everything academic, his intense dissatisfaction with the commercial and official aspects of musical life. Above all, he reveals his sense of justice and his readiness to acknowledge merit, even in the camp of the enemy. From the first, Berlioz had taken his stand with the opponents of Gioachino Rossini and "the party of the dilettanti." But he has undertaken to review *William Tell* and he does so without *parti pris* and without hypocrisy.

Rossini's *William Tell*

(1834)

[PART 1]

Tired of hearing perpetual criticism of his works from the point of view of dramatic expression, still more tired, perhaps, of the blind admiration of his fanatical adherents, Rossini has found a very simple means of silencing the one and getting rid of the others. This has been to write a score—one seriously thought out, considered at leisure, and conscientiously executed from beginning to end in accordance with the requirements imposed upon all time by taste and good sense. He has written *William Tell.* This splendid work is thus to be regarded as an application of the author's new theories, as a sign of those greater and nobler capacities whose development the requirements of the sensual people for whom he has written until now have necessarily made impossible. It is from this point of view that we shall examine—without favor, but also without the least bias—Rossini's latest score.

If we consider only the testimonials that it has earned, the applause that it has called forth, and the conversions that it has made, *William Tell* has unquestionably had an immense success—a success that has taken the form of spontaneous admiration with some and of reflection and analysis with many others. And yet one is obliged to admit that to this glory it has not been able to add that other glory of which directors, and sometimes even authors, are more appreciative than of any other—popular success, that is, box-office success. The party of the dilettanti is hostile to *William Tell* and finds it cold and tiresome. The reasons for such a difference of opinion will become clear, we hope, in the course of the examination of this important production which we invite the reader to make with us. Let us follow the author step by step as he hurries along the new path that he has chosen, one that he would have reached the end of more rapidly and with a steadier pace if the force of deeply rooted habit had not caused him to cast an occasional glance behind him. These rare deviations once again bear out the old proverb: "In the arts one must take sides; there is no middle ground."

TEXT: "Guillaume-Tell, de Rossini." *Gazette musicale de Paris*, vol. 1 (1834), pp. 326–27, 336–39, 341–43, 349–51. Berlioz's essay was not written until five years after the first performance of the opera, which took place in Paris on August 3, 1829. Translation by Oliver Strunk.

For the first time Rossini has sought to compose an overture meeting the dramatic requirements recognized by every nation in Europe, Italy alone excepted. In making his debut in this style of instrumental music, entirely new to him, he has enlarged the form, so that his overture has in fact become a symphony in four distinct movements instead of the piece in two movements usually thought to be sufficient.

The first movement depicts most successfully, in our opinion, the calm of profound solitude, the solemn silence of nature when the elements and the human passions are at rest. It is a poetic beginning to which the animated scenes that are to follow form a most striking contrast—a contrast in expression, even a contrast in instrumentation, this first part being written for five solo violoncellos, accompanied by the rest of the cellos and contrabasses, while the entire orchestra is brought into play in the next movement, "The Storm."

In this, it seems to us, our author would have done well to abandon the square-cut rhythms, the symmetrical phrase structures, and the periodically returning cadences that he uses so effectively at all other times: "often a beautiful disorder is an effect of art," as an author says whose classical reserve is beyond question.[1] Beethoven proves this in the prodigious cataclysm of his pastoral symphony; at the same time he attains the end which the Italian composer lets us expect but does not give us. Several of the harmonic devices are remarkable and ingeniously brought in; among others, the chord of the minor ninth gives rise to effects that are indeed singular. But it is disappointing to rediscover in the storm scene of *William Tell* those staccato notes of the wind instruments which the amateurs call "drops of rain"; Rossini has already used this device in the little storm in the *Barber of Seville* and perhaps in other operas. In compensation he manages to draw from the bass drum without the cymbals picturesque noises in which the imagination readily rediscovers the reechoing of distant thunder among the anfractuosities of the mountains. The inevitable decrescendo of the storm is handled with unusual skill. In short, it is not arresting or overpowering like Beethoven's storm, a musical tableau which will perhaps remain forever unequalled, and it lacks that sombre, desolate character which we admire so much in the introduction to *Iphigenia in Tauris*, but it is beautiful and full of majesty. Unfortunately the musician is always in evidence; we never lose sight of him in his combinations, even in those which seem the most eccentric. Beethoven on the other hand has known how to reveal himself wholly to the attentive listener: it is no longer an orchestra that one hears, it is no longer music, but rather the tumultuous voice of the heavenly torrents blended with the uproar of the earthly ones, with the furious claps of thunder, with the crashing of uprooted trees, with the gusts of an exterminating wind, with the frightened cries of men and the lowing of the herds. This is terrifying, it makes one shudder, the illusion is complete. The emotion that Rossini arouses in the same situation falls far short of attaining the same degree of— But let us continue.

