

***On Conducting* (Über das Dirigieren)? Heinrich Schenker, Wilhelm Furtwängler and the idea of the ‘organic’ Ninth**

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Wilhelm Furtwängler (1886-1954) c.1920

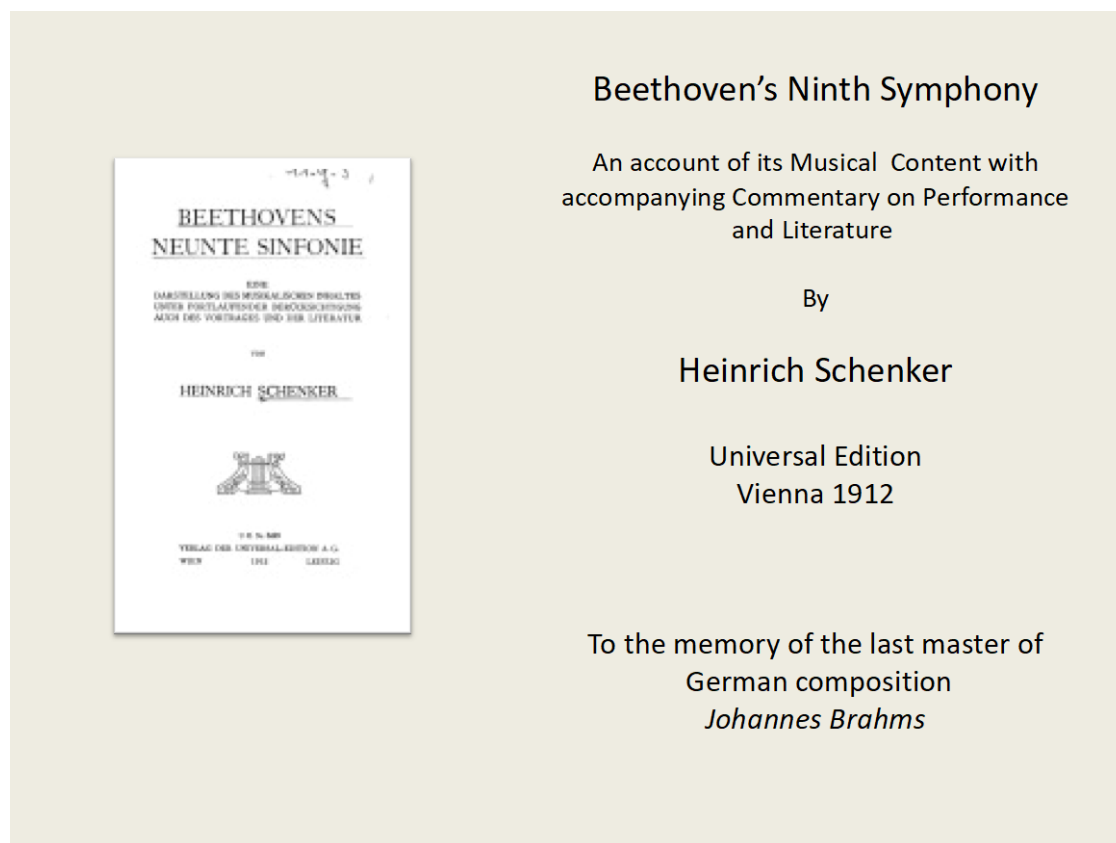


Heinrich Schenker (1868-1935), undated

There can be no doubt that Richard Wagner's book length essay 'On Conducting' (1869), the performance of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* he conducted on 22 May 1872 on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth, and his subsequent report *The Rendering of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony* (1873), are significant milestones in the history of conducting. Wagner's essay, performance and report all exercised an important influence on the subsequent development of the then nascent art. That much is beyond dispute. As was always the case with Wagner, however, critical reception of his ideas was mixed. Amongst those who responded adversely to Wagner's idiosyncratic approach to performance was the music theorist and pedagogue, Heinrich Schenker (1868-1935).

