

This meant ideally a continuation and expansion of listener engagement, and the possibility that not everyone would be shut out. However this need not have meant the takeover of the low-brows. Practically all of Berlioz is connected to specific extramusical meaning, without an awareness of which, comprehension, and enjoyment, are incomplete. But there is still the possibility, the necessity of musical listening. Prosaic elements did not necessarily eliminate poetry.

In this connection it is too often forgotten that, while programs were expressed in nonmusical language, those language sources were very frequently poetic. Newman points out that preromantic composers were practically indentured servants, with little opportunity for extramusical accomplishment. In contrast, many nineteenth-century musical figures were extraordinarily cultured, intimately aware of the intellectual and artistic life of the time. They brought that awareness to their compositions, which were not only expressions of inner feeling but expressions of a desire to share and teach.⁸⁶

If program music constituted a diminishing of musical feeling, then there were still great compensations. Music, though a handmaid, introduced listeners to varieties of great feeling from other discourses and contexts. In this way it actually countered the potential insularity—and certainly the later elitism—of absolute approaches. And, since preparation and synthesis were required to properly read the program, since the listener had to work, the possibility of progress and empowerment far exceeded the dangers of philistinism.⁸⁷

This is the situation in the nineteenth century, or at least one possible rendering of the situation. Words, which mean and are understood, added to music, which expresses and stimulates our higher feelings, add up to edification and understanding and union.⁸⁸ This can still be true, and even more than was contemplated in the original discussions. The words in question are not just Liszt's authorized, authorizing ones. They are also critical, analytical, historical, theoretical, and instinctual. Music communicates, and we communicate about it.

In this summary the terms, possibilities, and complications seem to multiply. In the next chapter, then, I will apply the analogies of montage, counterpoint, and program to specific instances,