1. Boileau, *L' Art poétique*, Canto 2, line 72.

The storm is followed by a pastoral scene, refreshing in the extreme; the melody of the English horn in the style of the *ranz des vaches*[2] is delicious, and the gamboling of the flute above this peaceful song is ravishing in its freshness and gaiety. We note in passing that the triangle, periodically sounding its tiny pianissimo strokes, is in its right place here; it represents the little bell sounded by the flocks as they saunter quietly along while the shepherds call and answer with their joyful songs. "So you find dramatic meaning in this use of the triangle," someone asks us; "in that case, pray be good enough to tell us what is represented by the violins, violas, basses, clarinets, and so forth." To this I should reply that these are musical instruments, essential to the existence of the art, while the triangle, being only a piece of iron whose sound does not belong to the class of sounds with definite pitch, ought not to be heard in the course of a sweet and tranquil movement unless its presence there is perfectly motivated, failing which it will seem only bizarre and ridiculous.

With the last note of the English horn, which sings the pastoral melody, the trumpets enter with a rapid incisive fanfare on B, the major third in the key of G, established in the previous movement, and in two measures this B becomes the dominant in E major, thus determining in a manner as simple as it is unexpected the tonality of the Allegro that follows. This last part of the overture is treated with a *brio* and a verve that invariably excite the transports of the house. Yet it is built upon a rhythm that has by now become hackneyed, and its theme is almost exactly the same as that of the Overture to *Fernand Cortez*. The staccato figuration of the first violins, bounding from C-sharp minor to G-sharp minor, is a particularly grateful episode, ingeniously interpolated into the midst of this warlike instrumentation; it also provides a means of returning to the principal theme and gives to this return an irresistible impetuosity which the author has known how to make the most of. The peroration of the saucy Allegro has genuine warmth. In short, despite its lack of originality in theme and rhythm, and despite its somewhat vulgar use of the bass drum, most disagreeable at certain moments, constantly pounding away on the strong beats as in a *pas redoublé* or the music of a country dance, one has to admit that the piece as a whole is treated with undeniable mastery and with an élan more captivating, perhaps, than any that Rossini has shown before, and that the overture to *William Tell* is the work of an enormous talent, so much like genius that it might easily be mistaken for it.

[PART 2]

Act 1 opens with a chorus that has a beautiful and noble simplicity. Placid joy is the feeling that the composer was to paint, and it is difficult to imagine anything better, more truthful, and at the same time more delicate than the melody he has given to these lines:

2. A traditional Swiss melody, played on the alphorn, to gather cows.

How clear a day the skies foretell!
Come bid it welcome with a song!

The vocal harmonies, supported by an accompaniment in the style of the *ranz des vaches*, breathe happiness and peace. Towards the end of the piece, the modulation from G to E-flat becomes original because of the way in which it is presented and makes an excellent effect.

The *romance* that follows ("Hasten aboard my boat") does not seem to us to be on the same level. Its melody is not always as naive as it should be for the song of a fisherman of Unterwald; many phrases are soiled by that affected style that the singers with their banal embellishments have unfortunately put into circulation. Besides, one scarcely knows why a Swiss should be accompanied by two harps.

Tell, who has been silent throughout the introduction and the fisherman's first stanza, comes forward with a measured monologue full of character; it sets before us the concentrated indignation of a lover of liberty, deeply proud of soul. Its instrumentation is perfect, likewise its modulations, although in the vocal part there are some intervals whose intonation is quite difficult.

At this point the general defect of the work as a whole begins to make itself felt. The scene is too long, and since the three pieces of which it consists are not very different in their coloring, the result is a tiring monotony which is further accentuated by the silence of the orchestra during the *romance*. In general, unless the stage is animated by a powerful dramatic interest, it is seldom that this kind of instrumental inactivity does not cause a fatal indifference, at least at the Opéra. Aside from this, the house is so enormous that a single voice, singing way at the back of the stage, reaches the listener deprived of that warm vibrancy that is the life of music and without which a melody can seldom stand out clearly and make its full effect.

After the intoning of a *ranz des vaches* with its echoes, in which four horns in G and E represent the Alpine trumpet, an Allegro vivace revives the attention. This is a chorus, full of impassioned verve, and it would be admirable if the meaning of the text were just the opposite of what it actually is. The key is E minor and the melody is so full of alarm and agitation that at the first performance, not hearing the words, as usually happens in large theatres, I expected the news of some catastrophe—at the very least, the assassination of Father Melchthal. Yet, far from it, the chorus sings:

From the mountains a summons
To repose sounds a call;
A festival shall lighten
Our labors in the field.