Heinrich Schenker was an assimilated Jew of Austrian parentage born in 1868 in the Polish province of Galicia. He studied composition at the University of Vienna with Bruckner and subsequently remained in the city as teacher of piano and theory. His first two important theoretical publications were *Harmonielehre* (1906) and *Kontrapunkt* (1910),

followed in 1912 by a substantial monograph: *Beethoven's Ninth Symphony: a representation of its musical content, with running commentary on performance and literature as well*. In any study of the history of conducting, this work deserves close critical attention, not only for the information it gives on the development of Schenker's analytical methodology (at that time still at its pre-graphic, *Formenlehre* stage), but also for the influence it had on subsequent performance practice.¹



As Nicholas Cook puts it, ‘The basic purpose of Schenker’s monograph on the Ninth Symphony [...] is to refute the whole edifice of Wagnerian interpretation, and to reclaim the work for what he calls ‘absolute music’. It should be remembered in this context that, as he made clear in his 1846 programme for his Dresden performance of the Ninth Symphony, for Wagner ‘absolute music’ was a pejorative term. The absolute versus programme music debate had polarised musical criticism since the publication in 1854 of Eduard Hanslick’s *Vom musikalische Schönen* (*On the Musically Beautiful*). This influential treatise directly critiques the expressive aesthetic promulgated by Wagner in *Oper und Drama* (1851) and

¹ Heinrich Schenker, *Beethovens neunte Sinfonie* (1912); Eng. edn., tr. John Rothgeb, *Beethoven's Ninth Symphony*, (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1992).

continued in *Über das Dirigieren*. Schenker's criticisms of 60 years later promulgated in the Ninth Symphony monograph stem from a similar premise: in his view Wagner's approach was self-serving and conceptually flawed in that he approached the Ninth Symphony from a *theatrical* rather than a *symphonic* perspective, thus misunderstanding and distorting the nature of the work as *symphony*. '... for whatever and however he [Wagner] thought about Beethoven, all of his thoughts unconsciously and ineluctably flowed into that artistic purpose which he envisioned as his own' (p.65). It was as a corrective to what he saw as this misguided approach that Schenker published his monograph.

Schenker's attacks on Wagner in the Introduction are the most hard-hitting and uncompromising. '

It was he, I insist, who was responsible if a new generation of composers finally neglected even to *strive* for that perfection found in the masterworks, which alone signifies the true salvation of art. He is to blame if they strayed off into a musical jargon that related to the true and perfect musical art of our masters just as medieval or 'kitchen' [Küchenlatein] Latin related to that of Virgil, Ovid, Cicero or Seneca (p.18-19)'.

Yet Schenker is by no means dismissive of Wagner's ideas in their entirety, even if his back-handed assessment is a classic example of damning with faint praise. He writes,

As is evident here [in Schenker's own analysis], the otherwise original and consequential Wagner has so completely misunderstood the Ninth Symphony precisely in respect to the most crucial artistic points – for example in respect to voice-leading, structure [Konstruktion], orchestration, style, and so forth – then this must not automatically discredit all the consequences he has drawn with such unprecedented passion from his own misunderstandings in support of an alleged progress based on the idea of superseding absolute music (p.18).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to give a detailed exegesis of Schenker's argument. Nevertheless, it is instructive to extrapolate some of the features which relate directly to its subsequent influence on performance practice. After a lengthy introduction notable for its strident polemical tone, Schenker gives a detailed, bar by bar analysis of the form and content of the Ninth Symphony in the traditions of *Formenlehre*, interspersed with strongly-worded critiques of other commentators such as Felix Weingartner, Hugo Riemann, Hermann Kretschmar and Richard Wagner. For example, in the course of his discussion of

Beethoven's metronome marks, Schenker states that 'The metronome markings as given in the score of the Ninth Symphony are all by Beethoven and thus to be accepted as authentic.' It should be mentioned, however, that there are no metronome marks in Beethoven's autograph; they are specified in a letter to Moscheles written on 18 March 1827, i.e. shortly before Beethoven's death, before an upcoming performance in London. Schenker goes on to suggest that '[the metronome marking] by no means ruled out possible tempo modifications; but rather the master himself [Beethoven] always preferred a free manner of playing to the rigid one' (pp 40-41). Significantly, whether intentionally or not, Schenker here positions Beethoven as a precursor of Wagner's prescription for flexible tempo modification as an expressive device in *Über das Dirigieren*. Whilst Schenker agrees with the importance Wagner places on the 'necessity for the clarification of *melos*' (p.66) in the performance of a Beethoven symphony, he takes him to task for misunderstanding the true nature of Beethoven's subtle means of achieving such clarity. 'Both Beethoven and Wagner strove for the same thing [clarity of melos]. The only difference between them was the choice of methods and degree of insight into the psychology of the listener' (p.68). Beethoven, of course, is credited with a far greater degree of insight than Wagner.

