual conceptions. ... The beautiful melody and the skillful harmony as such do not charm us, but only what they imply: the whispering of love, or the clamor of ardent combatants. ...

Suppose that emotions are represented, e.g., a whisper of love

In order to escape from such vague notions we must, first of all, sever from their habitual associations metaphors of the above description. The whispering may be expressed, true, but not the whispering of love; the clamor may be reproduced, undoubtedly, but not the clamor of ardent combatants. Music may reproduce phenomena such as whispering, storming, roaring, but the feelings of love or anger have only a subjective existence.

Music represents only active phenomena, not emotions

Definite feelings and emotions are unsusceptible of being embodied in music.

The chapter's main point

Our emotions have no isolated existence in the mind and cannot, therefore, be evoked by an art which is incapable of representing the remaining series of mental states. They are, on the contrary, dependent on physiological and pathological conditions, on notions and judgments—in fact, on all the processes of human reasoning which so many conceive as antithetical to the emotions.

One cannot have an emotion, or represent one, in isolation from other things

What, then, transforms an indefinite feeling into a definite one—into the feeling of longing, hope, or love? Is it the mere degree of intensity, the fluctuating rate of inner motion? Assuredly not. The latter may be the same in the case of dissimilar feelings or may, in the case of the same

Definite emotions depend on our judgments

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feeling, vary with the time and the person. Only by virtue of ideas and judgments-unconscious though we may be of them when our feelings run high-can an indefinite state of mind pass into a definite feeling. The feeling of hope is inseparable from the conception of a happier state which is to come, and which we compare with the actual state. The feeling of sadness involves the notion of a past state of happiness. These are perfectly definite ideas or conceptions, and in default of them-the apparatus of thought, as it were-no feeling can be called "hope" or "sadness," for through them alone can a feeling assume a definite character. On excluding these conceptions from consciousness, nothing remains but a vague sense of motion which at best could not rise above a general feeling of satisfaction or discomfort. The feeling of love cannot be conceived apart from the image of the beloved being, or apart from the desire and the longing for the possession of the object of our affections. It is not the kind of psychical activity but the intellectual substratum, the subject underlying it, which constitutes it love. Dynamically speaking, love may be gentle or impetuous, buoyant or depressed, and yet it remains love. This reflection alone ought to make it clear that music can express only those qualifying adjectives, and not the substantive, love, itself. A determinate feeling (a passion, an emotion) as such never exists without a definable meaning which can, of course, only be communicated through the medium of definite ideas. Now, since music as an "indefinite form of speech" is admittedly incapable of expressing definite ideas, is it not a psychologically unavoidable conclusion that it is likewise incapable of expressing definite emotions? For the definite character of an emotion rests entirely on the meaning involved in it.

How it is that music may, nevertheless, awaken feelings (though not necessarily so) such as sadness and joy we shall try to explain hereafter when we come to examine music from a subjective point of view. At this stage of our inquiry it is enough to determine whether music is capable of representing any definite emotion whatever. To this question only a negative answer can be given, the definiteness of an emotion being inseparably connected with concrete notions and conceptions, and to reduce these to a material form is altogether beyond the power of music. A certain class of ideas, however, is quite susceptible of being adequately expressed by means which unquestionably belong to the sphere of music proper. This class comprises all ideas which, consistently with the organ to which they appeal, are associated with audible changes of strength, motion, and ratio: the ideas of intensity waxing and diminishing; of motion hastening and lingering; of ingeniously complex and simple progression, etc. The aesthetic expression of music may be described by terms such as graceful, gentle, violent, vigorous, elegant, fresh-all these ideas being expressible by corresponding modifications of sound. We may, therefore, use those adjectives as directly describing musical phenomena without thinking of the ethical meanings attaching to them in a psychological sense, and which, from the habit of associating ideas, we readily ascribe to the effect of the music, or even mistake for purely

For example, hope requires a judgment that a happier time is possible in the future, and sadness involves a recognition of loss

Every emotion has an "intellectual substratum" or component

What music cannot represent: "concrete notions"

What music can represent: types of motion (later called "dynamic properties")

Description of music requires description of movement

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musical properties.