It is the first time that Rossini has been guilty of this particular kind of incongruity.

After this chorus, which is the second in this scene, there follows an accompanied recitative and then a third chorus, *maestoso*, chiefly remarkable for the

rare felicity of the scale from the B in the middle register to the high B which the soprano spreads obliquely against the harmonic background. But the action does not progress, and this defect is made still more glaring by a fourth chorus, rather more violent than joyous in character, sung throughout in full voice, scored throughout for full orchestra, and accompanied by great strokes of the bass drum on the first beat of each measure. Wholly superfluous from the dramatic point of view, the piece has little musical interest. Ruthless cuts have been made in the present score, yet great care has been taken to delete nothing here; this would have been too reasonable. Those who make cuts know only how to cut out the good things; in castrating, it is precisely the noblest parts that are removed. By actual count, then, there are four fully developed choruses here, to do honor to "the clear day" and "the rustic festival," to celebrate "labor and love," and to speak of "the horns that reecho close by the roaring torrents." This is an awkward blunder, especially at the beginning, this monotony in the choice of means, wholly unjustified by the requirements of the drama, whose progress it aimlessly brings to a standstill. It appears that the work has been dominated at many points by the same unfortunate influence which led the composer astray at this one. I say "the composer," for a man like Rossini always gets what he wants from his poet, and it is well known that for *William Tell* he insisted on a thousand changes which M. Jouy did not refuse him.

Lack of variety even affects the melodic style: the vocal part is full of repeated dominants, and the composer turns about the fifth step of the scale with tiresome persistence, as though it held for him an almost irresistible attraction. Here are some examples from Act 1. During the fanfare of the four horns in E-flat, Arnold sings:

> Have a care! Have a care!
> The approach of the Austrian tyrant
> Is announced by the horns from the mountain.

All these words are on a single note—B-flat. In the duet that follows, Arnold again resorts to this B-flat, the dominant in E-flat, for the recitation of two whole lines:

> Under the yoke of such oppression
> What great heart would not be cast down?

Further on, after the modulation to D minor, Tell and Arnold sing alternately on A, the dominant of the new key:

> TELL: Let's be men and we shall win!
> ARNOLD: What revenge can end these affronts?
> TELL: Ev'ry evil rule is unstable.

Against this obstinate droning of the dominant, the five syllables on D, F, and C-sharp at the ends of the phrases can barely be made out. The key changes to F, and the dominant, C, appears again immediately:

> ARNOLD: Think of all you may lose!
> TELL: No matter!
> ARNOLD: What acclaim can we hope from defeat?

And later on:

> ARNOLD: Your expectation?
> TELL: To be victorious,
> And yours as well; I must know what you hope.

Nor is this all; the dominants continue:

> When the signal sounds for the combat,
> My friend, I shall be there.

The E-flat fanfare of the horns begins again and Tell exclaims:

> The signal! Gessler comes.
> Even now as he taunts us,
> Willing slave of his whim, are you waiting
> To entreat the disdain of a favoring glance?

These four lines are entirely on the dominant, B-flat. True to his favorite note, Tell again returns to it in order to say, near the end of the movement:

> The music calls; I hear the wedding chorus;
> Oh, trouble not the shepherds at their feast
> Nor spoil their pleasures with your sad lament!

A defect as serious as this does immense harm to the general effect of the fine duet. I say "fine," for despite this chiming of dominants, it is really admirable in all other respects: the instrumentation is treated with unusual care and delicacy; the modulations are varied; Arnold's melody ("Oh Mathilda, my soul's precious idol") is suave in the extreme; many of Tell's phrases are full of dramatic accents; and except for the music of the line "But at virtue's call I obey," the whole has great nobility.

The pieces that follow are all of them more or less noteworthy. We cite in preference the A minor chorus:

> Goddess Hymen,
> Thy bright feast day
> Dawns for us.

This would have a novel, piquant effect if it were sung as one has the right to demand that all choruses should be at the Royal Academy of Music. The pantomimic Allegro of the archers also has great energy, and several *airs de danse* are distinguished by their fresh melodies and the exceptional finish of their orchestration.

The grand finale which crowns the act seems to us much less satisfactory. The beginning brings in the voices and orchestra a return of the dominant pedal-points which have been absent for some time. After a few exclamations by the chorus of Swiss, one hears Gessler's soldiers:

The hour of justice now is striking.
The murd'rer be accursed!
No quarter!