A further point of interest is the importance Schenker attaches to Beethoven's 'orthography' (Schreibart) in the Ninth Symphony: i.e. the way in which he has notated the content as found in Beethoven's autograph.

It is not the task of the orthography [...] to provide the performer with definite means of for achieving effects supposedly specified and attainable only through precisely these means, but rather to arouse in his mind, in an *a priori* manner, specific effects, *leaving it up to him to choose freely the appropriate means for their attainment* [my Italics]. [...] In short: orthography announces and seeks effects, but says nothing at all about the means of producing them!' (p.9)

Schenker thus sees in Beethoven's score, and the autograph in particular, an Aristotelian entelechy, simply defined as the essential nature or informing principle of a living thing, which generates a performance through a recreative process of improvisation into an organic whole, as opposed to the score as a fixed object, or semiotic plan determining a performance through fidelity to a written text. This idea is closely related to the notion of a musical work as a living organism and was to have a far-reaching influence on the performance aesthetic of one of the earliest and most enthusiastic readers of Schenker's monograph: Wilhelm Furtwängler (1886-1954).

Heinrich Schenker and Wilhelm Furtwängler



Wilhelm Furtwängler in
Lübeck, c.1912

It was in 1911, the year of his appointment as conductor of the Verein der Musikfreunde in Lübeck, that Furtwängler encountered Schenker's work at first hand when he made an intensive study of the Ninth Symphony monograph. This proved to be something of an epiphany for Furtwängler and was to have a lasting influence on the development of his thought and approach to performance. At the other end of his career in 1947 he wrote a retrospective appreciation of Schenker in which he recalled the impact that this reading had made on him:

The first work that became widely known was a monograph on Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. This book fell into my hands in Lübeck in 1911 when I was beginning my career as a Kapellmeister and immediately aroused my passionate interest. Whenever I disagreed with him in matters of detail, whenever the polemical position was questionable, such was the cast of mind, the overview that formulated the answers to these questions which was so unusual and different from the usual style of musical writing, that I was deeply moved.²

²Furtwängler, *TW*, 199. See Appendix for a translation of the complete text.

Schenker's monograph was published in 1912, a year after Furtwängler states that he first encountered the work. Writing in 1947 after the passage of 35 years it is possible that his memory was at fault; but it is more likely that he was made aware of Schenker's work prior to publication by his mother's cousin, the conductor George Dohrn (1867-1942), an enthusiastic admirer of Schenker's writings and an early champion of Furtwängler as a conductor.³

Furtwängler found Schenker's strident anti-Wagnerian and nationalistic polemics excessive; yet he had his own serious misgivings about Wagner and empathised with the spirit of Schenker's approach, even if the virulence of some of Schenker's statements was exaggerated and inelegant to one of his *bürgerlich* sensibilities.⁴ The most influential factor, however, was the central thrust of the argument in which Schenker, through his developing organicist methodology, explores the function of the musical process within the parameters of the fluctuating dialectical relationship between form and content. He portentously paraphrases the opening of St John's Gospel by stating unequivocally that 'In the beginning was content', and posits the view that form is a result of the demands of the musical content:

A musical content that is so perfect in itself as that of the Ninth Symphony uncovers laws of tonal construction that most other human beings do, indeed, carry within their own bosoms, but only the genius, by dint of natural gifts, can actually make manifest! [...] Thus, while for the genius a specific content could produce only this specific shape and none other, the theorists grasp the content *a posteriori* only through a form arbitrarily abstracted by them, but one in which no manner of necessity rules.⁵

It was this uncompromising approach to musical form as being defined by the composer's creative processes that earned Furtwängler's enthusiastic approval:

Here for the first time there were no hermeneutics, no irrelevances but the question was asked, simply and directly, what really stands before us in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony? No questions regarding the formal structure were asked, which today are the cause of so much misunderstanding; there was no attempt made to place the work in historical context, but rather the composer's creative process was examined which is

³ See ed. Ian Bent, David Bretherton and William Drabkin, *Heinrich Schenker: Selected Correspondence*. (The Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 2014), pp. 251-254.