The primary aim of poetry, sculpture, and painting is ... to produce some concrete image. Only by way of inference can the picture of a flower girl call up the wider notion of maidenly content and modesty, the picture of a snow-covered churchyard the transitoriness of earthly existence. In like manner, but far more vaguely and capriciously, may the listener discover in a piece of music the idea of youthful contentedness or that of transitoriness. These abstract notions, however, are by no means the subject matter of the pictures or the musical compositions, and it is still more absurd to talk as if the feelings of "transitoriness" or of "youthful contentedness" could be represented by them. ...

What part of the feelings, then, can music represent, if not the subject involved in them?

Only their dynamic properties. It may reproduce the motion accompanying psychical action, according to its momentum: speed, slowness, strength, weakness, increasing and decreasing intensity. But motion is only one of the concomitants of feeling, not the feeling itself. It is a popular fallacy to suppose that the descriptive power of music is sufficiently qualified by saying that, although incapable of representing the subject of a feeling, it may represent the feeling itself — not the object of love, but the feeling of love. In reality, however, music can do neither. It cannot reproduce the feeling of love but only the element of motion; and this may occur in any other feeling just as well as in love, and in no case is it the distinctive feature. The term "love" is as abstract as "virtue" or "immortality," and it is quite superfluous to assure us that music is unable to express abstract notions. No art can do this, for it is a matter of course that only definite and concrete ideas (those that have assumed a living form, as it were) can be incorporated by an art.' But no instrumental composition can describe the ideas of love, wrath, or fear, since there is no causal nexus between these ideas and certain combinations of sound. Which of the elements inherent in these ideas, then, does music turn to account so effectually? Only the element of motion—in the wider sense, of course, according to which the increasing and decreasing force of a single note or chord is "motion" also. This is the element which music has in common with our emotions and which, with creative power, it contrives to exhibit in an endless variety of forms and contrasts. ...

Beyond the analogy of motion ... music possesses no means for fulfilling its alleged mission.

We have intentionally selected examples from instrumental music, for only what is true of the latter is true also of music as such. If we wish to decide the question whether music possesses the character of definiteness, what its nature and properties are, and what its limits and

Representational arts can only convey abstraction by first picturing something concrete

The central argument of the chapter

An emotion is an abstraction unless identified by something else that is clearly represented

Instrumental music never represents anything with clarity

It only gives us a representation of motion, which is insufficient

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tendencies, no other than instrumental music can be taken into consideration. What instrumental music is unable to achieve lies also beyond the pale of music proper, for it alone is pure and self-subsistent music. No matter whether we regard vocal music as superior to or more effective than instrumental music-an unscientific proceeding, by the way, which is generally the upshot of one-sided dilettantism-we cannot help admitting that the term "music," in its true meaning, must exclude compositions in which words are set to music. In vocal or operatic music it is impossible to draw so nice a distinction between the effect of the music and that of the words that an exact definition of the share which each has had in the production of the whole becomes practicable. An inquiry into the subject of music must leave out even compositions with inscriptions, or so-called program music. Its union with poetry, though enhancing the power of the music, does not widen its limits. ...

What about vocal music?

Vocal music colors, as it were, the poetic drawing. In the musical elements we were able to discover the most brilliant and delicate hues and an abundance of symbolic meanings. Though by their aid it might be possible to transform a second-rate poem into a passionate effusion of the soul, it is not the music but the words which determine the subject of a vocal composition. Not the coloring but the drawing renders the represented subject intelligible. We appeal to the listener's faculty of abstraction, and beg him to think, in a purely musical sense, of some dramatically effective melody apart from the context. A melody, for instance, which impresses us as highly dramatic and which is intended to represent the feeling of rage can express this state of mind in no other way than by quick and impetuous motion. Words expressing passionate love, though diametrically opposed in meaning, might, therefore, be suitably rendered by the same melody.