All this is recited on B, the dominant in E minor, which has already been used as a pedal by the basses of the orchestra during the first nineteen measures of the introduction. Confronted by this persistent tendency of the composer's to fall back on the most familiar and monotonous of musical formulas, one can only suppose it to be due to sheer laziness. It is very practical indeed to write a phrase for orchestra whose harmony turns about the two fundamental chords of the key and then, when one has a leftover bit of text to add to it, to set this to the dominant, the note common to the two chords—this saves the composer much time and trouble. After this introductory movement there follows a chorus ("Virgin, adored by ev'ry Christian"); the tempo is slow—I might say, almost dragging—and the piece is accompanied in a very ordinary fashion, so that its effect is to hold up the action and the musical interest most inappropriately. Little is added by the syllabic asides of the soldiers' chorus during the singing of the women:

How they tremble with fright!
Do as we bid!
Your own lives are at stake!

The music for these words is neither menacing nor ironic: it is simply a succession of notes, mere padding to fill out the harmonies, expressing neither contempt nor anger. At length, when the women have finished their long prayer, Rudolf—Gessler's most ardent satellite—breaks out in a violent rage. The orchestra takes a tumultuous headlong plunge, the trombones bellow, the violins utter shrill cries, the instruments vie with one another in elaborating "the horrors of plundering and pillage" with which the Swiss are threatened; unfortunately, the whole is a copy of the finale of *La Vestale*. The figuration of the basses and violas, the strident chords of the brass, the incisive scales of the first violins, the syllabic accompaniment of the second chorus beneath the broad melody of the soprano—Spontini has them all. Let us add, however, that the *stretta* of this chorus contains a magnificent effect due wholly to Rossini. It is the syncopated descending scale for the whole chorus, singing in octaves, while trebles, flutes, and first violins forcefully sustain the major third E to G-sharp; against this interval the notes D-sharp, A, and F-sharp of the lower voices collide in violent agitation. This idea alone, in its grandeur and force, completely effaces all previous sections of the finale. These are now wholly forgotten. At the beginning one was indifferent—in the end one is moved; the author seemed to lack invention—he has redeemed himself and astonished us with an unexpected stroke. Rossini is full of such contrast.

[PART 3]

The curtain rises on Act 2. We are witnesses of a hunt; horses cross the stage at a gallop. The fanfare which we heard two or three times during the preced-

ing act resounds again; it is differently scored, to be sure, and linked to a characteristic chorus, but it is a misfortune that so undistinguished a theme should be heard so frequently. The development of the drama imposed it, the musician will tell us. Nevertheless, as we have said before, Rossini might have obtained from his librettist a different arrangement of the scenes and thus have avoided these numerous chances for monotony. He failed to do so and, now that it is too late, he regrets it. Let us go on. Halfway through the chorus just mentioned there is a diatonic passage played in unison by the horns and the four bassoons that has an energy all its own, and the piece as a whole would be captivating were it not for the torture inflicted upon the listener who is at all sensitive by the innumerable strokes of the bass drum on the strong beats, whose effect is the more unfortunate since they again call attention to rhythmic constructions that are completely lacking in originality.

To all this I am sure that Rossini will reply: "Those constructions which seem to you so contemptible are precisely the ones that the public understands the most readily." "Granted," I should answer; "but if you profess so great a respect for the propensities of the vulgar, you ought also to limit yourself to the most commonplace things in melody, harmony, and instrumentation. This is just what you have taken care not to do. Why, then, do you condemn rhythm alone to vulgarity? Besides, in the arts, criticism cannot and should not take account of considerations of this kind. Am I on the same footing as an amateur who hears an opera once every three or four months, I who have occupied myself exclusively with music for so many years? Haven't my ears become more delicate than those of the student whose hobby it is to play flute duets on Sundays? Am I as ignorant as the shopkeeper on the Rue Saint-Denis? In a word, do you not admit that there is progress in music, and in criticism a quality that distinguishes it from blind instinct, namely taste and judgment? Of course you do. This being the case, the ease or difficulty with which the public understands new departures counts for little; this has to do with material results, with business, while it is art that concerns us. Besides, the public—especially in Paris—is not as stupid as some would like to think; it does not reject innovations if they are presented with the right sort of candor. The people who are hostile to innovations are—need I name them?—the *demi-savans*. No, frankly; excuses of this kind are unacceptable. You have written a commonplace rhythm, not because the public would have rejected another, but because it was easier and above all quicker to repeat what had already been used over and over again than to search for more novel and more distinguished combinations."