⁴For an alternative reading of Schenker's polemics in relation to Wagner's view of the Ninth Symphony see Nicholas Cook, 'Heinrich Schenker, Polemicist: a reading of the Ninth Symphony Monograph', *Music Analysis* 14:1 (1995), 89-105.

⁵Schenker, *Beethoven's Ninth Symphony*, 4. ff.

the source of the organic cohesion of the work as a whole and which so profoundly affects us all.⁶

The organic worldview of Heinrich Schenker, still at this point at an early stage of its development, found a ready adherent in Furtwängler. His early musical education in the idealist traditions of *Bildung*, together with his own study of Beethoven and his early experiences as a conductor, made him receptive to the idea that a musical work functioned through the working of processes inherent within itself. These ideas were firmly embedded in Furtwängler's mind when on 26 April 1913 he conducted Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for the first time

Although Furtwängler had first encountered Schenker's ideas in 1911 it was not until 1919 that the two encountered each other personally. The meeting was arranged by Dr Paul Hammerschlag, Director of the Austrian Credit Institute for Trade and Industry, who on 2 May 1919 wrote to Schenker:

Yesterday evening Herr Kapellmeister Furtwängler was with me and he spoke of you and your work in the warmest possible terms. He also expressed a wish to meet you personally. [...] I think perhaps that you will be interested to meet this excellent musician.⁷

The meeting took place on 3 May 1919 and marked the beginning of a working relationship based on mutual respect rather than uncritical admiration. Schenker had a high regard for Furtwängler's musical achievements but considered him to be superficial and lacking in musical understanding; Furtwängler admired Schenker's single-mindedness even though he did not fully share his views, particularly with regard to Bruckner and Wagner. They met frequently in Vienna - at Schenker's home, in the company of mutual acquaintances or in restaurants - and Schenker, clearly hoping that Furtwängler would be a conductor whose

⁶Furtwängler, *TW*, 199.

⁷Helmut Federhofer, *Heinrich Schenker nach Tagebüchern und Briefen in der Oswald Jonas Memorial Collection* (1985), 107. All translations from Federhofer are by the author. The original text and alternative translations of these documents may also be accessed at www.schenkerdocumentsonline.org

mission was to put Schenkerian ideas into practice, was unsparing with his artistic advice.

Furtwängler was generally receptive and took every opportunity to express his thanks which in 1931 took the form of a personal donation of 3,000 marks in support of the publication of *Das Meisterwerk in Musik*, Vol III.⁸

In a diary entry following his first meeting with Furtwängler Schenker describes his initial impressions of the conductor (4 May 1919):

Furtwängler appeared to be about thirty years of age. [...] He had been introduced to my book six years previously whilst working in Lübeck and was well acquainted with my contacts in Germany. In any case, he was willing to involve himself in my current mission.⁹

The idea of mission is a common thread running through Schenker's writings; he was clearly anxious to enthuse the up-and-coming Furtwängler with similar proselytising zeal. On 4 November 1919 Schenker attended his first concert directed by Furtwängler (Beethoven *Egmont* stage music and *Fifth Symphony*). The diary entry in which he records the event is representative of his critical approach: 'There is no doubt that the young conductor is superior to Weingartner, Nikisch and Strauss, so it is only to be regretted that he does not penetrate more deeply into the composition'.¹⁰ The following day, 5 November, Schenker wrote to congratulate Furtwängler on his success.¹¹ In a letter written on 18 or 19 November Furtwängler later replied, 'I must confess that there is no-one whose approval of my work so

⁸Furtwängler's name occurs in Schenker's diaries approximately one hundred times. The Schenker archive, held as part of the Oswald Jonas Memorial Collection by the University of California, Riverside, contains twenty-two letters and two cards from Furtwängler dated between 1919 and 1937, two years after Schenker's death. Latterly Furtwängler directed his communications to the theorist's widow. See Federhofer, 106-7.

⁹Ibid., 107.

¹⁰Ibid., 109.

