

Interpreting Classical Music in Film

IN THE LAST CHAPTER I suggested that musical and extramusical programs are everywhere, whether explicit or effaced, whether intended or apprehended. Program extends far beyond Berlioz, if we are willing to expand our definition. In the first instance, program composers attached something external to the music which was to aid and direct experience and interpretation. But programs do not end at, nor are they limited to, authorial intent. We have discussed how this form can bring in the spectator. As the nineteenth-century Belgian composer and historian François Fétiis observed: “the large audience . . . will never listen to a symphony, quartet, or other composition of this order without outlining a program *for itself* during the performance, according to the grandiose, lively, impetuous, serenely soothing, or melancholy character of the music.”¹

Fétiis extends the site of programmatic creation, and this extension will be the focus of this chapter. I have suggested that meaning in music, not to mention feeling or affect, comes not through musical/verbal correspondence, in which a note *equals* a word and a phrase *equals* a phrase, but through series of multivalent and multifarious juxtapositions. Now I wish to develop the idea that these things come not only from the composer, but also through listener transformation of musical material into some verbal, conceptual, or even sensuous analogue. This is, if you will, intellectual, overtone, even emotional montage. Nineteenth-century, and nineteenth-century-derived, absolutists resist the notion, but their transposition of music through criticism (and the imagery used therein) to words and responses testifies to the power and universality of the process.

This is how I wish to situate classical music in film. Liszt