The distant "Bell Chorus," a contrast in style to the chorus that preceded it, seems to bear out this opinion of ours. Here the whole is full of charm—pure, fresh, and novel. The end of the piece even presents a chord succession whose effect is delightful, although the harmonies succeed one another in an order prohibited by every rule adopted since the schools began. I refer to the diatonic succession of triads in parallel motion which occurs in connection with the fourfold repetition of the line, "The night has come." A Master of Musical Science would call this kind of part-writing most incorrect: the basses and first

sopranos are continually at the octave, the basses and second sopranos continually at the fifth. After the C major triad come those in B major and A minor and finally that in G major, the prevailing tonic. The agreeable effect resulting from these four consecutive fifths and octaves is due, in the first place, to the short pause that separates the chords, a pause sufficient to isolate the harmonies one from another and to give to each fundamental the aspect of a new tonic; in the second place, to the naïve coloring of the piece, which not only authorizes this infraction of a time-honored rule, but makes it highly picturesque. Beethoven has already written a similar succession of triads in the first movement of his heroic symphony; everyone knows the majestic nobility of this passage. Believe then, if you must, in absolute rules!

Hardly has this evening hymn died away like a graceful sunset when we are greeted with another return of the horn fanfare with its inevitable pedal point on the dominant:

> There sounds a call, the horn of Gessler.
> It bids us return; we obey it.

The chief huntsman and the chorus recite these two lines in their entirety on B-flat. Our earlier observations have here a more direct and a more particular application.

With the following number the composer begins a higher flight; this is quite another style. Mathilda's entrance is preceded by a long ritornello doubly interesting as harmony and as dramatic expression. There is real passion in this, and that feverish agitation that animates the heart of a young woman obliged to conceal her love. Then comes a recitative, perfect in its diction and admirably commented upon by the orchestra, which reproduces fragments of the ritornello. After this introduction follows the well-known *romance*, "Somber forests."

Rossini has, in our opinion, written few pieces as elegant, as fresh, as distinguished in their melody, and as ingenious in their modulations as this one: aside from the immense merit of the vocal part and the harmony, it involves a style of accompaniment for the violas and first violins that is full of melancholy, also—at the beginning of each stanza—a pianissimo effect for the kettledrum that rouses the listener's attention in a lively manner. One seems to hear one of those natural sounds whose cause remains unknown, one of those strange noises which attract our attention on a clear day in the deep forest and which redouble in us the feeling of silence and isolation. This is poetry, this is music, this is art—beautiful, noble, and pure, just as its votaries would have it always.

This style is sustained until the end of the act, and from henceforth marvel follows marvel. In the duet between Arnold and Mathilda, so full of chivalrous passion, we mention as a blemish the long pedal of the horns and trumpets on G, alternately tonic and dominant, the effect of which is at certain moments atrocious. Then too we shall reproach the composer for having blindly followed the example of the older French composers, who would have thought them-

selves disgraced if they had failed to bring in the trumpets at once whenever the words made any mention of glory or victory. In this respect Rossini treats us like the dilettanti of 1803, like the admirers of Sédaine and Monsigny.[3]

> Ah, return to war and to glory,
> Take wing and make me proud once more!
> One gains a name if one's a victor;
> The world will then approve my choice.

"Out with the obbligato fanfare," Rossini will have said on reading this in his libretto; "I am writing for France." Finally, it seems to us that this duet, which is developed at considerable length, would gain if there were no repetition of the motive which the two singers have together, "The one who adores you." Since the tempo of this passage is slower than the rest, the repetition necessarily brings with it two interruptions which break up the general pace and detract from the animated effect of the scene by prolonging it uselessly.

But from this point until the final chord of the second act, this defect does not recur. Walter and Tell enter unexpectedly; Mathilda takes flight, Arnold remains to listen to bitter reproaches on his love for the daughter of the Helvetian tyrant. Nothing could be more beautiful, more expressive, more noble than this recitative, both in the vocal parts and in the orchestra. Two phrases are particularly striking in the verity of their expression. One is Walter's counsel:

> Perhaps, though, you should alter
> And take the pains to know us better.

The other is Tell's apostrophe:

> Do you know what it is to feel love for one's country?

At length, the tragic ritornello of the trio is unfolded. Here we confess that, despite our role as critic and the obligations that it brings with it, it is impossible for us to apply the cold blade of the scalpel to the heart of this sublime creation. What should we analyze? The passion, the despair, the tears, the lamentations of a son horrified by the news of his father's murder? God forbid! Or should we make frivolous observations about details, quibble with the author over a *gruppetto* or a solo passage for the flute or an obscure moment in the second violin part? Not I! If others have the courage for it, let them attempt it. As for me, I have none at all—I can only join the crowd in shouting: "Beautiful! Superb! Admirable! Ravishing!"