¹¹ SPK Berlin, 55 Nachlass 13, Kasten 31. The full text of Schenker's letter, transcribed by Christoph Hust and translated by Ian Bent, may be found at www.schenkerdocumentsonline.org

pleases me as yourself for there is no-one today whose knowledge of Beethoven approaches yours'.¹²

The Schenkerian concept of the *Urlinie*, or overarching line, is first mentioned in connection with Furtwängler in a diary entry for 15 April 1920. On this occasion Schenker's pupil, Hans Weisse, acted as intermediary between the two: 'Dr Weisse brought greetings from Furtwängler together with an invitation to a forthcoming performance of the *Ninth Symphony*. He recounted how he had acquainted Furtwängler with the concept of the *Urlinie*'.¹³ Schenker attended the performance in question which took place on 28 April 1920; his critical approach to Furtwängler's art is again clear from his comments: 'The conductor does not yet understand that an increase in tension comes from an *accelerando* rather than a *crescendo* and that this heightens the effect of moving towards a specific destination. In the last movement the vocal parts were sufficiently prominent and the chief difficulty was therefore overcome'.¹⁴

Schenker's exegesis of musical texts for Furtwängler continued throughout the period of their acquaintance. On 19 November 1922 Schenker records how he showed Furtwängler the *Urlinie* of Brahms's *Third Symphony*, Bach's *Little Preludes*, Beethoven's *Appassionata* (op. 57) and *Sonata in E major* (op. 109).

The meetings in Vienna between Schenker, Furtwängler and other members of the circle sometimes became heated. On 11 April 1925 Schenker records a discussion that had a pronounced polemical content:

During the meal we touched upon technical questions, principally those relating to the sonata. We had not previously suspected just how ignorant Furtwängler is on these matters. He hardly understands sonata form at all!!
He stands up for Bruckner - a composer towards whom he considers me an opponent. He thinks that Bruckner is a composer who has something specific to say. It is futile for him to try and clarify the spiritual content of Bruckner's works. He seems to think that spiritual

¹² Federhofer, 109.

¹³ Ibid., 111.

¹⁴ Ibid., 112.

fulfillment is only possible through abnegation of personality. In short, Furtwängler speaks as a dilettante and both Weisse and I have the greatest trouble in conversing with him on artistic matters. In spite of this he remains the leading conductor. After the meal we went into the music room where the Bruckner debate continued.¹⁵

Most importantly, Schenker enhanced his understanding of organic growth through the concept of the *Urlinie*, the *Ursatz* [Fundamental structure] and *Fernhören* (roughly translated as ‘distance’ or ‘structural hearing’). The content of a musical work should be realised through the act of performance as a series of exfoliations of the *Ursatz*. Thus to Furtwängler there was no such thing as a definitive musical text. Each performance of a work was in a sense a process of recomposition; it had to have a strong element of improvisation and at the same time reveal the deep underlying structure of a work. The idea of improvisation is fundamental to Furtwängler’s understanding of the act of musical performance as an organic process. There is no sense in which this means that a performance is to be extemporized or, in more homely terms, ‘made it up as it goes along’. Furtwängler’s performances were meticulously planned beforehand through detailed study of the score; but the crucial difference is that Furtwängler conceived of a score as a living organism rather than a pre-determined semiotic plan. The term Improvisation is used here in the sense that a musical performance is an act of unpremeditated spontaneous creativity driven by the laws of organic growth and the human will. As Ferdinand Tönnies put it, ‘Organic growth must be seen as spontaneous process, and so too is the development of natural or instinctive will’.¹⁶

In Schenkerian terms the underlying deep structure of a work unfolds in performance from the fundamental or background structure (*Ursatz*) through the middle ground to the musical surface. According to Schenker, ‘the whole must be discovered through improvisation if the piece is to be more than a collection of individual parts and motives in the sense of a

¹⁵ Ibid., 116.

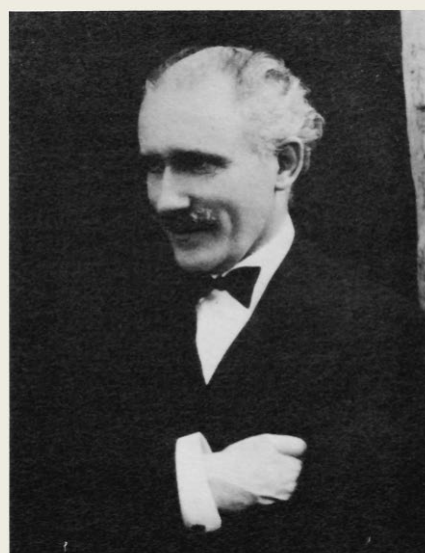
¹⁶ Tönnies p.97

schema' (Schenker, 1926). Schenker acted as a powerful catalyst in Furtwängler's understanding of this concept, although he was too independent-minded not to retain a strong sense of critical distance from the complete Schenkerian package. In his retrospective tribute he criticised Schenker for lack of clarity (somewhat ironically in view of his own convoluted prose style) and for the concept of the *Urlinie*, which he considered insufficiently thought through. It was the concept of *Fernhörens*, or structural hearing, that left the longest lasting impression.