The sung words can give a definite content to music

But different words can give different emotions to the same music

... Has the reader ever heard the *allegro fugato* from the overture to [Mozart's] *The Magic Flute* changed into a vocal quartet of quarreling Jewish peddlers? Mozart's music, though not altered in the smallest degree, fits the low text appallingly well, and the enjoyment we derive from the gravity of the music in the opera can be no heartier than our laugh at the farcical humor of the parody. We might quote numberless instances of the plastic character of every musical theme and every human emotion. The feeling of religious fervor is rightly considered to be the least liable to musical misconstruction. ... Foreigners who visit churches in Italy hear, to their amazement, the most popular themes from operas by Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi. Pieces like these and of a still more secular character, provided they do not altogether lose the quality of sobriety, are far from interfering with the devotions of the congregation, who, on the contrary, appear to be greatly edified. If music as such were capable of representing the feeling of piety, a *quid pro quo* of this kind would be as unlikely as the contingency of a preacher reciting from the pulpit a novel by Tieck or an act of Parliament. The greatest masters of sacred music afford abundant examples in proof of our

The Magic Flute is an opera

Secular music used in religious settings

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proposition. Handel, in particular, set to work with the greatest nonchalance in this respect. Winterfeld has shown that many of the most celebrated airs from *The Messiah*, including those most of all admired as being especially suggestive of piety, were taken from secular duets (mostly erotic) composed in the years 1711-1712, when Handel set to music certain madrigals by Mauro Ortensio for the Electoral Princess Caroline of Hanover. The music of the second duet [with the words "No I will not trust you/Blind love, cruel beauty/You are too deceitful] ... Handel employed unaltered both in key and melody for the chorus in the first part of *The Messiah*, "For unto us a Child is born." ... There is a vast number of similar instances, but we need only refer here to the entire series of pastoral pieces from the "Christmas Oratorio" which, as is well known, were naively taken from secular cantatas composed for special occasions. ...

Handel's *Messiah* sets Bible passages to music

Whenever the question of the representation of objects by musical means is under debate we are, with an air of wisdom, assured over and over again that, though music is unable to portray phenomena which are foreign to its province, it nevertheless may picture the feelings which they excite. The very reverse is the case. Music can undertake to imitate objective phenomena only, and never the specific feeling they arouse. The falling of snow, the fluttering of birds, and the rising of the sun can be painted musically only by producing auditory impressions which are dynamically related to those phenomena. In point of strength, pitch, velocity, and rhythm, sounds present to the ear a figure bearing that degree of analogy to certain visual impressions which sensations of various kinds bear to one another. As there is, physiologically speaking, such a thing as a vicarious function (up to a certain point), so may sense impressions, aesthetically speaking, become vicarious also. There is a well-founded analogy between motion in space and motion in time; between the color, texture, and size of an object and the pitch, timbre, and strength of a tone; and it is for this reason quite practicable to paint an object musically. The pretension, however, to describe by musical means the "feeling" which the falling snow, the crowing cock, or a flash of lightning excites in us is simply ludicrous.

Notice how the verbs (e.g., flutter, fall) convey dynamics

Although, as far as we remember, all musical theorists tacitly accept and base their arguments on the postulate that music has the power of representing definite emotions, yet their better judgment has kept them from openly avowing it. The conspicuous absence of definite ideas in music troubled their minds and induced them to lay down the somewhat modified principle that the object of music was to awaken and represent indefinite, not definite, emotions. Rationally understood, this can only mean that music ought to deal with the motion accompanying a feeling, regardless of its essential part, with what is felt; in other words, that its function is restricted to the reproduction of what we termed the dynamic element of an emotion, a function which we unhesitatingly conceded to music. But this property does not enable music to represent indefinite

Why it does not help to say that music represents "indefinite" emotions

Hanslick proposes that music only represents the dynamics of any emotion

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feelings, for to "represent" something "indefinite" is a contradiction in terms. ... The theory respecting "indefinite feelings" ... is but a step removed from the clear recognition that music represents no feelings, either definite or indefinite. ...