But I shall have to be sparing of my enthusiastic adjectives, for I am going to need them for the rest of the act, which remains almost continuously on this same high level. The arrival of the three cantons affords the composer an opportunity to write three pieces in three wholly different styles. The first

3. The year in which Berlioz was born. Michel-Jean Sedaine (1719–1797), librettist, and Pierre-Alexandre Monsigny (1729–1817), composer, sustained a highly successful operatic collaboration during the 1760s and '70s.

chorus is in a strong, robust style which paints for us a working people with calloused hands and arms that never tire. In the second chorus and the chaste sweetness of its melody we recognize the timid shepherds; the expression of their fears is ravishing in its grace and naïveté. The fishermen from the canton of Uri arrive by boat from the lake while the orchestra imitates as faithfully as music can the movements and the cadenced efforts of a crew of oarsmen. Hardly have these latecomers disembarked when the three choruses unite in a syllabic ensemble, rapidly recited in half voice and accompanied by the pizzicati of the strings and an occasional muffled chord from the wind instruments:

> Before you, Tell, you see
> Three peoples as one band,
> Our rights our only arms
> Against a vile oppressor.

First recited by the chorus of fishermen and then taken up by the two other choruses, who mingle with it their exclamations and their laconic asides, this phrase is dramatically most realistic. Here is a crowd in which each individual, moved by hope and fear, can scarcely hold back the sentiments that agitate him, a crowd in which all wish to speak and each man interrupts his neighbor. Be it said in passing that the execution of this *coro parlato* is extremely difficult, a fact that may in part excuse the choristers of the Opéra, who usually recite it very badly indeed.

But Tell is about to speak and all grow silent—*arrectis auribus adstant.*[4] He stirs them, he inflames them, he apprises them of Melchthal's cruel death, he promises them arms; finally he asks them directly:

> TELL: Do you agree to help?
> CHORUS: We one and all agree.
> TELL: You will join us?
> CHORUS: We will.
> TELL: Even in death?
> CHORUS: We will.

Then, uniting their voices, they swear a grave and solemn oath to "the God of kings and of shepherds" to free themselves from slavery and to exterminate their tyrants. Their gravity under these circumstances, which would be absurd if they were Frenchmen or Italians, is admirable for a cold-blooded people like the Swiss, whose decisions, if less precipitate, are not lacking in steadfastness or in assurance of attainment. The movement becomes animated only at the end, when Arnold catches sight of the first rays of the rising sun:

> ARNOLD: The time has come.
> WALTER: For us this is a time of danger.
> TELL: Nay, of vict'ry!
> WALTER: What answer shall we give him?
> ARNOLD: To arms!

4. "They stand by with attentive ears." Vergil, *Aeneid* 1. 152. [Fairclough, trans.].

> ARNOLD, TELL, WALTER: To arms!

Then the whole chorus, the soloists, the orchestra, and the percussion instruments, which have not been heard since the beginning of the act, one and all take up the cry: "To arms!" And at this last and most terrible war cry which bursts forth from all these breasts, shivering in the dawn of the first day of liberty, the entire instrumental mass hurls itself like an avalanche into an impetuous Allegro!

Ah, it is sublime! Let us take breath.

[PART 4]

We left Arnold in despair, thinking only of war and vengeance. His father's death, imposing new obligations upon him, has torn him abruptly from the attraction that had lured him little by little towards the ranks of his country's enemies. Filled with gloomy thoughts, his words to Mathilda at the beginning of Act 3 reveal his fierce and somber pre-occupation:

> ARNOLD: I tarry to avenge my father.
> MATHILDA: What is your hope?
> ARNOLD: It is blood that I hope for;
> I renounce Fortune's favors all,
> I renounce all love and all friendship,
> Even glory, even marriage.
> MATHILDA: And I, Melchthal?
> ARNOLD: My father's dead.

The expression of these agitated sentiments dominates the whole of the long ritornello which precedes and prepares the entrance of the two lovers. After a short but energetic recitative, in which Arnold sings another five-measure phrase on a single note, an E, the great agitato aria of Mathilda begins.

At the outset, this piece is not as happy in its choice of melody and in its dramatic expression as we find it at the end. The composer seems to have begun it in cold blood and to have come to life by degrees as he penetrated his subject. The first phrase is what we might call "a phrase in compartments" *(une phrase à compartimens);* it belongs to that vast family of melodies consisting of eight measures, four of them on the tonic and as many on the dominant, examples of which occur at the beginning of nearly every concerto of Viotti, Rode, Kreutzer, and their imitators. This is a style in which each development can be foreseen well in advance; in composing this, his latest and perhaps his most important work, it would seem to us that Rossini ought to have abandoned it once and for all. Aside from this, the two lines that follow cry out for an expressive musical setting:

> In my heart solitude unending!
> Shall you never be at my side?