Furtwängler and Toscanini in Berlin (1930)



Furtwängler in 1931



Arturo Toscanini (1867-1957) in 1926

The ideas first encountered in Schenker's *Ninth Symphony* and subsequently strengthened through personal contact brought together many of the diverse strands in Furtwängler's performance aesthetic. In particular the idea of a musical work as a living organism became the driver of a way of thinking about music and its realisation through the practice of performance which stands in contrast the idea of *werktreue*, or fidelity to the written score. This is nowhere more clearly seen than in the controversy between Furtwängler and his charismatic Italian rival: Arturo Toscanini (1867-1957). This distinctly 'German' performance aesthetic rooted in the traditions of philosophical idealism and the work of art

as a living organism was directly challenged by the enthusiastic reception given to Toscanini on his visit to Berlin with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in May 1930. The American Orchestra under their Italian conductor gave two concerts in the Philharmonie on 27 and 28 May as part of Berlin's *Kunstwoche*. In the light of Furtwängler's subsequent response, the programmes are worth giving in full:

27 May 1930: Haydn, Symphony No 101 (The 'Clock'); Debussy *La Mer*; Beethoven, *Leonore Overture No 3* (Op. 72a); Pizetti *Rondo Veneziano*;¹⁷ Mendelssohn Incidental Music to *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

28 May 1930: Beethoven, *Eroica* Symphony (Op 55); Brahms *Haydn Variations* (Op.56a); R.Strauss, *Tod und Verklärung*.

These concerts are the subject of a long Notebook entry headed *Toscanini in Germany: An article on the true situation of German music-making in 1930*. This extended polemic amounts to an uncompromising and strident attack on Toscanini's perceived shortcomings, most particularly as an interpreter of the German masterworks. Furtwängler does find something worthwhile in Toscanini's performances: he admires the tender cantabile sound he achieves, especially in the first movement of the Haydn symphony; but this has the effect of damning with faint praise once the familiar tropes of Furtwängler's thinking come to the fore. Toscanini is taken to task for his 'literal renderings' [notengetreue]. The idea that the written text as fixed in the printed score is inviolate, is to Furtwängler not only a meaningless cliché but a conceptual impossibility. A performance must above all else be faithful to the *spirit* of the work as revealed through the organic unfolding of the deep sub-structure. In his attempts to give a literal rendering Toscanini extinguishes the necessary

¹⁷ Not Donizetti, as given in AZN, p.73; NBKS p. 42

element of spontaneity and thus fails to achieve the equilibrium between the whole and the parts. In a critique of a performance of Haydn's Symphony No.101 Furtwängler writes:

The overall impression was therefore divided, because the essence of Haydn's music and its style, that inimitable mixture of cheerful sweetness and tautened energy which makes Haydn one of the greatest masters ever to have created anything, was not forthcoming, so that the individually apparent qualities of the performance hampered each other rather than complementing and mutually supporting one another.¹⁸

Unsurprisingly, Furtwängler is at his most proprietorial and coruscating when considering Toscanini's Beethoven performances. He takes Toscanini to task for failing to understand the functional meaning of the modulations in *Leonore* No.3 and for his resulting inability to communicate the spiritual and psychological content of the music:

The functional meaning of the modulations in the long term, which in absolute music such as Beethoven's play such a different role, seems to be completely unknown to his naïve feeling for opera music. But beyond this too, there is not the slightest attempt to transmute purely musical forms into a spiritual and psychological insight.¹⁹

For Furtwängler it was the expressive potential of purely musical forms that was paramount. In his attack on Toscanini's performance of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony Furtwängler makes his position quite clear: the former's perceived shortcomings as an interpreter, we are given to understand, are unsurprisingly and in no small measure due to his lack of understanding of the organic process. In commenting upon Toscanini's interpretation of a particular passage he makes the following generalisation:

