

Goepp surmounts such challenges with a remarkable bit of musical anthropomorphizing.

And now the [musical] story really begins: the characters are described; now they act and talk; the several musical ideas are discussed, singly or together, to new surprises of climax and beauty; they take on the guise often of new melodies, or melodies of kindred beauty are suggested.

Thus . . . the themes pass from the mere phase of lyric utterance to that of epic narrative, not without strong dramatic power.⁵⁴

Musical ideas come together to express more than the sum of their parts. Here is some of that epic narrative.

Somehow, there is a little more [in Beethoven's musical descriptions] than mere chance imagery; for there is real truth in the symbolism of the moral strife of individual, of debate and dispute, drawing truth from the dregs, rising to final enlightenment. Every phase of life is here idealized . . . Beauty, strength, each have their figures. The moral, not the external life of man finds in music its full play and mirror. The true essence of life is in its emotions, and these play in tones as do fish in the waters. The highest problems are ethical, emotional, of experience; science is but a lesser helpmeet. In music their utterance is so real that they seem to be there themselves in the life of the tonal stream.

Given the type of pleading, of defiance, of plaint, of dim foreboding akin to objective omen, of prayerful trust, of triumphant joy,—given all these, together with the full play of dispute and strife,—and you have all the resources, unconscious and therefore the more genuine and convincing, for the utterance of man's most vital thought. So you have in the Fifth Symphony actually as stirring a refrain of the same high truth as in the book of Job.⁵⁵

This long quote demonstrates the intricate musical narration that to some extent prevailed in this period. By these descriptions we see that, however absolute the music may be, the act of describing, which has to be considered part of music's discourse, is very often plainly programmatic. Images are enlisted to explain, to contain the music, to bring it back to the realm of human comprehensibility. What the composer does not give—and in not giving he is valorized—the critic seems impelled to provide, however contradictory the provision to his absolute preferences.