Rossini has failed to give it to them. What he has written is cold and commonplace, despite an instrumentation that might have been less tortured in its superabundant luxuriousness. As though to efface the memory of this somewhat scholastic beginning, the peroration is admirable in its originality, its grace, and its sentiment. The liveliest imagination could not have asked the composer for a style of declamation more truthful or more noble than that in which he has caused Mathilda to exclaim, with melancholy abandon:

> To the land of the stranger
> Whose shore you seek, I may not follow
> To offer you my tender care,
> And yet all my heart shall be with you,
> To all your woes it shall be true.

We are not as satisfied with the ensemble for the two voices which closes the scene. As the farewell of two lovers who separate, never to see each other again, it should have been heartbreaking; apart from Mathilda's chromatic vocalization on the word "Melchthal," it is only brilliant and overscored for the wind instruments, without contrasts or oppositions.

At the same time, it is greatly to be regretted—even if only because of the fine flashes of inspiration which we have mentioned—that the scene is entirely suppressed in the performances being given today. At present the act begins with the chorus of Gessler's soldiers, who are engaged in a brutal and arrogant celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the conquest of Switzerland and its addition to the German Empire.

After this there is dancing, of course; at the Opéra, an excuse for a ballet would be found, even in a representation of the Last Judgment. What difference does it make?—the *airs de danse,* all of them saturated with the Swiss melodic idiom, have rare elegance and are written with care (I except only the Allegro in G called the "Pas de soldats"). It is in the midst of this ballet that we meet the celebrated Tyrolienne, so popular nowadays, remarkable for its modulations and for the vocal rhythm which serves as its accompaniment. Before Rossini, no one writing for the stage had thought of using an immediate succession of chords having the character of contrasted tonic harmonies, such as the one that occurs in the thirty-third measure, where the melody outlines an arpeggio within the major triad on B, only to fall back at once into the one on G, the true tonic. This little piece, doubtless written one morning at the breakfast table, has had a truly incredible success, while beauties of an incomparably higher order have won only very limited approval, although this approval is, to be sure, of quite another sort than that which has welcomed the pretty Tyrolienne so graciously. With some composers, the applause of the crowd is useful but scarcely flattering—for these artists, only the opinion of the discriminating has real value. With others it is just the opposite: only quantity has value, while quality is almost worthless. Until their more frequent dealings with Europeans taught them the value of money, the American Indians preferred a hundred sous to a single gold piece.

After the dances comes the famous scene of the apple. Its style is in general nervous and dramatic. One of Tell's phrases in his dialogue with Gessler seems to us to have real character:

> GESSLER: My captive shall he be.
> TELL: Let us hope he may be your last.

On the other hand, a movement that seems to us absolutely false in sentiment and expression is that in which Tell, concerned for his son, takes him aside, embraces him, and orders him to leave:

> My heart's dearest treasure,
> Receive my embraces,
> Then depart from me.

Instead of this, it would have been enough to have made him a sign and to have uttered quickly these two words: "Save thyself!" To elaborate upon this idea in an Andante would perhaps have done no harm in an Italian opera, a really Italian one, but in a work like *William Tell,* where reason has been admitted to full civic rights, where not everything is directed towards permitting the singers to shine, such a piece is more than an incongruity—it is an outright nonsense.

The recitative that follows exactly meets the requirements that we have just laid down:

> Rejoin your mother! These my orders:
> That the flame on the mountains now be lighted
> To give to our allies the command to rebel.

This precipitate utterance throws an even more glaring light on the faulty expression that shocked us when this idea was presented before. In compensation, the composer offers us Tell's touching instructions to his little son:

> Move not a muscle, be calm and fearless,
> In prayer bend a suppliant knee!

How admirably the accompaniment of the violoncellos weeps beneath the voice of this father whose heart is breaking as he embraces his boy! The orchestra, almost silent, is heard only in pizzicato chords, each group followed by a rest of half a measure. The bassoons, pianissimo, sustain long plaintive notes. How filled all this is with emotion and anguish—how expressive of the anticipated great event about to be accomplished!

> My son, my son, think of thy mother!
> Patiently she waits for us both.

These last phrases of the melody are irresistibly lifelike; they go straight to the heart.