Doubtless he has never understood the origin of this passage. But as a result, the same misunderstanding recurred many times during the symphony – revealing a lack of acquaintance with and a naïve ignorance of one of the main demands of properly

¹⁸ AZN pp.72-3; NBKS., p.41

¹⁹ AZN, p.74; NBKS., p. 42.

symphonic music, the demand for organic development, the living and organic growth of every melodic, rhythmic, harmonic formation out of what has gone before.²⁰

Toscanini is essentially an Italian operatic musician: the operatic Tutti and Aria are his musical modes of thought. Toscanini cannot deny his own self. The sonata ‘which in all its major examples is a German creation’ is therefore beyond his understanding; but in Strauss’s programmatic *Tod und Verklärung* ‘the theatrical Kapellmeister’s sense of effect was an advantage. Furtwängler even criticizes Toscanini’s inexpressive conducting gestures and lack of manual talent.

It is unclear whether this extensive Notebook entry was ever intended for publication. It is not included amongst Furtwängler’s published or unpublished formally composed essays. The uncut original text is to be found in the handwritten *Notizkalendar* ²¹ and transcribed in an incorrectly dated typescript where the stenographer has clearly had difficulty in reading Furtwängler’s notoriously problematic script: hence the minor Italian composer and Toscanini’s near contemporary from Parma, Ildebrando Pizetti (1880-1968), whose *Rondo Veneziano* Furtwängler loftily dismisses as unworthy of attention, is incorrectly transcribed as Donizetti, a misreading that has found its way into both published versions.²² The form in which it appears in the published German and English editions of the *Notebooks* is abridged: the passages omitted amount to more attacks on Toscanini, accusing him of posturing, lacking in talent and for his schoolmasterly [Schulmeister] insistence on precision above all else.

But the most significant redaction is the epigrammatic final sentence: Toscanini’s performances are described as ‘Sleek portrayals, obliging, lively, springy, without tragedy, without the daemonic, full of gleaming strength, completely cold, tedious. Just like a record’. Most damningly of all, Toscanini’s performances are without the two essentially German qualities of the tragic [Tragik] and the daemonic [Dämonie].²³

Furtwängler’s criticisms of Toscanini are driven not only his personal insecurities and clear resentment of a rival’s success on his home territory, but, more significantly for the present discussion, by his very German way of thinking about the act of musical performance. His attacks on the Italian’s ‘literal renderings’ and overreliance on technique

²⁰ AZN, p.77., NBKS, p.44

²¹ Originals (1912-54) SPK Berlin 55 Nachl. 13, Kasten 44

²² Zentralbibliothek Zürich Nachl. W. Furtwängler: S 95

²³ Ibid., typescript p.12. See also Theodor Adorno, ‘Die Meisterschaft des Maestro’, in *Musikalische Schriften I-III, Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt a M: Suhrkamp, 1978), Vol 16, pp. 52-67

stem from his belief in the conceptual impossibility of playing music according to the letter of the score without the element of spontaneous improvisation that is the lifeblood of every living performance. The non-rational qualities of spontaneity, improvisation and organic growth in performance belong to the ‘mythos’; literal rendering, precision and overreliance on technical perfection belong to the ‘logos’. It was the creative force embodied in the non-rational mythos that Goethe, ‘following the example of the ancients’ represented poetically as the daemonic [das Dämonische]; Furtwängler’s criticism of Toscanini’s performances as lacking in the daemonic is therefore particularly significant and hard-hitting.²⁴ The ideological dichotomy of nature versus artifice seen in the opposition between the non-rational and the overly-intellectual is a later manifestation of the distinction between mythos and logos: the encoded agenda is all that is natural, i.e. organic growth, is good; all that is artificial, i.e. technique, is bad.