This conclusion might give rise to the view that the representation of definite feelings by music, though impracticable, may yet be adopted as an ideal, never wholly realizable, but which it is possible, and even necessary, to approach more and more closely.

Having absolutely denied the possibility of representing emotions by musical means, we must be still more emphatic in refuting the fallacy which considers this the aesthetic touchstone of music.

... Let us, for argument's sake, assume the possibility and examine it from a practical point of view.

The beautiful in music would not depend on the accurate representation of feelings even if such a representation were possible. ...

It is manifestly out of the question to test this fallacy with instrumental music, as the latter could be shown to represent definite feelings only by arguing in a circle. We must, therefore, make the experiment with vocal music as being that music whose office it is to emphasize clearly defined states of mind.

... Suppose there did exist perfect congruity between the real and the assumed power of music, that it was possible to represent feelings by musical means, and that these feelings were the subject of musical compositions. If this assumption be granted, we should be logically compelled to call those compositions the best which perform the task in the most perfect manner. Yet do we not all know compositions of exquisite beauty without any definite subject? We need but instance Bach's preludes and fugues. On the other hand, there are vocal compositions which aim at the most accurate expression of certain emotions within the limits referred to, and in which the supreme goal is truthfulness in this descriptive process. On close examination we find that the rigor with which music is subordinated to words is generally in an inverse ratio to the independent beauty of the former; otherwise expressed, that rhetorico-dramatical precision and musical perfection go together but halfway, and then proceed in different directions.

The recitative affords a good illustration of this truth, since it is that form of music which best accommodates itself to rhetorical requirements down to the very accent of each individual word, never even attempting to be more than a faithful copy of rapidly changing states of mind. This, therefore, in strict accordance with the theory before us, should be the highest and most perfect music. But in the recitative, music degenerates

Perhaps the representation of emotion is an ideal goal, seldom achieved

For the sake of argument, let's agree

The following problem will arise

This new version of the theory can only be tested with vocal music

The most definite representation should be the most beautiful

However, the inverse is actually the case

Recitative highlights words by simplifying the music

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into a mere shadow and relinquishes its individual sphere of action altogether. Is not this proof that the representing of definite states of mind is contrary to the nature of music, and that in their ultimate bearings they are antagonistic to one another? Let anyone play a long recitative, leaving out the words, and inquire into its musical merit and subject. Any kind of music claiming to be the sole factor in producing a given effect should be able to stand this test. ...

The dance is a similar case in point, of which any ballet is a proof. The more the graceful rhythm of the figures is sacrificed in the attempt to speak by gesture and dumb show, and to convey definite thoughts and emotions, the closer is the approximation to the low rank of mere pantomime. The prominence given to the dramatic principle in the dance proportionately lessens its rhythmical and plastic beauty. The opera can never be quite on a level with recited drama or with purely instrumental music. A good opera composer will, therefore, constantly endeavor to combine and reconcile the two factors instead of automatically emphasizing now one and now the other. When in doubt, however, he will always allow the claim of music to prevail, the chief element in the opera being not dramatic but musical beauty. ...

How is it that in every song slight alterations may be introduced which, without in the least detracting from the accuracy of expression, immediately destroy the beauty of the [musical] theme? This would be impossible if the latter were inseparably connected with the former. Again, how is it that many a song, though adequately expressing the drift of the poem, is nevertheless quite intolerable? The theory that music is capable of expressing emotions furnishes us with no explanation. In what, then, consists the beautiful in music, if it does not consist in the emotional element?

CHAPTER III THE BEAUTIFUL IN MUSIC

... To the question: What is to be expressed with all this material? the answer will be: Musical ideas. Now, a musical idea reproduced in its entirety is not only an object of intrinsic beauty but also an end in itself, and not a means for representing feelings and thoughts.

The essence of music is sound and motion.

Dance is more beautiful than mime. We want the artistic element to be stronger than the representational.

He stresses beauty as a type of value; we can retain the expression while destroying the beauty, so music's value is not related to its expressiveness