Let the partisans of popular opinion say what they please. If this sublime inspiration arouses only polite and infrequent applause, there is something about it that is nobler, higher, worthier for a man to take pride in having cre-

ated, than there is in a graceful Tyrolienne, even though it be applauded by a hundred thousand and sung by the women and children of all Europe. There is a difference between the pretty and the beautiful. To pretend to side with the majority, and to value prettiness at the expense of that which addresses itself to the heart's most intimate sentiments, this is the part of the shrewd businessman, but not that of the artist conscious of his dignity and independence.

The finale of this act includes, in its first section, an admirably energetic passage which is invariably annihilated at the Opéra by the inadequacy of the singer; this is the sudden outburst of the timid Mathilda:

> I claim him as my ward in the name of the sov'reign.
> In indignation a people is watching,
> Take care, take care, he is safe in my arms.

This general indignation is skillfully portrayed, both in the vocal part and in the orchestra; it is as lifelike as Gluck and Spontini. As an accompaniment to the ingeniously modulated melody of the sopranos, the syllabic theme of the men's chorus ("When their pride has misled them") makes an excellent effect. On the other hand, the *stretta* of this chorus consists only of furious cries; to be sure, they are motivated by the text, but they arouse no emotion in the listener, whose ears are needlessly outraged. Here again, it would perhaps have been better to change the wording of the libretto, for it would be difficult if not impossible to set the line, "Cursèd be Gessler's name," except as a savage vociferation having neither melody nor rhythm and paralyzing by its violence all feeling for harmony.

Act 4 reestablishes the individual passions and affords a needed relaxation after the uproar of the preceding scenes. Arnold revisits his father's deserted cottage; his heart filled with a hopeless love and with projects of vengeance, all his senses stirred by the recollections of bloody carnage always before his mind's eye, he breaks down, overcome by the enormity of the affecting contrast. All is calm and silent. Here is peace—and the tomb. And yet an infinity separates him from that breast upon which, at a moment like this, he would so gladly pour out his tears of filial piety, from that heart close to which his own would beat less sadly. Mathilda shall never be his. The situation is poetic, even poignantly melancholy, and it has inspired the musician to write an air which we do not hesitate to pronounce the most beautiful of the entire score. Here the young Melchthal pours out all the sufferings of his soul; here his mournful recollections of the past are painted in the most ravishing of melodies; harmony and modulation are employed only to reinforce the melodic expression, never out of purely musical caprice.

The Allegro with choruses, which follows, is full of spirit and makes a worthy crown for an equally fine scene. At the same time, the piece has only a very indifferent effect upon the public, to judge from the applause with which it is received. For the many it is too refined; delicate shadings like these nearly

always escape their attention. Alas, if one could only reduce the public to an assembly of fifty sensible and intelligent persons, how blissful it would be to be an artist!

Since the first performance, the trio accompanied only by the wind instruments has been suppressed, also the piece immediately following it, the prayer sung during the storm. The cut is most inopportune, particularly in view of the prayer, a masterpiece in the picturesque style, whose musical conception is novel enough to have warranted some allowance being made in its favor. Aside from the mise-en-scène, considerations having to do with the decor or the stage machinery were no doubt responsible for the suppression of this interesting part of the score. The thing was accordingly done without hesitation—everyone knows that at the Opéra the directors *support* the music.

From this moment until the final chorus, we shall find nothing but padding. The outbursts of the orchestra while Tell struggles on the lake with the storm, the fragments of recitative interrupted by the chorus—these are things that the musician writes with confidence that no one will listen to them.

The final chorus is another story:

> About us all changes and grows.
> Fresh the air!

This is a beautiful harmonic broadening-out. The *ranz des vaches* floats gracefully above these massive chords and the hymn of Swiss liberty soars upward to heaven, calm and imposing, like the prayer of a just man.

157 Robert Schumann

In contrast to Hector Berlioz, the professional man of letters, Robert Schumann brings to his critical writing romantic idealism and a high purpose. As he tells us himself in his introductory essay, the founding of the *Neue Zeitschrift* in 1834 was a direct outgrowth of his dissatisfaction with the existing state of music and of his desire to bring about a rehabilitation of the poetic principle, "the very thing," as he said later on, "by which we should like to have these pages distinguished from others." The editorial position of the new journal is perhaps most forcefully summed up in Schumann's "speech from the throne" for 1839: "A stern attitude towards foreign trash, benevolence towards aspiring younger artists, enthusiasm for everything masterly that the past has bequeathed." On the whole, these aims are not so very different from those implicit in Berlioz; it is simply that Schumann has less self-interest and less worldly wisdom and that he goes about his task in a more serious way, more humbly and more charitably, if also with greater chauvinism.