Conclusion

There are no extant recordings of Furtwängler or Toscanini conducting Beethoven contemporaneous with Toscanini’s appearances in Berlin in May 1930. The following later performances may be consulted by way of comparison:

Beethoven, *Symphony No 3 in E flat major (Eroica)*, Op 55. NBC Symphony Orchestra, c. Toscanini (28 October, 1939)

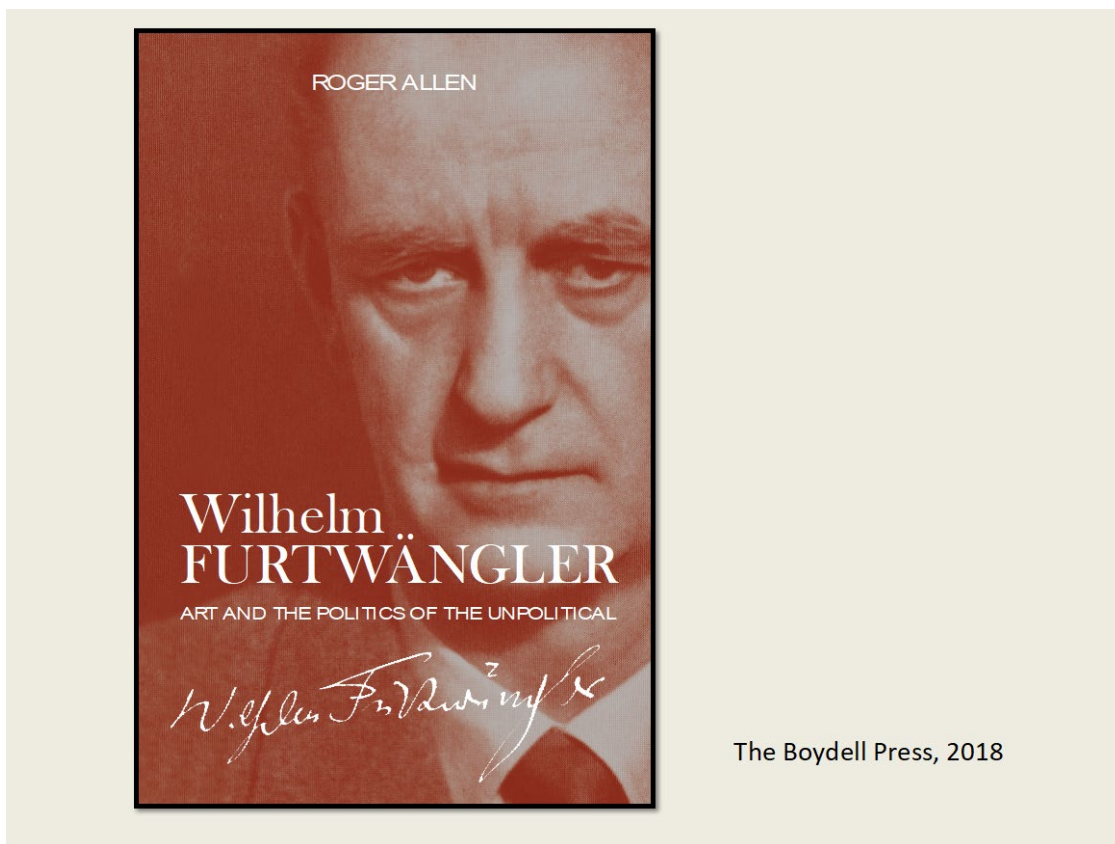
_____Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, c. Furtwängler (19 December, 1944)

Furtwängler’s 1944 performance of the *Eroica* is a particularly fine example of Improvisation as a performance aesthetic. Note in particular the controlled *accelerando* in the tonic/dominant oscillation in the coda of the first movement. In *Über das Dirigieren*, Wagner describes the finale as ‘a greatly expanded series of variations, and accordingly should be interpreted with as much variety as possible’ (p 45). His prescription for achieving cohesion, an appropriate modification of *tempo* (p.48). The Schenkerian idea of the unfolding of the deep structure through a process of spontaneous improvisation has its

²⁴ Angus Nicholls, *Goethe’s Concept of the Demonic after the Ancients* (Rochester NY: Camden House, 2006), p.31

counterpart in Wagner's ideas of flexible tempo modification. It might be suggested that although Schenker wrote his Ninth Symphony monograph as an attack on Wagnerian aesthetics, the performance practice of Wilhelm Furtwängler suggests that Schenker's ideas on performance were not as far removed from Wagner's as he liked to think.

For anyone who might like to pursue these ideas further, may I with all due modesty suggest my recent book which considers these ideas in more depth.



Roger Allen, *Wilhelm Furtwängler: Art Politics and the Unpolitical*

Roger Allen

Bern

2 November 2018